

Shirley TM OKs most of warrant

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SHIRLEY -- With 20 articles on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant, it took 3 hours for 99 registered voters to work through them all, passing all but three that were withdrawn at the selectmen's request and therefore "passed over" for technical reasons. Those moves also required a majority vote.

When it came to the municipal operating budget, which was taken up and voted on in several separate categories, townspeople voted in favor of the \$14,040,686 bottom line with some discussion but no substantive debate.

Housed within the budget article were the two school district budgets, which also passed: \$631,258 for Nashoba Tech, the regional technical high school in Westford that the town belongs to and \$7,735,108 for the Ayer Shirley Regional School District, which includes four schools in the two member towns.

While Nashoba Tech's assessment dropped due to lower student enrollment from Shirley, the Ayer Shirley District budget rose by 3 percent, as Finance Committee Chairman John O'Keefe pointed out.

Although the Finance Committee and selectmen recommended passage of the budget, O'Keefe cautioned against continuing to forward annual increases of more than 2.5 or 2.6 percent.

Voters also accepted the Stewardship Plan for the Nashua, Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers, known as the "Wild and Scenic Rivers" designation.

The plan was developed over several years by a study group that included the Nashua River Watershed Association and representatives from communities in the study area.

"Wild and Scenic River" is a national recognition given under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act that was passed by Congress 50 years ago. Only rivers that are shown to have "outstandingly remarkable resource values" can qualify for this designation. Less than one-quarter of 1 percent of all American rivers are designated "Wild and Scenic."

To date, 11 towns had signed on, nine of which are in Massachusetts and two in New Hampshire.

One much-anticipated article called for amending a marijuana zoning law created by Special Town Meeting voters in March.

At that time, some people objected to language that was so restrictive it effectively ruled out targeted commercial and industrial areas on the zoning map where marijuana businesses could go.

The amended bylaw aimed to fix the problem. Voters approved the new version and the motion passed by the required two-thirds majority vote.

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