

# Understanding Belmont's 2024 Override



# Belmont is at a Turning Point

A Yes vote on April 2 will:

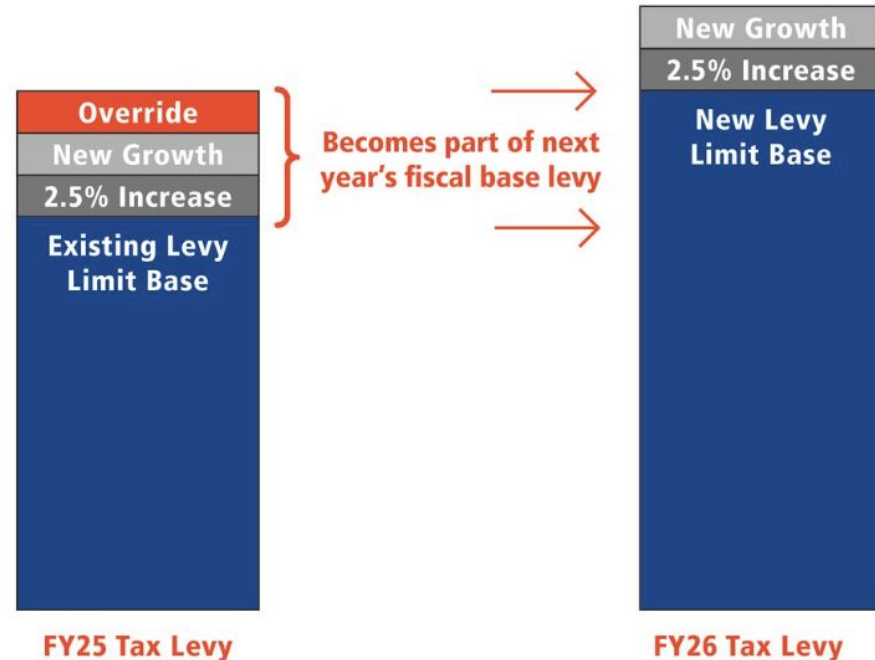
- Protect our community from devastating cuts,
- Make strategic investments to save money in the long run,
- Support the town's progress in fostering new businesses,
- Provide the time needed to build a bridge to a financially sustainable future for Belmont.

# What is an Operating Override?

Proposition 2 ½ is a law that passed in 1980.

- It limits annual property tax increases to 2½ %.
- Residents can permit a larger tax increase through a vote called an override.
- Overrides are common across Massachusetts.

## How does an override work?



# How Much Will the Proposed Override Cost?

The \$8.4M override will appear on April 2 ballot. If it is approved, it will cost:

- \$740/year for a home worth \$1 million
- \$14 per week



# Why Belmont Needs an Override

- Short-term Factors:
  - Inflation exceeding 2 ½%,
  - Tight labor markets,
  - Rising employee healthcare costs, and
  - Increasing cost of certain materials (e.g. cement).
- Property tax base (95% residential, 5% commercial)
- Long-term Factors:
  - Pension payments (underfunded for many decades),
  - Long-term increase in school enrollment since 1994, and
  - Rising state-mandated special education placement costs.

# What's at Stake for Town Depts

A YES vote will:	A No vote will:
Maintain fire/EMT services. <small>press alt T</small>	Lay off 8+ fire fighters/EMTs. Likely close Belmont Center fire station.
Improve sidewalk safety.	Provide no new funding for sidewalks.
Fund services for seniors.	Reduce senior services (24% budget cut)
Keep trash/recycling/yard waste pickups.	Likely privatize trash removal (\$360+ fee per residence for pay-as-you-throw).
Maintain library hours & other services.	Cut library hours & other town services.
Retain talented and experienced staff.	Lose talented staff to other towns.

# What's at Stake for the Schools

## A YES vote will:

Please say that again

Retain teachers and staff.

Maintain transportation.

Maintain sports & extracurriculars.

Keep Burbank Elementary School open.

Improve elementary math & reading.

Create an inhouse program to improve outcomes & reduce reliance on external special education programs.

## A NO vote will:

Eliminate 50 FTEs (22 teachers).

Eliminate busing for 80% of students.

Eliminate all sports & extracurriculars.

Close Burbank Elementary School.

Continue to postpone improvements to elementary math & reading instruction.

Cannot implement new special education programming (costing more in long run).

# Taking a Closer Look at Three Key Expense Drivers

- State-mandated back payments to Belmont's employee pension fund (roughly \$10 million in FY24)
- Long-term rise in school enrollment (40% increase since 1994)
- Rising state-mandated out-of-district special education placements (\$13 million in FY24)



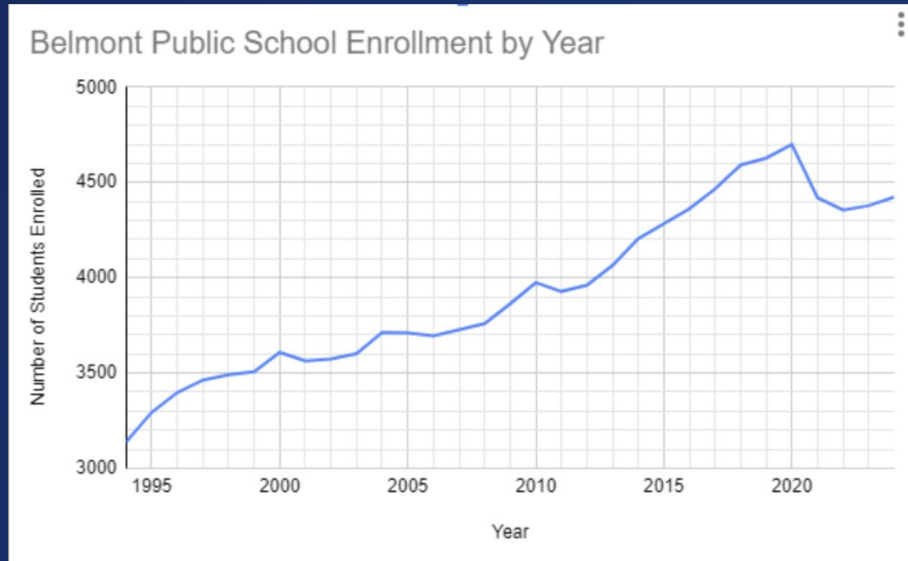
# State-Mandated Pension Payments

- Belmont underfunded employee pensions for decades but the town has now paid down 70% of its pension fund liability.
- The pension liability will be fully funded in seven years (2031).
- State-mandated payments will be \$10M to \$13M until 2031.
- After 2031, annual contributions should be around \$3M.

***An override will keep Belmont's schools and town services intact while we pay off this liability***

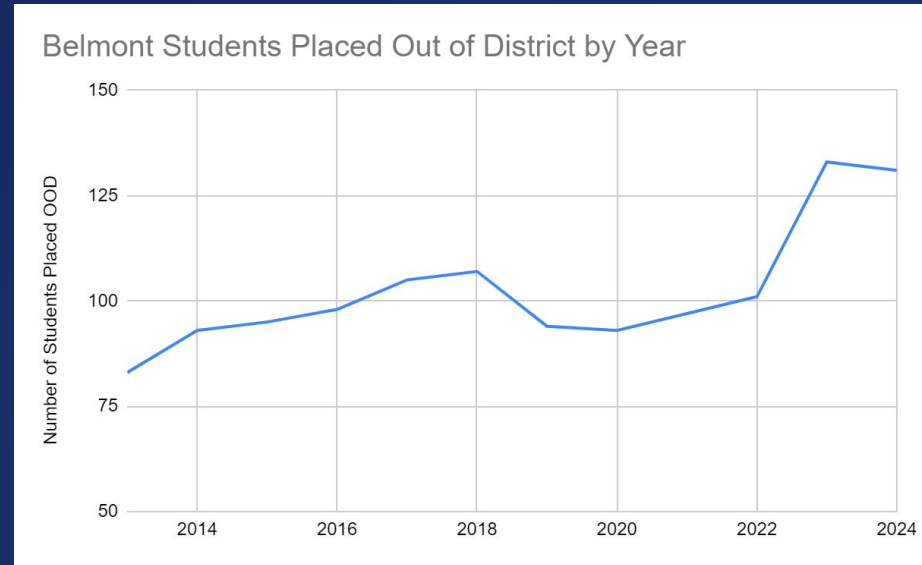
# Growing School-age Population

- Since 1994, Belmont's in-district enrollment has increased by 40% (town population has increased by only 10%)
- After a post-COVID dip, it is beginning to rise once again



# Out of District Placements Surging

- Under the prior school administration, state-mandated special ed placements in programs outside of Belmont surged.
- They now account for 20% of the school district budget (\$13 million this fiscal year)



# Strategic Investments Needed

Belmont's new Superintendent Dr. Jill Geiser is recommending key investments to improve outcomes & bring down costs:

- Improve elementary math & reading instruction (evidence-based phonics)
- Implement in-house special education programming
- Add reading & math specialists (if possible through efficiencies)

***\*Without an override, these investments won't be possible and external special education placements will continue increasing.***

# History of Overrides in Belmont

- 2021 - Failed
- 2015 - Passed (\$4.5M)
- 2010 - Failed
- 2008 - Failed
- 2002 - Passed (2.4M)
- 2001 - Passed (\$3M)
- 1993 - Failed
- 1990 - Passed (\$2M)

***Over the past 20 years, Belmont voters have passed only one operating override (in 2015)***

# Consequences of the Failed 2021 Override

Although the impact of the failed 2021 override was mitigated by federal COVID relief funds, between 2021 and 2023 Belmont eliminated:

- 2 DPW staff & 1 Engineer
- 1 Police Officer & 1 Firefighter
- 1 Reading Teacher & 1 Elementary Special Ed Teacher
- 6th Grade World Languages
- 1 BHS Librarian
- Building Substitutes
- And additional positions.


# The Town is Taking Action

## Recent Progress Towards Expanding the Commercial Tax Base:

- Simplified zoning bylaw to allow restaurants to open as-of-right (no more costly, time-consuming special permits).
- Created a Department of Planning & Building (no new headcount).
- Hired a town planner with deep experience in rezoning to foster business growth (done through reallocation of existing positions).
- Appointed experienced professionals to the Economic Dev. Committee, Planning Board & Vision 21 Implementation Committee, all of whom are working with the new Town Planner.

# The Town is Taking Action

The Select Board is working to increase commercial tax revenue by proposing zoning amendments that would:

- Add hotels as a permissible use,
  - Ease parking requirements for new small businesses,
  - Allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as-of-right,
  - Remove special permit requirements for common-sense home renovations, and
  - Incentivize landlords to rent empty storefronts.
- 



# The Town is Taking Action

- Town leaders are developing a comprehensive plan for reducing Belmont's year-over-year expense growth.
- Representatives from the Warrant Committee, School Committee and Select Board are crafting a "Compact with the Voters" to lay out the strategies they have identified for achieving this important goal.

# Vote Yes on April 2nd!

Here's what you can do:

- Visit [www.investinbelmont.com](http://www.investinbelmont.com)
- Talk to your neighbors
- Host a yard sign
- Go canvassing

