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Voters reject pay-to-throw plan

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Last modified: 3/18/2012 12:00:00 AM

Gilmanton residents yesterday voted down proposals to make recycling mandatory and establish a pay-as-you-throw system for trash disposal.

Voters also decided to contribute \$45,000 to the Gilmanton Year-Round Library, which opened in 2009, to cover most of its operating budget.

Yesterday's town meeting, which lasted nearly 5 1/2 hours, was Gilmanton's last. Residents on Tuesday voted to switch to the SB 2 system of holding town meeting by ballot.

"This will be the last one - unless it's ever brought back," Moderator Mark Sisti said as yesterday's meeting kicked off.

Some of the most contentious debate centered on proposals dealing with trash. One would have introduced mandatory recycling, and the second would have introduced a pay-by-bag system for trash.

After more than an hour of discussion, both measures were rejected. The recycling article failed on a divided voice vote, while pay-as-you-throw fell short on a 135-112 show of voter cards.

A previous attempt to introduce pay-as-you-throw in Gilmanton, in 2010, was defeated on a 155-116 vote.

Lori Baldwin, a member of the town recycling committee, assured residents yesterday that pay-as-you-throw could work in a town of Gilmanton's size (population: 3,777) and that it would lead to more recycling and lower costs.

"We can do it. We can do it and save money," Baldwin said. She added that with pay-by-bag, people would pay for what they throw out, "and the responsibility would truly be on the individual."

Resident Brenda Sens said she's tired of seeing people refuse to recycle because everyone pays the same amount in taxes for trash disposal. "They're living free, but they're not dying, somehow," Sens said.

But a number of residents spoke against the plan, voicing worries about illegal dumping, cost and whether the transfer station could handle either pay-as-you-throw or mandatory recycling.

Resident Laurie Sanborn said recycling is on the rise in Gilmanton without a mandate. "It's working. We're doing it on our own. I don't think we need to do mandatory at this point in time," she said to applause.

For a third straight year, the debate was contentious over funding for the Gilmanton Year-Round Library. Last year, the town meeting gave the private organization \$47,500 on a close vote. This year, the group asked for \$45,000, saying it could cover the rest of its \$70,500 budget with grants and donations.

"If we could run it for less, we would. . . It's a great service for the town, and we would not be able to remain open as we are if the money is reduced," said Anne Kirby, the library's president.

An attempt to cut the appropriation to \$25,000 failed on a voice vote. The \$45,000 appropriation then passed on a ballot vote, 152-112.

The budget committee's proposed town budget of more than \$3.4 million, 2.1 percent less than last year, was green-lit on an overwhelming voice vote. Donald Guarino, chairman of the selectmen, tried to add \$16,702 to level-fund a vacant position on the police force, but his amendment failed on a show of voter cards, 130-108.

There were two attempts to reduce the amount of money deposited in various capital reserve funds, but both amendments failed and the original total of nearly \$345,000 was okayed on an overwhelming voice vote.

Residents voted 87-61 to buy a police cruiser for \$30,000 but on a lopsided voice vote rejected a \$20,000 plan to redesign the entrance to the transfer station.

And on a 198-70 ballot vote, residents voted to purchase a new ambulance under a five-year lease-purchase agreement with a total cost of more than \$197,000. Fire Chief Paul Hempel said the new vehicle will replace a decade-old ambulance that he said "has served us well" but now requires frequent repairs. (Ben Leubsdorf can be reached at 369-3307 or bleubsdorf@cmonitor.com.)

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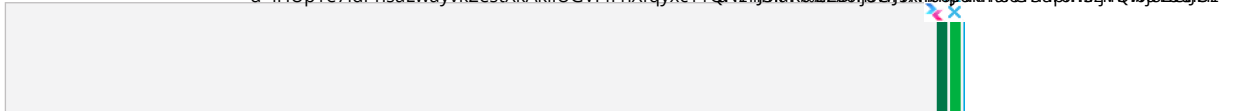
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