

Town of South Hadley Override Survey 2025/2026

Prepared by:

Melinda R. Tarsi-Goldfien, Ph.D.
Bartlett Endowed Professor for Civic Education and Engagement
Professor of Political Science and Chair, MPA Program
Bridgewater State University
February 13, 2026

The author would like to thank the town officials who collaborated on this project. Funding to support this project was provided by the Bartlett Civic funds at Bridgewater State University.

Methodology

The survey ran from December 8, 2025 through February 1, 2026. The total N is 2,305.

The survey was made available in both online and hardcopy formats. The online version (using the Qualtrics platform) was distributed through both an anonymous survey link posted by the town on its website and shared on various social media platforms by town officials and residents.

Below are the topline. Please note that responses may not always sum to the sample size (2,305) due to respondents skipping questions. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding to whole numbers for ease of reporting. The data is unweighted, and therefore a margin of error cannot be calculated. Sentiment analysis was conducted using Microsoft CoPilot running TEXTBOB.

DEMOGRAPHICS	2
REPONSES TO BUDGET OVERRIDE ISSUES	4
RESPONSES BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS (CROSSTABS)	10
COMMENTS TO BUDGET TASK FORCE	24
Top Themes Identified	25
Sentiment by Topic Area	25
Recurring Community Concerns	26
General Takeaways	26

Demographics

Below are the responses to the demographic questions at the conclusion of the survey.

Q15 - How long have you lived in South Hadley?

	Percentage	Count
Less than 1 year	2%	38
1-5 years	15%	243
6-10 years	14%	227
Over 10 years	68%	1093

Q16 - What is your current living situation in South Hadley?

	Percentage	Count
Own	89%	1423
Rent	6%	100
I live with family or friends in South Hadley	5%	78

Q17 - How many school-age (i.e., under 18 years of age) children do you have at home?

	Percentage	Count
0	56%	890
1-2	37%	591
3 or more	7%	117

Q18 - How many dependents do you have living at home? This includes children under the age of 18, elderly relatives, or anyone else who relies on you for assistance.

	Percentage	Count
0	47%	743
1-2	42%	667
3-4	11%	174
5 or more	1%	13

Q19 – [Respondents with School-Age Children Only] Which of the following best describes the schooling situation for the children in your home?

	Percentage	Count
In-district	75%	519
Out-of-district	17%	116
Both	9%	61

Q20 - Which of the following age categories best describes you?

	Percentage	Count
18-24	2%	38
25-34	10%	161
35-44	28%	438
45-54	22%	339
55-64	16%	248
65+	23%	357

Q21 - Do you intend to vote in this year's Town Election on April 14, 2026?

	Percentage	Count
No	2%	37
Maybe	13%	194
Yes	85%	1265

Q22 - What precinct are you in?

	Percentage	Count
A	18%	242
B	21%	282
C	24%	314
D	15%	197
E	22%	288

Reponses to Budget Override Issues

Q4 - How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?

	Percentage	Count
Very familiar	25%	511
Somewhat familiar	53%	1067
Not familiar at all	22%	454

Q5 - How much have you followed the ongoing budget discussions in the town leading up to the budget override proposal?

	Percentage	Count
None at all	17%	347
A little	35%	714
A moderate amount	32%	658
A lot	11%	222
A great deal	4%	88

Q6 - Thinking back on the past 12 months, which of the following town departments have you interacted with as a resident of South Hadley? Please check all that apply. Sorted in descending order based on percentage of respondents.

	Percentage	Count
Public Library Main Branch	16%	1148
Public Works Department	15%	1084
Schools	12%	894
Recreation (includes Ledges Golf Course)	10%	718
Police Department	8.0%	602
Town Clerk	7%	547
Treasurer / Collector	6%	467
Senior Center	6%	469
Gaylord Library	5%	348
Planning and Conservation	3%	188
Building/Inspections Department	2%	170
Town Administrator	2%	161
Board of Health	2%	141
Selectboard	2%	126
Animal Control	1%	105
Veterans' Service Agent	1%	98
Board of Assessors	1%	93

Q7 - As mentioned earlier, an override raises the existing tax rate permanently to support the operating budget. In contrast, a debt exclusion is a temporary increase in the tax rate to support a specific, voter-approved project. Which of the following would you most likely support?

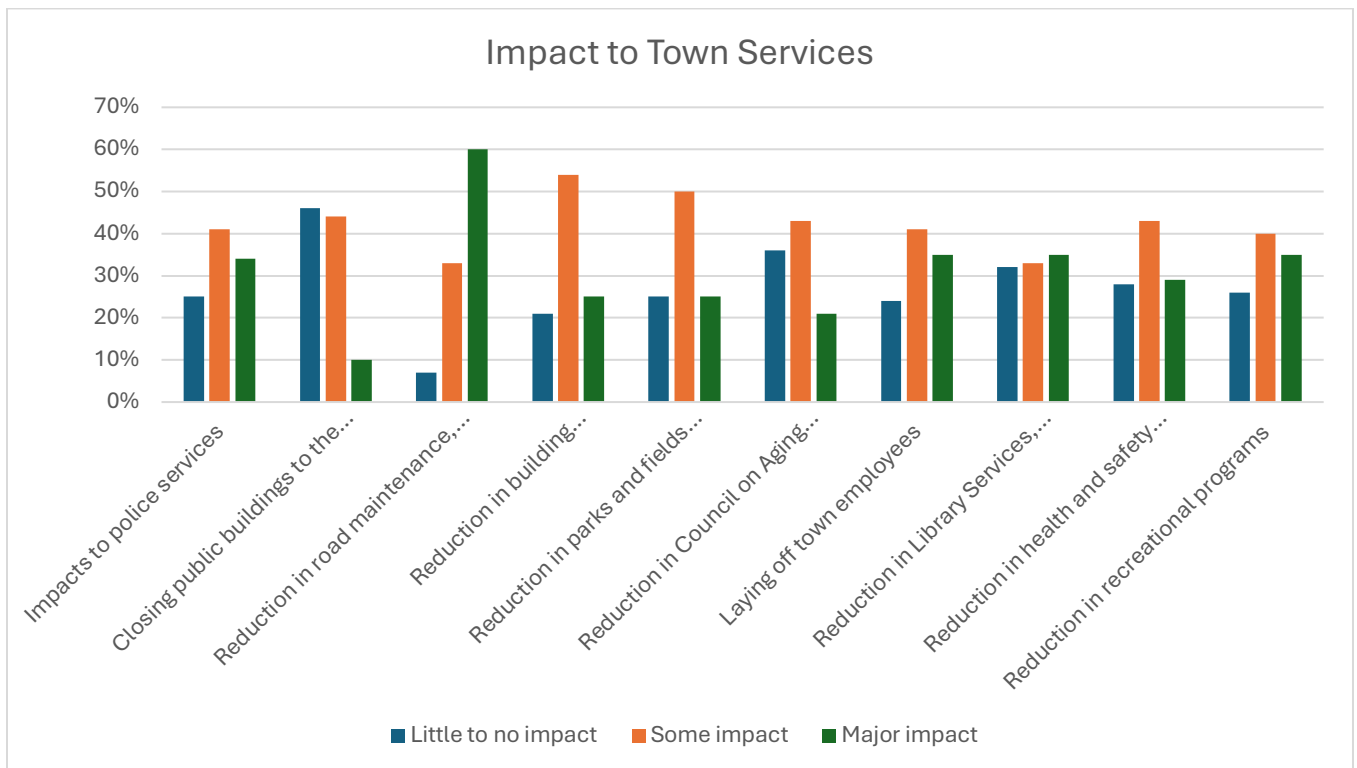
	Percentage	Count
Override to preserve town and school services ONLY	24%	426
Debt exclusion to renovate/build a new elementary school ONLY	12%	212
Both	30%	537
Neither	34%	614

Q8 - How much more per month would you be willing to pay in property taxes to maintain services?

	Percentage	Count
\$0	29%	513
\$1-25	27%	471
\$26-50	23%	406
\$51-75	8%	148
\$76-100	12%	207

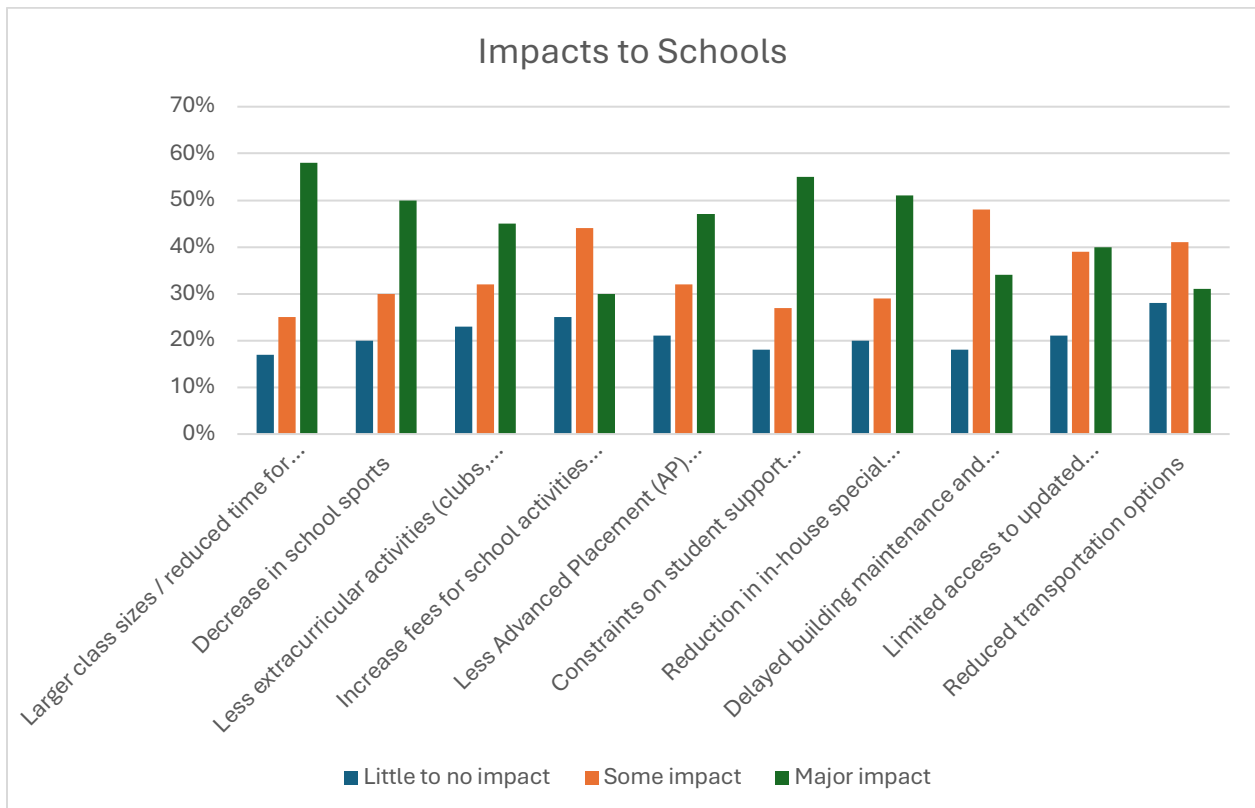
Q9 - If the budget override vote fails, the Town will need to substantially reduce or eliminate certain services. How much would each of the following service changes impact the quality of life in South Hadley?

Question	Little to no impact	Some impact	Major impact
Impacts to police services	25%	41%	34%
Closing public buildings to the public on some days	46%	44%	10%
Reduction in road maintenance, including plowing	7%	33%	60%
Reduction in building maintenance and repair	21%	54%	25%
Reduction in parks and fields maintenance	25%	50%	25%
Reduction in Council on Aging services	36%	43%	21%
Laying off town employees	24%	41%	35%
Reduction in Library Services, including ability to borrow from other libraries	32%	33%	35%
Reduction in health and safety inspections	28%	43%	29%
Reduction in recreational programs	26%	40%	35%



Q10 - If the budget override vote fails, the Schools will need to substantially reduce or eliminate certain services. How much would each of the following service changes impact the quality of life in South Hadley?

Question	Little to no impact	Some impact	Major impact
Larger class sizes / reduced time for individual instruction	17%	25%	58%
Decrease in school sports	20%	30%	50%
Less extracurricular activities (clubs, field trips, dances/proms/socials)	23%	32%	45%
Increase fees for school activities including sports	25%	44%	30%
Less Advanced Placement (AP) classes (middle/high school)	21%	32%	47%
Constraints on student support services (counseling, behavioral, health)	18%	27%	55%
Reduction in in-house special education staff (increase in contracted services)	20%	29%	51%
Delayed building maintenance and repairs	18%	48%	34%
Limited access to updated instructional materials and technology	21%	39%	40%
Reduced transportation options	28%	41%	31%



Q11 - How comfortable are you with cuts to town services if they cannot be immediately restored in future fiscal years?

	Percentage	Count
Extremely uncomfortable	37%	600
Somewhat uncomfortable	31%	492
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	15%	242
Somewhat comfortable	9%	152
Extremely comfortable	8%	122

Q12 - Where do you get most of your news on what is going on in South Hadley? Check all that apply.

	Percentage	Count
Town or school website	15%	690
Town or school Facebook page	18%	820
Unofficial town Facebook page (e.x. South Hadley/Granby Community Page)	20%	921
Town e-newsletter (ex: Town Administrator’s Weekly Wrap-up, Library Newsletter, Recreation newsletter)	8%	340
Regional Newspaper (Daily Hampshire Gazette, Republican/MassLive)	14%	638
Word of mouth	21%	928
Other	4%	181

Q13 - How would you prefer the Town of South Hadley to communicate with residents about the upcoming budget override vote? Please check all that apply.

	Percentage	Count
Page on the Town website	15%	893
Posts on the Town Facebook page	17%	970
Special e-newsletters	11%	625
Emails	17%	985
Community forum(s) with local leaders	11%	634
YouTube or other recorded video presentations	5%	319
Public access channel/TV presentations	7%	403
Inserts in tax or utility bills	13%	765
Robocall/Reverse 311	5%	265

Responses by Demographic Groups (Crosstabs)

Q4 - How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?

...By Attention to Budget Discussions *Results are statistically significant at <0.1; meaning, how familiar someone is with an override has a statistically significant correlation with how much they are following conversations.

		Q5: How much have you followed the ongoing budget discussions in the town leading up to the budget override proposal?					
		Total	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Q4: How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?	Very familiar	25%	10%	11%	28%	59%	91%
	Somewhat familiar	52%	33%	62%	63%	38%	9%
	Not familiar at all	22%	57%	27%	9%	2%	0%

...By Parents vs. Non-Parents *Results are statistically significant at <0.1; meaning, people without children are statistically more likely to be familiar with the override

		Parents		
		Total	Non-Parent	Parent
Q4: How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?	Very familiar	25%	26%	24%
	Somewhat familiar	54%	56%	51%
	Not familiar at all	21%	17%	25%

...By Age *Results are statistically significant – those over 65 more likely to be familiar

		Under or Over 65		
		Total	65+	Under 65
Q4: How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?	Very familiar	25%	27%	25%
	Somewhat familiar	54%	59%	53%
	Not familiar at all	21%	14%	22%

...By Length of Time in Town *Statistically significant, meaning length of residence correlates with increased likelihood of some familiarity with override process

		Q15: How long have you lived in South Hadley?				
		Total	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	Over 10 years
Q4: How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?	Very familiar	25%	18%	20%	21%	28%
	Somewhat familiar	54%	47%	51%	53%	55%
	Not familiar at all	20%	34%	29%	26%	17%

...By Rent vs. Own *Statistically significant, meaning those who own are more likely to have some familiarity with override process

		Q16: What is your current living situation in South Hadley?			
		Total	Own	Rent	I live with family or friends in South Hadley
Q4: How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?	Very familiar	25%	26%	19%	21%
	Somewhat familiar	54%	54%	53%	49%
	Not familiar at all	20%	19%	28%	31%

...By Precinct *Statistically significant

	What precinct are you in?					
	Total	A	B	C	D	E
Very familiar	26%	20%	25%	30%	30%	23%
Somewhat familiar	55%	56%	58%	48%	50%	61%
Not familiar at all	20%	24%	17%	23%	20%	16%

...By Comfort to Town Restoring Services. Note that here, familiarity with the budget process is the independent variable, meaning we are measuring how much someone's familiarity with overrides relates to their comfort with the restoration of town services. *Results are statistically significant, meaning those who are somewhat familiar with the override process are more likely to be uncomfortable with cuts not immediately restored

		Q4: How familiar are you with what a budget override entails?			
		Total	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not familiar at all
Q11: How comfortable are you with cuts to town services if they cannot be immediately restored in future fiscal years?	Extremely uncomfortable	29%	27%	32%	26%
	Somewhat uncomfortable	24%	18%	27%	24%
	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	12%	13%	10%	14%
	Somewhat comfortable	7%	9%	7%	6%
	Extremely comfortable	6%	13%	4%	2%

RESPONSES BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Q5 - How much have you followed the ongoing budget discussions in the town leading up to the budget override proposal?

...By Age (not statistically significant)

	65+	Under 65
None at all	13%	14%
A little	35%	35%
A moderate amount	36%	34%
A lot	11%	12%
A great deal	5%	5%

...By Precinct (not statistically significant)

	Total	A	B	C	D	E
None at all	12%	15%	12%	11%	12%	13%
A little	36%	37%	32%	36%	38%	39%
A moderate amount	34%	33%	38%	33%	34%	32%
A lot	13%	12%	14%	14%	10%	12%
A great deal	5%	4%	5%	6%	7%	4%

...Parents vs. Non-Parents (not statistically significant)

	Total	Non-Parent	Parent
None at all	14%	15%	12%
A little	35%	34%	37%
A moderate amount	35%	34%	36%
A lot	12%	12%	12%
A great deal	5%	5%	4%

...Length of Residence (*statistically significant)

	Total	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	Over 10 years
None at all	14%	47%	18%	13%	11%
A little	35%	34%	43%	41%	32%
A moderate amount	35%	13%	30%	33%	37%
A lot	12%	5%	6%	10%	14%
A great deal	5%	0%	3%	3%	6%

...Own vs. Rent (*statistically significant)

	Total	Own	Rent	I live with family or friends in South Hadley
None at all	14%	13%	20%	22%
A little	35%	36%	38%	28%
A moderate amount	35%	35%	30%	33%
A lot	12%	12%	8%	8%
A great deal	5%	5%	3%	9%

...Comfort with Restoring Services (*statistically significant). Note that here, how much someone has followed the budget discussions is the independent variable, meaning we are measuring its relationship with how comfortable someone is with service restoration.

	Total	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Extremely uncomfortable	30%	22%	31%	29%	34%	36%
Somewhat uncomfortable	24%	21%	26%	26%	23%	13%
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	12%	12%	12%	13%	8%	10%
Somewhat comfortable	8%	6%	6%	9%	10%	10%
Extremely comfortable	6%	4%	4%	6%	12%	15%

Q7 – OVERRIDE SUPPORT

Override Support – Parents vs. Non-Parents (*Statistically significant)

	Total	Non-Parent	Parent
Override to preserve town and school services ONLY	23%	20%	28%
Debt exclusion to renovate/build a new elementary school ONLY	12%	14%	10%
Both	31%	25%	37%
Neither	34%	40%	25%

Override Support – Age (*Statistically significant)

	Total	65+	Under 65
Override to preserve town and school services ONLY	23%	20%	24%
Debt exclusion to renovate/build a new elementary school ONLY	12%	13%	11%
Both	31%	27%	32%
Neither	33%	39%	32%

...By Length of Residence (*Statistically significant)

	Q15: How long have you lived in South Hadley?				
	Total	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	Over 10 years
Override to preserve town and school services ONLY	23%	24%	22%	25%	23%
Debt exclusion to renovate/build a new elementary school ONLY	12%	13%	12%	10%	12%
Both	31%	29%	38%	37%	28%
Neither	34%	34%	27%	28%	36%

Override Support – Schooling Situation (*statistically significant)

	Total	They attend in-district	They attend out-of-district	Both
Override to preserve town and school services ONLY	28%	31%	22%	15%
Debt exclusion to renovate/build a new elementary school ONLY	10%	9%	10%	12%
Both	37%	39%	27%	39%
Neither	25%	20%	41%	34%

...By Precinct (*statistically significant)

	Total	A	B	C	D	E
Override to preserve town and school services ONLY	23%	24%	20%	27%	15%	26%
Debt exclusion to renovate/build a new elementary school ONLY	12%	14%	11%	11%	10%	14%
Both	32%	29%	33%	31%	38%	30%
Neither	32%	32%	35%	30%	36%	30%

Town and School Service Impacts for Those Indicating \$0 for Tax Increase (Q9 and Q10)

Impacts to Town for Those with \$0 Increase Tolerance (*Statistically significant for each impact)

		Total	\$0
Impacts to police services	Little to no impact	23%	33%
	Some impact	38%	33%
	Major impact	32%	24%
Closing public buildings to the public on some days	Little to no impact	44%	62%
	Some impact	41%	25%
	Major impact	10%	5%
Reduction in road maintenance, including plowing	Little to no impact	7%	17%
	Some impact	31%	38%
	Major impact	56%	37%
Reduction in building maintenance and repair	Little to no impact	20%	42%
	Some impact	51%	40%
	Major impact	23%	11%
Reduction in parks and fields maintenance	Little to no impact	23%	47%
	Some impact	47%	36%
	Major impact	24%	10%
Reduction in Council on Aging services	Little to no impact	33%	47%
	Some impact	41%	36%
	Major impact	20%	10%
Laying off town employees	Little to no impact	23%	49%
	Some impact	38%	29%
	Major impact	33%	13%

Reduction in Library Services, including ability to borrow from other libraries	Little to no impact	30%	53%
	Some impact	31%	23%
	Major impact	33%	16%
Reduction in health and safety inspections	Little to no impact	27%	48%
	Some impact	40%	32%
	Major impact	27%	13%
Reduction in recreational programs	Little to no impact	24%	45%
	Some impact	37%	29%
	Major impact	32%	18%

Impacts to School – Parents vs. Non-Parents (Statistically Significant for all impacts)

		Parents		
		Total	Non-Parent	Parent
Larger class sizes / reduced time for individual instruction	Little to no impact	17%	21%	11%
	Some impact	25%	32%	16%
	Major impact	57%	45%	73%
Decrease in school sports	Little to no impact	20%	25%	14%
	Some impact	29%	36%	20%
	Major impact	50%	37%	66%
Less extracurricular activities (clubs, field trips, dances/proms/socials)	Little to no impact	23%	30%	15%
	Some impact	32%	35%	28%
	Major impact	44%	34%	57%
Increase fees for school activities including sports	Little to no impact	25%	31%	18%
	Some impact	44%	43%	46%
	Major impact	30%	25%	36%
Less Advanced Placement (AP) classes (middle/high school)	Little to no impact	20%	23%	16%
	Some impact	32%	34%	29%
	Major impact	46%	40%	54%
Constraints on student support services (counseling, behavioral, health)	Little to no impact	18%	20%	15%

	Some impact	26%	31%	21%
	Major impact	55%	47%	64%
Reduction in in-house special education staff (increase in contracted services)	Little to no impact	20%	22%	17%
	Some impact	29%	32%	25%
	Major impact	50%	44%	58%
Delayed building maintenance and repairs	Little to no impact	18%	21%	15%
	Some impact	47%	46%	48%
	Major impact	34%	31%	37%
Limited access to updated instructional materials and technology	Little to no impact	20%	24%	16%
	Some impact	38%	40%	36%
	Major impact	40%	34%	48%
Reduced transportation options	Little to no impact	28%	30%	26%
	Some impact	40%	44%	35%
	Major impact	31%	24%	39%

Impacts to School for Those with \$0 Increase Tolerance (*Statistically significant for each impact)

		Total	\$0
Larger class sizes / reduced time for individual instruction	Little to no impact	15%	37%
	Some impact	23%	26%
	Major impact	53%	26%
Decrease in school sports	Little to no impact	19%	37%
	Some impact	27%	22%
	Major impact	46%	29%
Less extracurricular activities (clubs, field trips, dances/proms/socials)	Little to no impact	22%	47%
	Some impact	30%	23%
	Major impact	41%	19%
Increase fees for school activities including sports	Little to no impact	23%	42%
	Some impact	40%	28%
	Major impact	28%	20%
Less Advanced Placement (AP) classes (middle/high school)	Little to no impact	19%	40%
	Some impact	30%	26%
	Major impact	43%	23%
Constraints on student support services (counseling, behavioral, health)	Little to no impact	17%	39%
	Some impact	24%	25%
	Major impact	50%	24%
Reduction in in-house special education staff (increase in contracted services)	Little to no impact	18%	38%
	Some impact	26%	27%
	Major impact	46%	23%
Delayed building maintenance and repairs	Little to no impact	17%	38%

	Some impact	43%	38%
	Major impact	31%	13%
Limited access to updated instructional materials and technology	Little to no impact	19%	41%
	Some impact	35%	31%
	Major impact	37%	17%
Reduced transportation options	Little to no impact	26%	48%
	Some impact	37%	26%
	Major impact	28%	15%

Comments to Budget Task Force

Topic	Mentions
Schools & Education	335
Taxes & Overrides	207
Business Development	76
Public Safety	86
Libraries	60
Seniors & Fixed Income	58
Health Insurance & Benefits	40
Ledges Golf Course	42
Trash & Sewer	29
Mount Holyoke PILOT	24



Top Themes Identified

- **Schools/Education** was the most frequently mentioned theme, appearing in **335 responses**, signaling it as the community’s primary concern.
- **Taxes/Override/Debt Exclusion** was the second most common topic, with **207 mentions**, reflecting strong community engagement around affordability.
- Other prominent themes included:
 - **Public safety (police/fire): 86 mentions**
 - **Business development/economic growth: 76 mentions**
 - **Library services: 60 mentions**
 - **Seniors/fixed income issues: 58 mentions**
 - **Health insurance/benefits: 40 mentions**
 - **Ledges Golf Course: 42 mentions**
 - **Trash/sewer/landfill operations: 29 mentions**
 - **Mount Holyoke College/PILOT: 24 mentions**

Sentiment by Topic Area

- **Schools:** 55% of comments were positive, often expressing concern about preserving programs, staffing, and student opportunities.

- **Taxes/Override:** Mixed tone, with roughly equal representation between support for an override and concern about rising tax burdens.
- **Libraries:** Majority positive, with strong support for maintaining full services and interlibrary loan.
- **Public Safety:** More polarized than other topics, with notable debate about staffing levels and district consolidation.
- **Seniors:** Comments emphasized protecting seniors from financial strain on fixed incomes.
- **Business Development:** Predominantly positive suggestions to expand the commercial tax base and diversify revenue streams.

Recurring Community Concerns

- Strong desire to **protect educational quality**, including AP courses, special education supports, arts programs, and sports.
- Significant tension around **affordability**, with many residents citing rising taxes, trash/sewer fees, and insurance costs.
- Calls for **improved fiscal management**, including reducing administrative overhead and reassessing spending priorities.
- Frequent suggestions to **pursue new revenue**, including business recruitment, zoning reform, dispensary approval, and a PILOT agreement with Mount Holyoke College.
- Repeated requests for **greater transparency, communication, and community engagement** from town leadership.

General Takeaways

- Residents are deeply invested in the town's future and show strong attachment to core community services.
- Although opinions differ, especially around taxation, most comments aim to identify **constructive solutions** rather than merely express dissatisfaction.
- Community willingness to support financial measures is often tied to assurances of accountability, transparency, and preservation of key programs.