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\$340,000 set aside for Maynard High

The Boston Globe

By **Melissa Beecher**, Globe Correspondent | April 1, 2007

MAYNARD -- Maynard High School's accreditation woes may soon be eased without going to the ballot box, after town officials earmarked \$340,000 for building improvements.

After pressure from the town's School Committee, selectmen agreed to pull capital needs at Maynard High from a \$5.2 million debt exclusion override.

Superintendent Mark Masterson praised the decision, saying it reflects the town's commitment to schools.

"What this means is that our issues will but put forward in a fashion that does not add to the tax rate," said Masterson. "I couldn't be more happy."

Town Meeting next month still must approve the funding.

Before last week, selectmen and School Committee members clashed over bundling more than \$1 million in school needs at Maynard High and Green Meadow Elementary School with a \$3.9 million request for a new police station and \$200,000 for upgrades to the fire station.

Spurred on by member Paul Howes, the School Committee unanimously pushed for an alternative.

"It's like playing Russian roulette. If that ballot question goes down, there goes our accreditation," Howes said. "To sit here and let that happen, to me it's unfathomable."

Town Administrator John Curran went back to the drawing board after the school's vote and found the needed funds in

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free cash reserves and leftover monies from the Fowler Middle School project. Curran said although he found a solution this time, the school district must be more willing to compromise in the future.

"The School Department needs to know that all the needs presented to voters this year are critical. It's not all about them," said Curran .

"The ballot is not a menu. This year voters can't pick and choose which projects they want. This year, all the projects are critical."

Last year, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges placed Maynard High on probation, and told administrators that without significant improvements to its facilities, the school would lose its accreditation.

Graduates from unaccredited high schools may have a harder time getting into college.

The \$340,000 appropriation would pay for upgrades to the high school's library and roof; replace a failing boiler; and cover feasibility and engineering studies for a new school. While the school would keep its accreditation, it would like remain on probation until it is replaced by a new building.

The Board of Selectmen's chairwoman, Sally Bubier, said the latest twist in the budget discussion shows flexibility by town officials.

"The selectmen are hearing loud and clear that NEASC is a top concern," said Bubier. "The NEASC issue is on the top of our priority list, but there are many things on that list this year."

Town Meeting on May 21 will be asked to decide on a \$4.8 million debt exclusion, which if approved would go before voters townwide. The property tax increase would pay for converting the old library into a police station and upgrading the Summer Street Public Safety Building, which would just house the Fire Department. The debt exclusion also includes \$700,000 for improvements to the Green Meadow Elementary School.

Melissa Beecher can be reached for comment at mbeecher@globe.com. ■

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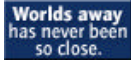
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