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Running Out of Gas

By Neha Shabeer

As of May 17, the Ashland community voted against passing the Proposition 2 1/2 Override.

Ashland is like a car running out of gas. We have slowed our speed to elongate our time before we run out of fuel. But, would we rather scrape by at 5 mph making almost no progress towards our destination and eventually running out of fuel or call AAA to fill the tank halfway to make it to the destination? *It seems like we've made the choice to move at a snail's pace.*

"The override," has been a low murmur to a loud shout in Ashland for several months. But, are students and citizens actually aware of its intent and implications? Let's begin with the basics. Proposition 2 1/2 is a Massachusetts statute that states a municipality cannot increase its property tax by more than 2.5% in a given year unless voters approve increasing that levy. Ashland needs to increase this tax because we have structural deficit, which means that revenues are not enough to cover anticipated expenses on a year over year basis. It is projected that the FY17 deficit will be around \$900,000.

Although, this didn't all happen in a heartbeat. Ashland has been having budget problems for years and instead of passing this override in 2008, the town dipped into one-time rainy day funds. With the failure of this bill again in 2016, there is no choice but to reduce or eliminate programs such as town hall, library, and senior center hours along with program cuts in schools. On top of that, lack of maintenance of town roads and buildings will cause financial issues in the long run. The choice seems simple to me. Nineteen of Ashland's surrounding towns made this realization...why haven't we joined them?

Most must currently be wondering, "What is the price to pay?" That depends on your house value. The two subcategories within the override are the operational override for \$1.9M (focusing mainly on town and school operations) and the override for the establishment of the CEDI (Community and Economic Development Improvement) stabilization fund at \$0.5M. Based on the average home value of \$399K, the operational override will only cost \$27/month and the establishment of the CEDI will only cost \$7/month. These small amounts from each household collaboratively become a

large sum that will go to the greater good of bettering the town.

As students of Ashland High School, we all know that our schools lack sufficient funding. We offer a significantly lower amount of AP classes compared to other schools, reduced electives (especially in the STEM and business fields), and the World Language program is so deteriorated that Ashland schools might soon only be offering Spanish. The physical books we use to learn need to be replaced, as well. English books are falling apart from years of use and History and Science textbooks are almost 20 years old leading them to be inaccurate and decrepit. In lab periods, there is not enough scientific equipment leading experiments to be long, tiresome, and ineffective due to sharing of materials. Extra-curriculars have also been affected with reduced club funding, increased fees for bussing, and raised athletic fees (already among of highest in the state). On top of it all, Ashland has not had a Director of Curriculum or High School Department Chairs since 2008. How will our school's curriculum and standard keep up with the rapidly changing and competitive times?

Many disheartened families since the 2008 override defeat have switched over to charter schools. In 2007, Ashland spent \$118,000 for students to attend charter schools and eight years later, in 2015, this cost went up to nearly \$1 million. We need to keep our money in Ashland and invest in Ashland's future, the students.

Furthermore, the override doesn't just help people within the educational system; it helps every citizen of Ashland in its own way. It will help the firefighters, Department of Public Works employees, capital improvements, and community center staffing. The Ashland Fire Department hasn't had an increase in firefighters in 25 years even with the rapid population increase of the town. Currently, we only have 4 firefighters per shift while the standard is 15 firefighters per shift. We are horribly understaffed and this inhibits the Fire Department from responding to more than one call at a time. The override would have increased the amount to 5 firefighters per shift, slightly helping in case of a dual emergency.

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2016 Botball Robotics Competition

By Sabrina Liu, President of AHS Robotics Club and Captain of Team 2

On Saturday, April 20th, two teams from the AHS Robotics Club competed against eighteen teams in Botball's New England Region Robotics Competition, held annually worldwide. In January, we received the parts to create two robots per team. Since then, we have been furiously strategizing, designing, building, and coding. Each robot's evolution must also be carefully documented, since documentation counts for one third of a team's overall score. At the competition, a team's robots participate in a gleefully nerdy (and actually quite intense, but friendly) head-to-head competition with a rival team. Each preprogrammed robot tries to accomplish precise tasks in order to score the most points and win the round, hopefully without crashing into or destroying other robots. Or itself. Even if eliminated from the "Tournament," teams can form an alliance with another team to see how many points their robots can score together during the Alliance Rounds.

After an exhausting yet satisfying day of spontaneous coding and even construction, the hard work and long hours put in by both Ashland teams paid off. Team 1 (led by senior Evan Bilech) secured a miraculous second place in the Tournament, second only to Winchester, who happen to be Botball World Champions. Team 2 pulled off this spectacular victory with just one robot that was

created and coded earlier that morning, epitomizing the power of simple yet profoundly reliable design. Team 2 joined Malden Robotics for the Alliance Rounds, and scored first place out of six teams. Thank you to all the dedicated, enthusiastic members of both teams for making this such a memorable year. Thank you for all those hours you spent troubleshooting the robots, persevering even through seemingly bleak times. I cannot wait to see what we can all accomplish next year with this year's experiences to guide us.



From left to right: Ryan Henderson, Ethan Prybyla, Seth Colson, Nathan Savard, Joey Morrissey, Jamie Kurriss, Sabrina Liu, Josef Komissar, Hunter Steele, Arthur Wang, Spencer Martell, Maky Kotob, Conrad Tulig, Matthew Levine, Ethan Bilech

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We also only have one DPW crew for 82 miles of road, which is inefficient and creates dangerous conditions especially when snow needs to be cleared. There has been a 15% increase of road since 2000 (when the second crew was laid off due to budget cuts), directly affecting the prominence of potholes and insufficient sidewalks in our town.

However, I am not delusional enough to believe that passing the override would have fixed all of these

problems. It would have been a start of a long and steady

race to restore Ashland. But, the vote is now over and there is no point crying over spilt milk. Ashland will troop on as we always do and will somehow make it work with the dedication of citizens and leadership. But for the future when the issue of override comes back up for debate, please make the right, educated choice of voting YES FOR ASHLAND.