

Concord Select Board  
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## Annual Town Meeting 2022

### Select Board Positions for Selected Articles

#### Article 11: Senior Means-Tested Property Tax Exemption

*(Note: a motion will only be made if the legislature approves our home rule request before ATM)*

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 11. With this action, we can finally make our temporary, annually authorized tax relief program for lower-income homeowners permanent. It is even more important for the Town to offer this program as property taxes continue to rise, so residents who've called Concord home for decades are not forced to sell their homes and move away. The costs are very modest, considering the social impact that this program delivers.

#### Article 16: Five-Year Moratorium on Installation of Synthetic Turf on Town Land (by petition)

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 16. It extends a moratorium that has already been in place for six years. Town meeting voters have also already renewed it once previously.

The article's scope is limited to the Town's fields, explicitly excluding those (such as the Doug White synthetic turf field) that belong to the regional school district. The only new Town field planned in the near term is at the future middle school; the middle school building committee has already committed to use natural turf for that. In the meantime, research into the health and environmental impacts of synthetic turf, as well as development of new alternative surfacing options will continue. These may inform our decisions once the moratorium ends.

#### Article 23: Ranked Choice Voting for Concord Elections (by petition)

The Select Board recommends affirmative action on Article 23. Concord proudly relies on pure democracy – each citizen's vote at this Town Meeting – for its most important decisions, but we call upon elected representatives to oversee other matters.

Concord's town elections are not always contested, but when they are, sometimes several candidates vie for multiple open seats on the Select Board, School Committee, or Housing Authority. Some well-qualified candidates may "split the vote" in that case, resulting in the election of a candidate that would not have been the first or second choice of the majority of voters.

Ranked choice voting addresses this scenario, promoting candidates that are more representative of voters' preferences. It also encourages more candidates to stand for election, because they will be evaluated on their individual merits, rather than dilute support for others with a similar platform. While it's not pure democracy, ranked choice selection of our elected representatives yields the closest thing to a consensus of the voters.

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## Select Board Positions on Articles (continued)

### Article 24: Appropriate Funds for Affordable Housing Development

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 24 which would provide an appropriation of \$500,000 to the Concord Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (CMAHT) from Free Cash, funds to be made available as a result of applied FY'22 ARPA (Federal American Rescue Plan Act) funds. This recommendation continues the Select Board's commitment to fund Town affordable housing goals encapsulated in such documents as its 2015 Housing Production Plan and Town master plan, Envision Concord: Bridge to 2030. This article is also supported by the Finance Committee, Planning Board, Concord Housing Development Corporation, Concord Housing Authority, Concord Housing Foundation and the CMAHT.

During this past year, the Select Board approved CMAHT Interim Policy Goals for the Use of Funds which will be reviewed and updated when Concord's new State-required Housing Production Plan is completed at the end of this year, and when hopefully, more sustainable sources of affordable housing funds will be available.

Annual Town Meeting (ATM) appropriations provide ready funds which allow the Town to take advantage of affordable housing opportunities throughout the year before they are lost.

Recent ATMs have supported similar appropriations and contributed, among other projects, to the 930 Main Street two family home currently under construction which will hold a permanent affordable housing deed restriction, and the proposed Assabet River Bluff land acquisition project for open space and land for five affordable housing units.

### Article 25: Assabet River Bluff Preservation Project

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 25 for the Town to borrow \$500,000 toward the open space conservation and passive recreation portion of this 7- acre proposed land acquisition project known as the Assabet River Bluff located at 2B Upland Road and 406 Old Marlboro Road which will also include land for five affordable housing units. Multiple sources of funds have been identified to make this combined open space and affordable housing land acquisition project possible, including ATM approval for both this article and CPC funds described in Article 26. Identified project funds include an application for grant funds of \$500,000, which have already received preliminary approval at the state level awaiting federal-level approval. This borrowing meets required grant conditions before awarded grant funds are officially reimbursed to the Town.

In an extraordinary effort, multiple entities within and external to the Town have collaborated over many months to make this proposed project possible, to meet both Town open space/conservation and affordable housing goals which otherwise likely could not have been accomplished without this collaboration. Article 25 is also supported by the Planning Board, and broadly by both land conservation and affordable housing groups within the Town and the Concord community, acknowledging the extraordinary collaboration to bring open space and affordable housing groups together to accomplish a shared purpose.

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## Select Board Positions on Articles (continued)

### Article 26: Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Appropriation Recommendations

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 26 to appropriate \$2,153,741 from the Community Preservation Fund for the nine project funding recommendations included in this article. These funds will support important projects in Community Housing, Open Space, Recreation, and Historic Preservation as allowed by the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act which will greatly benefit the character of the Town and meet defined Town goals. Funds are also allocated for administration of Concord's CPA program under this article.

As in past years, projects being recommended for funding have been submitted by both the Town and community non-profit organizations for projects with demonstrable public benefit. The Community Preservation Committee has, over these many past months, thoroughly vetted each of these recommended projects. They have sought legal advice and consultation from the state-wide Community Preservation Coalition for the more complicated issues that arose as applications were reviewed. This committee has done extraordinary work in bringing Article 26 recommendations to ATM for its ratification.

### Article 33: Zoning Bylaw Amendment – Zoning Map & Thoreau Depot Business District

The Select Board recommends affirmative action on Article 33. Thoreau Depot is an important commercial and commuting center for the Town, which also has great potential for mixed-use development. The Planning Board carefully studied the current conditions and zoning for the district, and applied best practices in land use planning to arrive at this zoning bylaw amendment. Developed through a public process, the regulations incorporated neighborhood concerns about building scale, the streetscape, and use of open space, while increasing the opportunity to generate much-needed housing in walking distance to the MBTA station, along with less car-centric retail and commercial infrastructure.

Recognizing that most of these properties are privately held, the Town cannot control whether any future development will occur in the district. Yet through this zoning, we can shape the outcome when and if it comes.

### Article 36: Adopt Local Ballot Option Pursuant to Mass. General Laws 53, § 18B

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 36 which would provide Concord voters with information related to ballot questions. At present, ballot language is restricted by law, and this can be confusing. If we adopt MGL c. 53, § 18B under this article, voters will receive a mailing with summary language, pros and cons, for each ballot question. A copy of this mailing will also be available at the polls.

### Article 37: Authorize Select Board to Petition to Impose a Checkout Bag Charge (by petition)

The Select Board recommends affirmative action on Article 37. Limiting single-use packaging waste is in line with the Town's sustainability goals. Adding a checkout bag charge encourages shoppers to bring their own bag, reducing the need for shop owners to provide disposable bags at their own cost.

Many municipalities have successfully adopted similar regulations. The petitioner has revised his motion to take advantage of this experience, adding some practical exceptions that are part of Sudbury's bylaw.

Please note that this checkout bag charge would not become effective until the General Court approves Concord's home rule petition. The Select Board will pursue this initiative with our state legislators, as we have for the real estate transfer fee, voting rights for 17-year-olds, and elimination of fossil fuel infrastructure.

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## Select Board Positions on Articles (continued)

### Article 38: Development Plan for Municipal Solar Generation (by petition)

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 38. Concord Municipal Light is currently pursuing many strategic initiatives, including a new metering infrastructure, rate design, electrification incentives, and energy storage on the path to meeting the Town's climate goals, yet the Town's electric grid currently constrains in-town solar production. Under the circumstances, CMLP has worked to secure non-emitting power from projects outside of Concord, and has not recently invested in new local solar projects.

While CMLP has made laudable progress on many fronts, developing more robust local solar energy capacity is an important goal of Concord's Climate Action Plan. A clear roadmap is needed now if we are going to overcome the current challenges to deliver 20 megawatts of in-town solar capacity by 2030.

### Article 45: Beede Swim & Fitness Center Enterprise Fund Expenditures

The Select Board unanimously recommends affirmative action on Article 45. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of recreation staff and the commitment of members, the Beede Center has endured the extreme challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Center's 2023 budget reflects rising personnel costs and other inflationary pressures, but offsets these to some degree with new revenue sources and continued membership growth. Significant challenges lie ahead and it's likely that the facility, now 16 years old, will require a capital campaign in the near future. The Recreation Department plans to undergo a strategic planning initiative this year that will help inform community conversations while documenting Beede's future viability, value, and impact.

### Article 46: Reformatory Branch Trail Feasibility Study (by petition)

The Select Board recommends affirmative action on Article 46 as shown in the motion. Rather than appropriating funds at this Town Meeting, this motion recommends that the Select Board allocate \$75,000 to perform a study using funds we expect will become available to the Town from the 'Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.'

The article has not yet gone through the usual process for Capital projects. This year, the rigorous process resulted in many worthy municipal projects (paving, sidewalks, etc.) being cut or underfunded. It is difficult to know where this project would have ranked if evaluated along with other capital needs. The Free Cash balance, another possible source of funding, is lower than it has been in several years due to contributions to Middle School project sustainability fund, affordable housing and other worthy expenditures approved by past Town Meetings.

The type of feasibility study to be done on the Reformatory Branch Trail needs more discussion and public input, perhaps in the context of reviewing the entire town trail system.

### Article 47: Preserve Concord's Reformatory Branch Trail (by petition)

The Select Board recommends affirmative action on Article 47. The article recommends that the various owners of portions of the Reformatory Branch Trail recognize the value in preserving the natural features of the trail. This is a recommendation, not a mandate, which the Select Board supports.