



CITY OF AMESBURY
IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FIVE

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2025 AUG 28 P 4:01

SPONSORED BY:

Kassandra Gove
Kassandra Gove, Mayor

CITY OF AMESBURY, MA
BILL No. 2025-089

An Order to place a \$6 million operating override on the November 4, 2025 ballot.

Whereas, the City of Amesbury faces increasing costs for municipal and school services that are not fully met by the annual 2.5% increase in the tax levy limit under Proposition 2½; and

Whereas, the Amesbury City Council with input from the Mayor's Financial Advisory Board has determined that an operating override is necessary to fund essential services and avoid significant budget cuts; and

Whereas, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 59, Section 21C(g) allows for the City Council by majority vote, with the approval of the Mayor, to seek voter approval of a levy limit override question.

Therefore, be it ordered:

That the City Council, with approval of the Mayor authorizes the placement of the following question on the ballot for the November 4, 2025 election:

“Shall the City of Amesbury be allowed to assess an additional \$6,000,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the operating budgets of the City and of the Public Schools for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026?”

Be it further ordered:

That the City Clerk is directed to take all necessary actions to place this question on the ballot for the November 4, 2025 election, as required by law.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Amesbury City Council
FROM: Mayor's Financial Advisory Board (FAB)
DATE: August 28, 2025
RE: Council Order requesting approval to place override question on November 4, 2025 ballot

At the conclusion of the FY26 budget process, the Mayor formed a Financial Advisory Board (FAB) to define the components of a Proposition 2 ½ override question for consideration by Amesbury voters and taxpayers. The purpose of this memo is to provide additional information relative to the Mayor's filing of a Council Order requesting a majority vote of the City Council to place a \$6 million operating override on the November 4, 2025 ballot.

The FAB includes core members from across city leadership and its goals are to ensure certainty of revenue and levy capacity in advance of the FY27 budget process, considering needs of all city departments, unfunded state mandates, reduction in state aid, and providing transparency to voters for this effort and future budgeting needs. Members of the FAB include Mayor Cassandra Gove, Chief Financial Officer Marisa Batista, Amesbury Public Schools Superintendent Elizabeth McAndrews, Police Chief Craig Bailey, and Library Director Aimie Westphal.

The rationale behind the FAB's recommendation for this override is that for several years, city officials have been signaling that the city was approaching a financial breaking point due to cost increases such as inflation, rising service costs, healthcare, and contractual obligations. The city has relied on short-term solutions like using reserves, delaying maintenance, and trimming department requests, but these strategies are not sustainable and have created a structural deficit.

The FAB reviewed the projected revenues and expenses for the upcoming fiscal years to determine budget shortfalls and made careful determinations about the city's financial outlook. These assumptions were made using the best available data, building permits, market trends in real estate, and guidance from the Commonwealth on valuation practices. A planned reduction in the use of Free Cash was also factored in. Free Cash is one-time funds from surpluses; using it year after year to cover recurring expenses is risky and unsustainable. Phasing down reliance on Free Cash will allow for greater financial stability for Amesbury.

Combining revenue assumptions with projected expenses, the FAB identified the gap between what the city can legally raise and what is needed to maintain current services. The result is a

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proposal that not only covers the immediate gap in the coming fiscal year, but also positions the city for stability over future years. By building in responsible revenue projections, the override is expected to support balanced budgets beyond next year.

If approved by the voters in Amesbury, the override will be used to help with the structural deficit and maintain "level services". Without additional funding, schools and city departments will experience critical reductions in staffing, programs, or maintenance.

The form of the question for an override is found in G.L. c. 59, sec. 21C(g) and must be authorized by the City Council with the approval of the Mayor. A majority vote of the City Council is required to authorize the question being placed on the ballot. Please note that a copy of the City Council's vote authorizing the override question must be provided to the City Clerk on or before September 30, 2025, which is no less than thirty-five days prior to the election in order for the question to be placed on the ballot.

The Mayor and members of the FAB will be in attendance at upcoming Council and sub-committee meetings for discussion and to field questions from the City Council and the public. The FAB is also prepared to schedule a series of public forums in the coming weeks leading up to the election.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this measure. Should you have any questions or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Mayor's Office.

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