

**MILFORD
DAILY NEWS**

NEWS

Franklin town administrator portends budget woes

Matt Tota/Daily News staff

Published 12:01 a.m. ET May 16, 2013 | Updated 4:04 p.m. ET May 16, 2013

All along, Town Administrator Jeffrey Nutting has presented the \$95.1 million proposed fiscal year 2014 budget as a calculated step toward shoring up Franklin for greater fiscal challenges on the horizon.

On Wednesday, in the first night of Town Council's budget hearing, Nutting again warned of looming constraints amid stagnant revenue and decreasing state aid, this time pointing out that balancing the budget will get harder in the next two years.

"This is a balanced budget," he said, "but our cost increases continue to put pressure on our abilities to fund things that we would like to."

He added, "We continue to try to be frugal so we do not face any bigger problems in future budgets."

Deficits will grow exponentially in the next five years, Nutting predicted. And they'll become even more difficult to erase.

With the exception of annual contract obligations, the budget reflects across-the-board level funding in every department, Nutting said.

"Our expenses generally outpace our revenues," he said. "This is the first year we have not had to make any cuts. We have already reduced our staff about 20 percent in our town and school."

A \$50 million backlog of road repairs and a potential yearly commitment to fund other post-employment benefits (OPEB) in excess of \$3 million are two of the hurdles ahead, he said.

The council will vote on whether to accept the budget as presented on Thursday.

Later in Wednesday's meeting, the council voted to use \$500,000 of the town's free cash to repair Remington Middle School's perpetually leaky roof. "We have been making temporary repairs for a long time," said Nutting.

Part of the roof toward the backside of the building will need to be replaced, said Director of Public Facilities Michael D'Angelo.

In other news, the council agreed to raise the salaries of the treasurer/collector and town clerk by 4 to 5 percent to bring them in line with those offered in other towns.

He said the treasurer/collector salary of more than \$85,000 is well below the \$93,500 average for comparable towns, while the town clerk's salary is about 13 percent below the average.

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