

**MINUTES
REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING
STATE OF THE TOWN MEETING
DECEMBER 10, 2018**

CALL TO ORDER

The Regular State of the Town Meeting was called to order at 8:07 p.m. by Donna Rajczewski, Town Clerk.

Upon Roll Call, the following members were present:

From District I, there were 13 members present, 3 absent.
From District II, there were 12 members present, 4 absent.
From District III, there were 9 members present, 6 absent.
From District IV, there were 11 members present, 5 absent.
From District V, there were 16 members present, 2 absent.
From District VI, there were 16 members present, 1 absent.

The absentees from District I were: Barsanti, Butler & Colin Kelly.
The absentees from District II were: Bacon, Howe, Wheeler & Wilson
The absentee from District III were: Giordano, McGoey, Riordan, Sload, Washecka & Woodberry
The absentees from District IV were: Hardison, Hauser, Kemp, Millar, & Whittier
The absentees from District V were: Boulton & Fiveson.
The absentees from District VI was: Luz.

The Moderator, Seth Morton, assumed the Chair.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

**** THE AGENDA WAS ACCEPTED BY UNIVERSAL CONSENT.**

**ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 2018
ANNUAL MEETING**

**** THE MINUTES WERE ACCEPTED AS SUBMITTED BY UNIVERSAL CONSENT.**

Mr Morton then requested a moment of silence in remembrance of former President George H.W. Bush. He also asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of long-time RTM member, Selectman, & Police Commissioner Linda Saverine Santarella who passed away back in the Fall. His remarks are attached.

STATE OF THE TOWN REPORTS

CHAIR, PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

John Sini, Chairman, read his report (attached).

CHAIR, BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tara Ochman, Chairman, read her report (attached).

CHAIR, BOARD OF FINANCE

Jon Zagrodzky, Chairman, narrated a PowerPoint presentation.

FIRST SELECTMAN

First Selectman Jayme Stevenson read her report (attached).

**** UPON MOTION MADE AND SECONDED FROM THE FLOOR, IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO ADJOURN AT 9:30 P.M.**

Respectfully submitted,
S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

Linda Saverine Santarella

My fellow RTM members, it saddens me to report the passing of Linda Saverine Santarella, a 25 year member of this body from District III. She served this body with distinction, as Chair of the Planning, Zoning and Housing Committee.

I first met Linda when our children were attending Holmes School, and we fought along with others to keep Holmes School from being closed. As part of that effort we joined the RTM in 1985. I bring you 2 stories about Linda and passion.

First, when Holmes was closed, there was a convoy early in the day winding its way from District 3 to Royle and Ox Ridge schools. The convoy consisted of a school bus, followed by Linda in her car with a stopwatch, followed by a Darien police cruiser. The situation was resolved by an admission from the Board of Education that the 10-15 minute bus rides promised to Holmes School parents were underestimated and were more like 45 minutes. Linda insisted on accountability.

Second, After the RTM vote on the Town budget one year, she came up to me, pinched my cheek and said "Why did you vote in favor of the Board of Selectmen's Budget?" I replied that the F&B Committee reviewed the Budget in detail and approved it. She said, "They failed to include new sand for the beaches." Linda loved her time at the beach. She had passion.

Linda resigned from the RTM to go on to the Board of Selectmen where we served together. She then went on to be the first woman appointed to the Police Commission and also served on the first Charter Revision Commission. Her influence in the Downtown Task Force brought us the sidewalks and the beautiful lampposts we have there today.

Linda loved her town.

Please join me in a minute of silence to remember Linda Saverine Santarella.

**State of the Town of Darien Address
John Sini, Jr. -- Planning and Zoning, Chairman
December 10, 2018**

Thank you, Mister Moderator. Good evening everyone, I am John Sini, Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Before I commence with my update, I would like to extend my thanks to my fellow commissioners for all their hard work and dedication: Steve Olvany, our Vice Chair, Kevin Cunningham, our Secretary and the commission's longest serving member; as well as Jim Rand, Liz Riva, and Jennifer Leahy.

As many of you know, the applications can be complex, our public hearings can be emotive and our meetings often run late into the evening. I deeply appreciate how well commission members work together in order to reach a fair consensus within our legal bounds. I want you to know that our commission members come to our meetings with one clear intention: That is to render decisions that comply with the applicable standards found in our regulations, and are in the best interest for the future of Darien and all of its stakeholders.

The Planning and Zoning Commission conducted 27 meetings in 2018 and reviewed 63 zoning applications. While the number applications is down from almost 90 in 2017, a few of the proposals were arguably some the most complex decisions the commission has ever faced. These approved projects will have a momentous influence on our community for decades to come. I will discuss some of these key projects in a few minutes.

The Environmental Protection Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Architectural Review Board were also busy this year, conducting a total of 37 meetings among the three bodies. The efforts of all of our land-use board volunteers are crucial to the conservation, planning and development activities in our town. Their service to our town is deeply appreciated.

I would also like to thank all of our Planning and Zoning Department staff members under the direction of Jeremy Ginsberg. Without our staff's labor, the four land use boards would certainly struggle to fulfill their obligations to our town. Our senior planner, Fred Doneit is deserved of recognition for drafting the countless pages of resolutions and minutes.

My last shout-out goes out to the staff at TV-79 with its gavel-to-gavel coverage of our late night meetings, providing a valuable resource for not only our local government, but also the entire community.

As I look back this year, the most noteworthy of the applications approved by our Commission was Baywater Properties' downtown Corbin project. After over three years of regulation amendment and site plan hearings, the Commission approved the last of the applications related to this redevelopment project on November 27.

This redevelopment area is bordered by the Post Road, I-95 and the exit 11 off-ramp to

Corbin Drive – including the gas station and additional two properties on the east side of the street reaching south to Old King’s Highway South. This transformative development, consisting of nine new multi-story buildings in the middle of our downtown, will arguably represent the largest in the Darien’s history.

As part of the project’s inclusionary affordable housing requirement, the commission approved the creation of an overlay zone that will allow for twelve housing units on East Lane for adults with intellectual disabilities. These independent units will further diversify Darien’s housing stock and provide much-needed housing among that special community.

Another project approved this year is the Ox Ridge Riding and Racquet Club. The new construction and renovation work is now well underway at the site.

Related to the club’s transformation was the purchase of the 16-acre property now known as Highland Farm by the Town of Darien. In July, the Commission approved site improvements for the property, including new parking areas, and a jogging/walking path. The special permit approval allows for various programming and activities to occur on-site once fencing is constructed and parking areas are provided. This property represents an open-space treasure for the entire community to enjoy.

Just recently, the commission approved replacement of the Scout Cabin on West Avenue. The Andrew Shaw Memorial Trust purchased an adjacent residential property and will combine it with scout’s existing property while building a larger cabin. This project will significantly improve the site and meet flood regulations.

During the public hearing process, a great deal of time and effort was spent listening to comments from the scout trustees, their experts, neighbors and other scout representatives. I believe the final resolution for this project and its associated related programming activities represented a true compromise by fulfilling the needs of the scouts while limiting the impact to the surrounding neighborhood, all while complying with local zoning and special permit requirements and standards.

In July, the Commission expedited the Board of Education’s application and approved the request to establish the Fitch Academy on the second floor of 6 Thorndal Circle, in close proximity to the library. The commission is hopeful that the Fitch Academy may have found a long-term home for this wonderful education program.

There are two projects now happening on the east end of the Post Road corridor: This fall, various improvements were approved to the Darien Green Office Park, which is adjacent to, and behind Duchess Restaurant. We expect the enhancements to lure office and medical tenants into the facility and bring an influx of new jobs into town. Another notable improvement project approved was 364 Post Road, the building where Jack’s Fabrics and the Sewing Machine were formerly located, which should offer additional retail and personal service options.

Several new businesses opened their doors over the last year including Hollow Tree Ridge Self Storage; Flour, Water, Salt; Bankwell; Osteostrong; Dance on the DL; Huntington

Learning; Bonny Reflexology; Danny's Cycles; and Roost. Café Nero should also open very soon.

Lastly, we expect the Residence at Selleck's Woods, the town's newest assisted living and memory care facility located at the Parklands site to accept residents in early 2019. Fourteen new condominium units at Kensett's Phase II are now well underway, with expected completion in 2020.

As I was reflecting on the five years that I have served on the Commission, a constant theme came to mind: It is "**Change.**" One of the things we often take for granted is the amount of positive momentum on this front that our town has experienced over the last fifteen years.

It's easy to forget that not so long ago, our business districts had a number of open lots and vacant storefronts and buildings. Real estate brokers would avoid taking potential homebuyers through our downtown or even past our high school given their lack of attractiveness relative to other surrounding communities.

Popular destinations that we enjoy today like Trader Joes, Whole Foods, Chipotle, Shake Shack, the Darien Playhouse, Grove Street Plaza and even the Darien High School all faced zoning challenges in one form or another. In our downtown, pedestrians were few, signage was limited, restaurants and personal service businesses had to clear high hurdles for approvals, and outside dining and gathering places weren't the norm.

Socrates wrote, "***The secret of change is to focus all your energy, not on fighting the old, but building the new.***" Thankfully, since the early 2000's, Darien has certainly focused its energy on "building the new" and we are all reaping the benefits. Many community members and town leaders, past and present, are responsible for creating and maintaining the momentum.

With the Old Town Hall Homes, Federal Realty, Noroton Heights Shopping Center and Corbin projects all expected to commence with construction in 2019, Darien is about to experience one its most monumental makeovers in its history. We are all very fortunate to live a town that has garnered so much interest for its several redevelopment projects, many being led by developers that have deep roots in our community and have an interest in maintaining Darien's character and charm.

Needless to say, these multi-year construction projects will likely result in temporary disruption, yet I am confident that the final products will be game-changers for both the Noroton Heights Business District and downtown. Each site plan has a layout that allows for more pedestrian friendly areas, complete with ample open spaces and outside dining areas, creating a desirable sense of place to live, work and play. I know David Genovese is excited to reveal a digital rendering which will provide an idea what is to come for the Corbin block on the 'Our Downtown Darien' site.

Plans to add 297 one and two-bedroom units among the three projects will not only attract the next generation millennials to our community – a group that seems to be lured by vibrant downtown and commercial areas – they will also expand the housing options for

our long-time residents who are looking to downsize, yet remain in the community that they raised their families.

Between the new developments' affordable units and the expansion of Old Town Hall Homes, the projects will yield approximately 55 new affordable units in Darien. Our local regulations and policy decisions are clearly achieving the goal of adding more affordable units in town. However, once the town's second 8-30(g) moratorium expires in October 2020, we are likely to see affordable housing proposals that fall outside our local zoning regulations.

Given the recent flooding incidents on Heights Road, I would like to remind everyone that commission worked very closely with the developers to build flood mitigation systems and other drainage improvements in the area, which will be further enhanced by a town sponsored project in the Noroton Heights Commuter lot. This will be implemented as the redevelopment projects are constructed, and should help in reducing the impact of heavy rain events.

While the ongoing commercial redevelopment will assist in maintaining the value of Darien's grand list, it is important to remember that residential properties make up 85% of the town's \$8.6 billion tax base, which is flat with last year. The Commission is committed to maintaining Darien's economic vibrancy through supporting sensible renovations and redevelopment.

The Commission's effort to implement zoning regulation modifications for signage was completed in 2018. It has also started the process to simplify various business zones as well as consider implementing the Municipal Use zone for several of our town-owned properties, including our schools, which will allow for more zoning flexibility for future municipal projects.

Because my term ends in November 2019, this will be my last State of the Town address. As I look back over the last five years that I served as a commissioner, I am gratified of all the projects that P&Z has helped enable. I feel a sense of reward by visualizing many small fingerprints on each one of the approved projects. I deeply appreciate the input and guidance from so many members of this community over the last five years.

I want to leave you with the same message that I left you with last year: The Commission can't make decisions effectively without feedback from the community. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us with any comments - positive or negative.

Thank you again for your time this evening. I wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and healthy and prosperous 2019!

Mr. Moderator, Members of the RTM, and the Community of Darien. I am honored to stand here before you to tonight on behalf of the Board of Education to update you on our work.

This discussion really begins in previous budget years. We all spend hours of time creating a plan for Darien, balancing needs, having critical conversations and believing in what Darien is, and can be.

As a Board, we believe that education is the key to preparing our children to participate in their future and we are steadfast in the belief that an educated society leads to the betterment of society.

It is with that dedication to students, that each morning the Darien Public Schools welcome just over 4,600 children. Our qualified staff works to identify where each student is educationally and challenges them to grow throughout the year so that they can achieve their dreams.

This is not a simple task, and each year we learn and adjust to be better able to serve our students and, in turn, serve our community.

Specifically, this year, your support has allowed us to further a variety of important initiatives.

Safety and security upgrades have been made at many schools. New entrances have been installed at Holmes and Middlesex schools. Additional cameras have been installed to help provide greater surveillance capability for the District and more rapid communication with the police in case of any emergency. Our emergency blue light system is fully operational at all schools.

The turfing of the baseball field is almost complete and will allow for a variety of student activities to take place on a safe and well maintained field.

Soon you will see the addition of solar panels on many of our school buildings, bringing with them an estimated \$1 mm dollars of savings over the next 10 years.

And while now in the hands of the Board of Selectman, I would be remiss not to note the good work and thorough conversations involved so far in the building project for a new Ox Ridge School. This is an aged facility with failing systems, and I believe the project that will come forward is something of which we will all be proud.

Our Department Chairpersons and elementary Directors continue to work to align teaching and learning best practices across classrooms.

This includes responding with curriculum adjustments in an ever-evolving world, and is based on student data.

These vital personnel are able to ensure curriculum is developmentally appropriate and is standards-based. Moreover, they have been given the freedom and time to write unique and innovative curriculum that adheres to State standards but represents Darien's own commitment to excellence in education.

We have been able to capture economies of scale and accelerate our technology plan so that grades 5-12 are now all part of our 1:1 technology initiative.

Our students have engaged in digital citizenry workshops, to understand the power of accessing technology and the responsibility that such access brings.

The Board and the District recognize that students must be prepared for a world that will demand a certain amount of technological expertise; but we are equally committed to civics and civility as they engage in this new world.

We also acknowledge the necessity for Social Emotional learning in our schools. This is not unique to Darien. Towns across the State are experiencing a similar need, but through the hard work of our dedicated staff we have been able to develop a curriculum that is tailored to the specific needs we are seeing here in Darien.

Programs like this were not traditionally codified in schools but they are now a reality. As one neighboring school official said recently, schools are now one of the major mental health providers in the State.

This is a complex task to undertake. So far, with effective and strong leadership at the District and school levels, we have been able to manage this emerging need within our budgets. But, if I were to signal to the Town where I see requests for future investment, this is a growth area to which we need to pay attention.

No State of the Town would be complete without mentioning the amazing work of our students this year. Once again we have seen accomplishments in the arts and academics, success in sports and music, and achievements in our after school clubs and honor societies. We are proud to offer a wide variety of activities to engage interested students.

We celebrate their successes and are proud of their achievements.

And, as a Board, all that our students experience leads us back to essential questions

Have we invested in our children as learners so they believe they should invest in themselves?

Have the exams and homework, wins and losses, performances, conferences and concerts taught them to be active in their own education?

While important, independent of GPA, test scores, acceptances, deferrals, or denials, have they learned that as long as they choose to continue to learn, they will find their way?

Answering these questions is the work we love and believe in. This is what drives our partnership with you as elected officials and neighbors.

I would like to recognize each member of the BOE for engaging the community and listening to differing viewpoints, for never succumbing to those looking to destroy, and for always trying to rise to the occasion.

I would also thank Dr. Elliott Landon who took on the arduous task of interim superintendent. We are fortunate he is committed to keeping Darien moving forward, because as you all know, our children never cease nor pause.

And, thanks to all our central office and building level staff for being committed to Darien and its learners, believing consistently in providing outstanding educational experiences for all.

Finally, we thank you, the RTM, BOF and the Town of Darien for your support. We look forward to continuing our important work with you in the future.

We wish you all a very Happy Holiday season and a prosperous New Year.



State of the Town Address

Darien Board of Finance

Jon Zagrodzky, Chairman

December 10, 2018

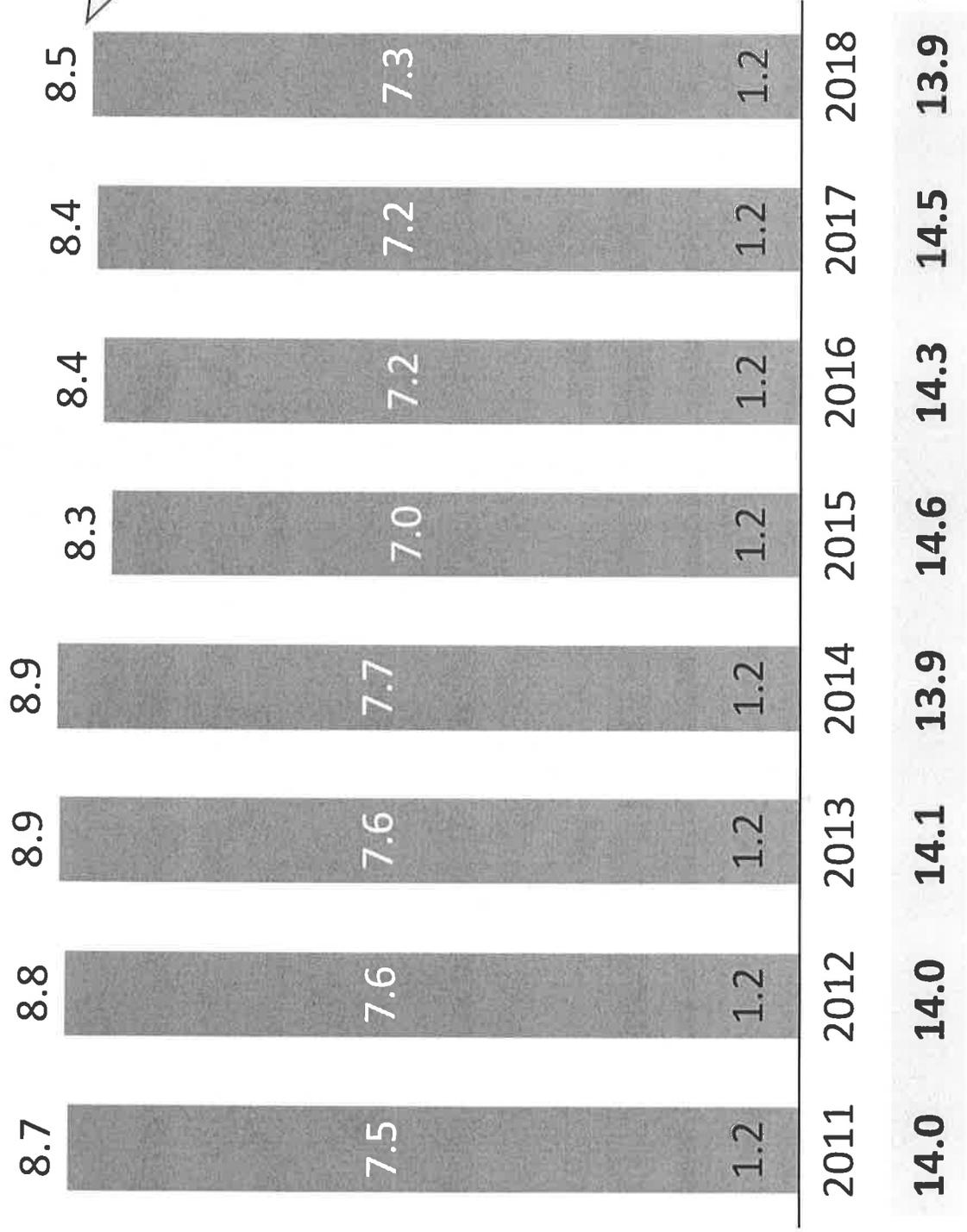
Topics

- **Yesterday: recent financial trends**

- Today: current finances
- Tomorrow: five-year forecast
 - Base case
 - Scenarios and implications
- 2019-20 budget guidance
- Another thought

Grand list

\$ billions



Grand List stable, but not fully recovered from recession

Commercial property "flat" as % of total, but new developments will change this...?

Revenue sources

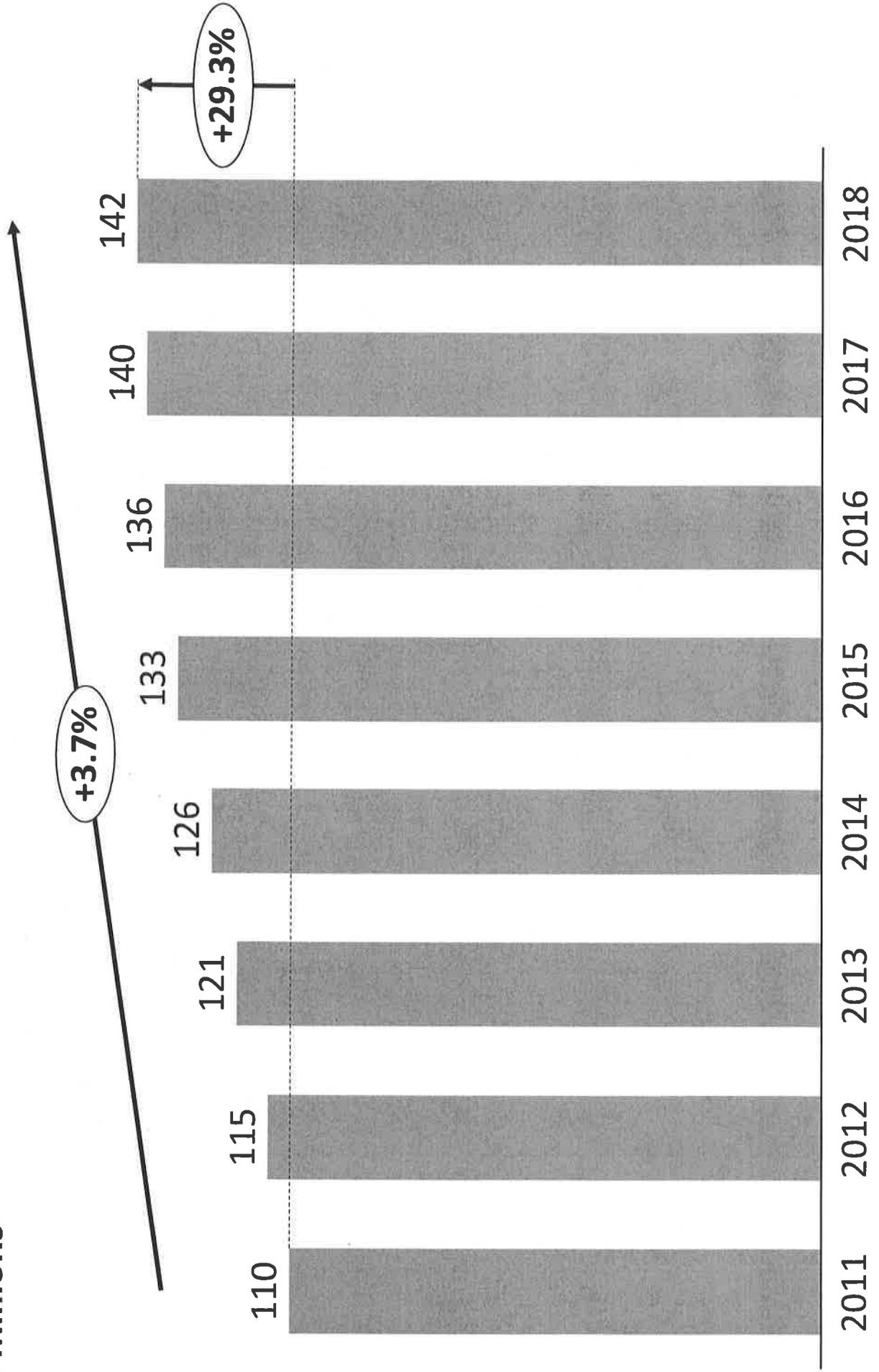
\$ millions

	<u>2011</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>%</u>
Property taxes	101.2	92	137.2	94
State grants	2.6	2	0.6	1
Other local	6.7	6	7.3	5
Total	110.5	100%	145.1	100%

- Heavily reliant on property taxes; more so now
- Prospect of losing further state money less menacing

Total expenditures

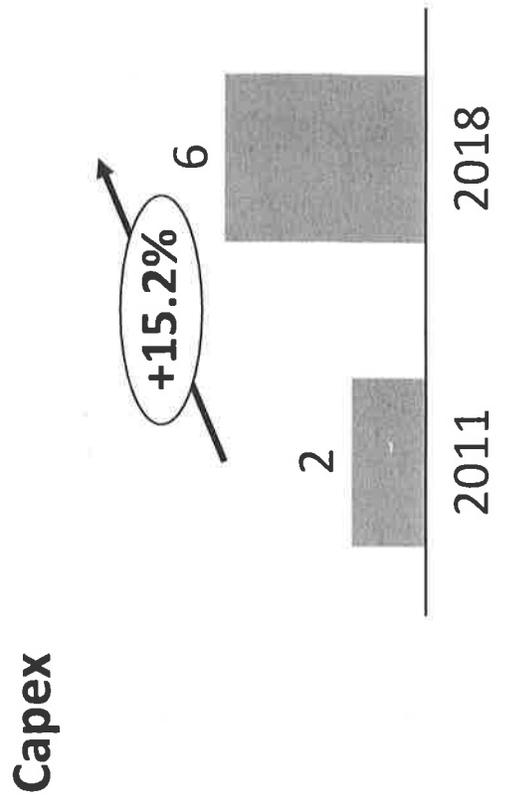
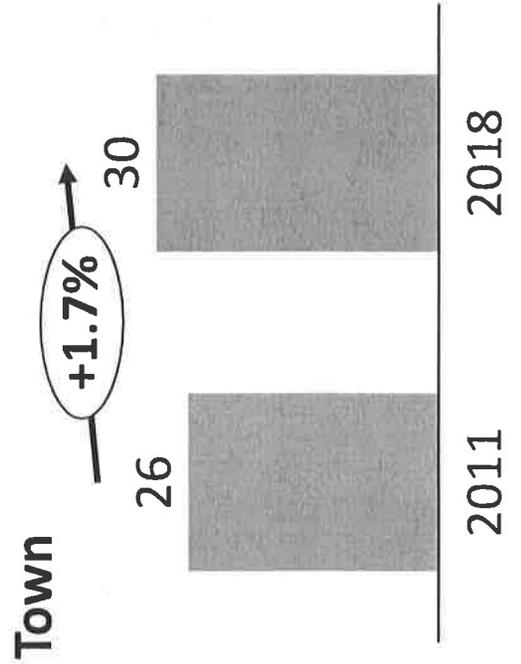
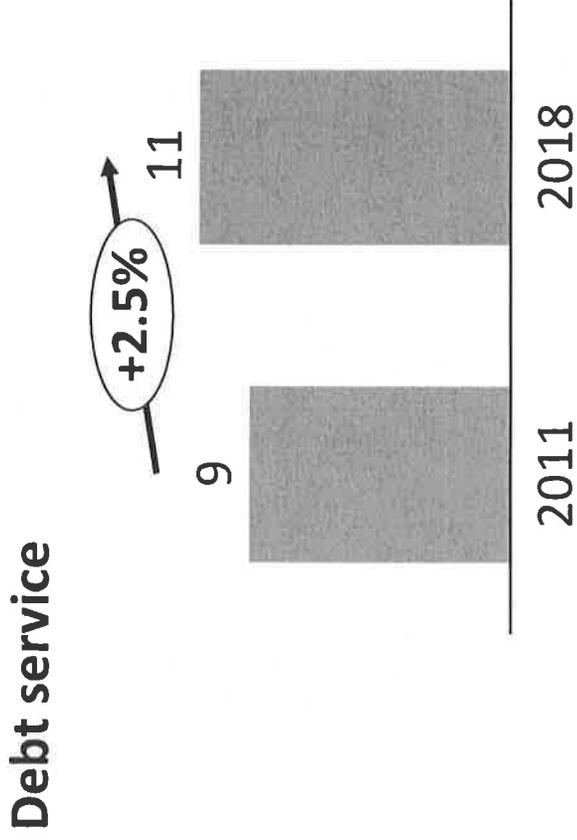
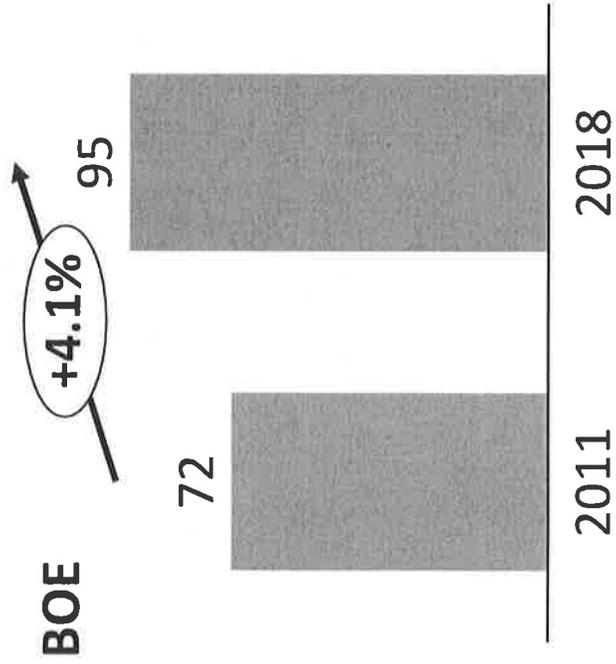
\$ millions



Total expenditures

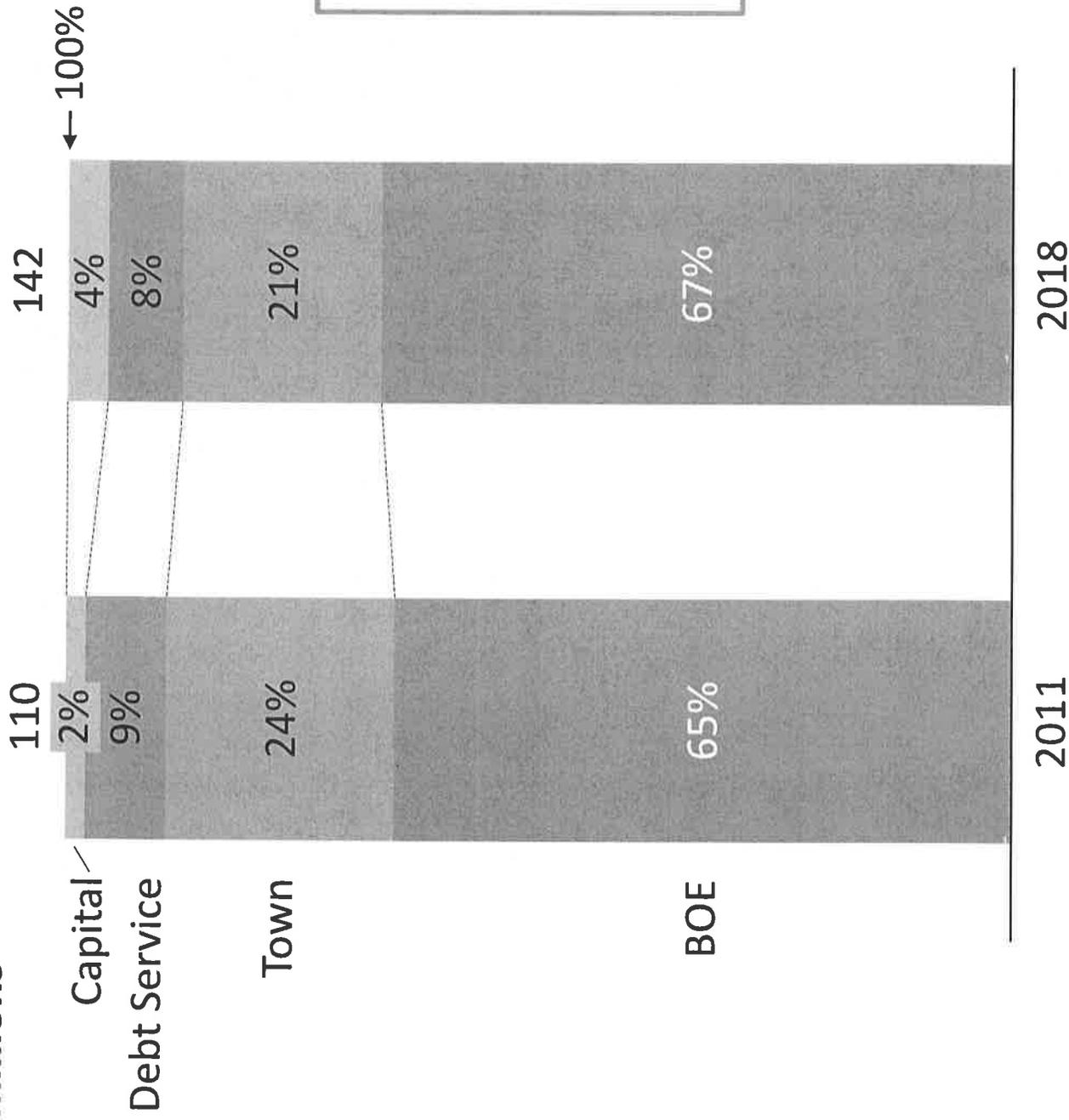
\$ millions

Not to scale



Total expenditures

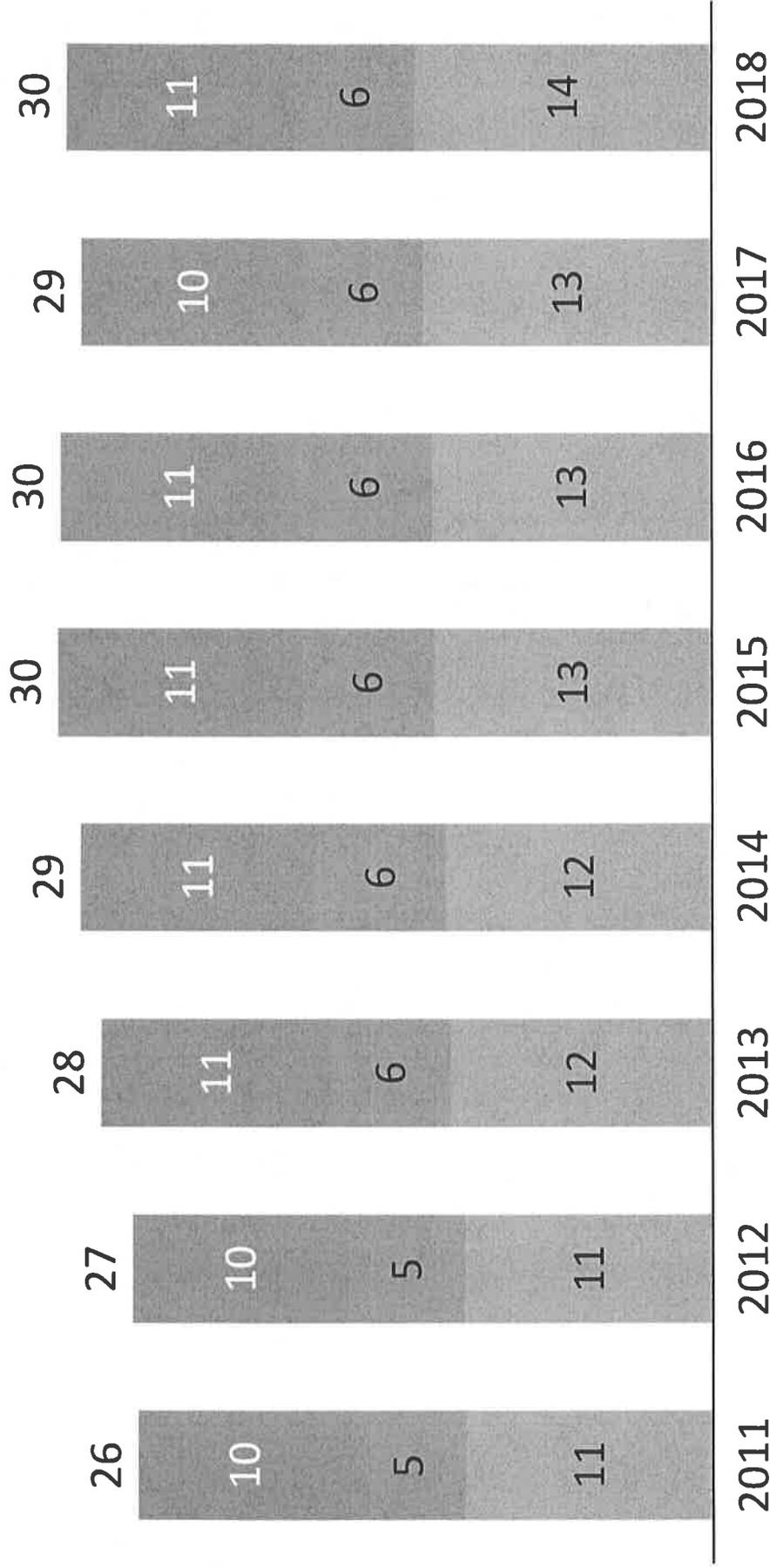
\$ millions



BOE growing as a percent of total, while the Town share is shrinking...
...but not dramatically

Town expenditures by type

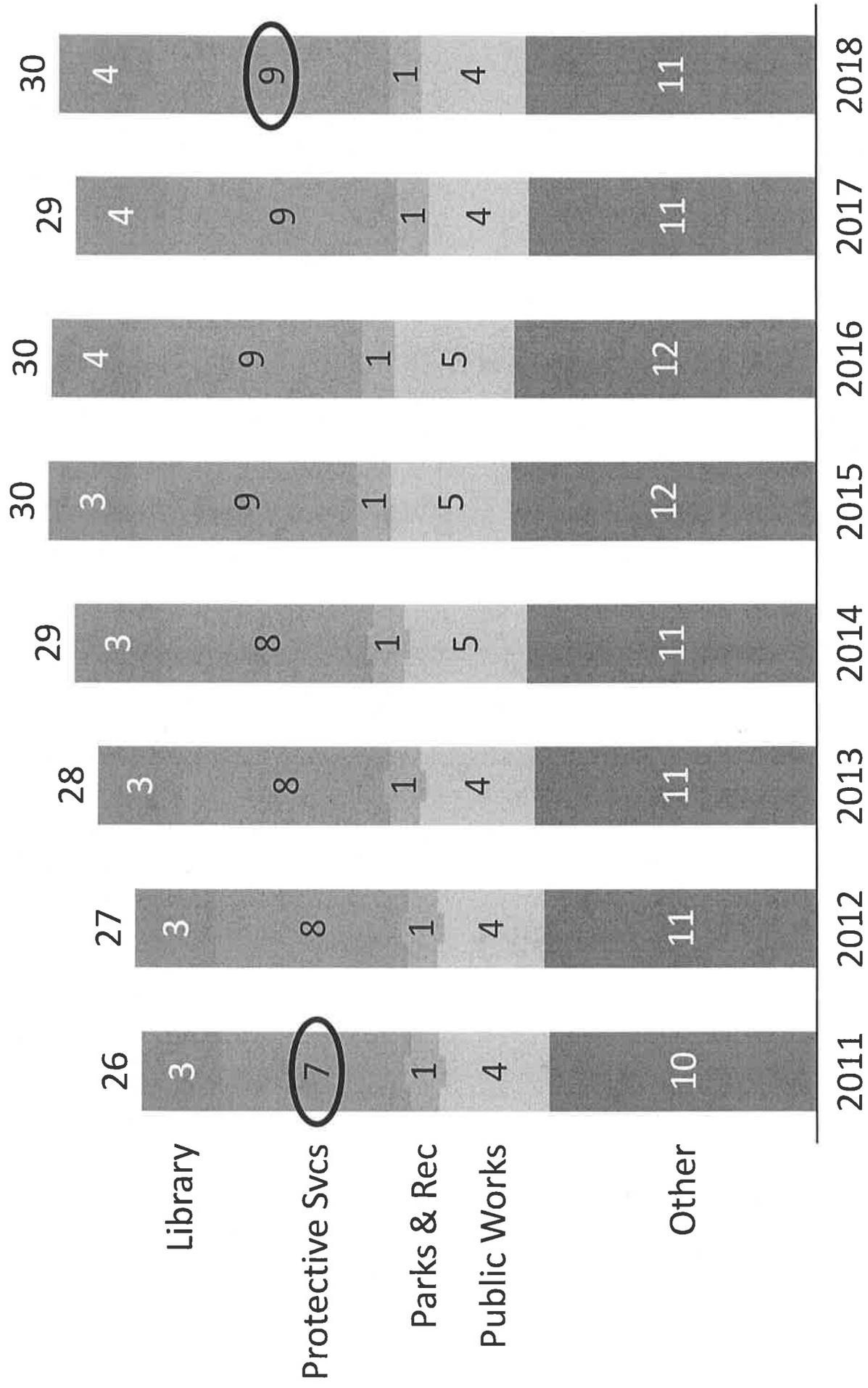
\$ millions



FTEs	134	136	135	133	137	138	141	141
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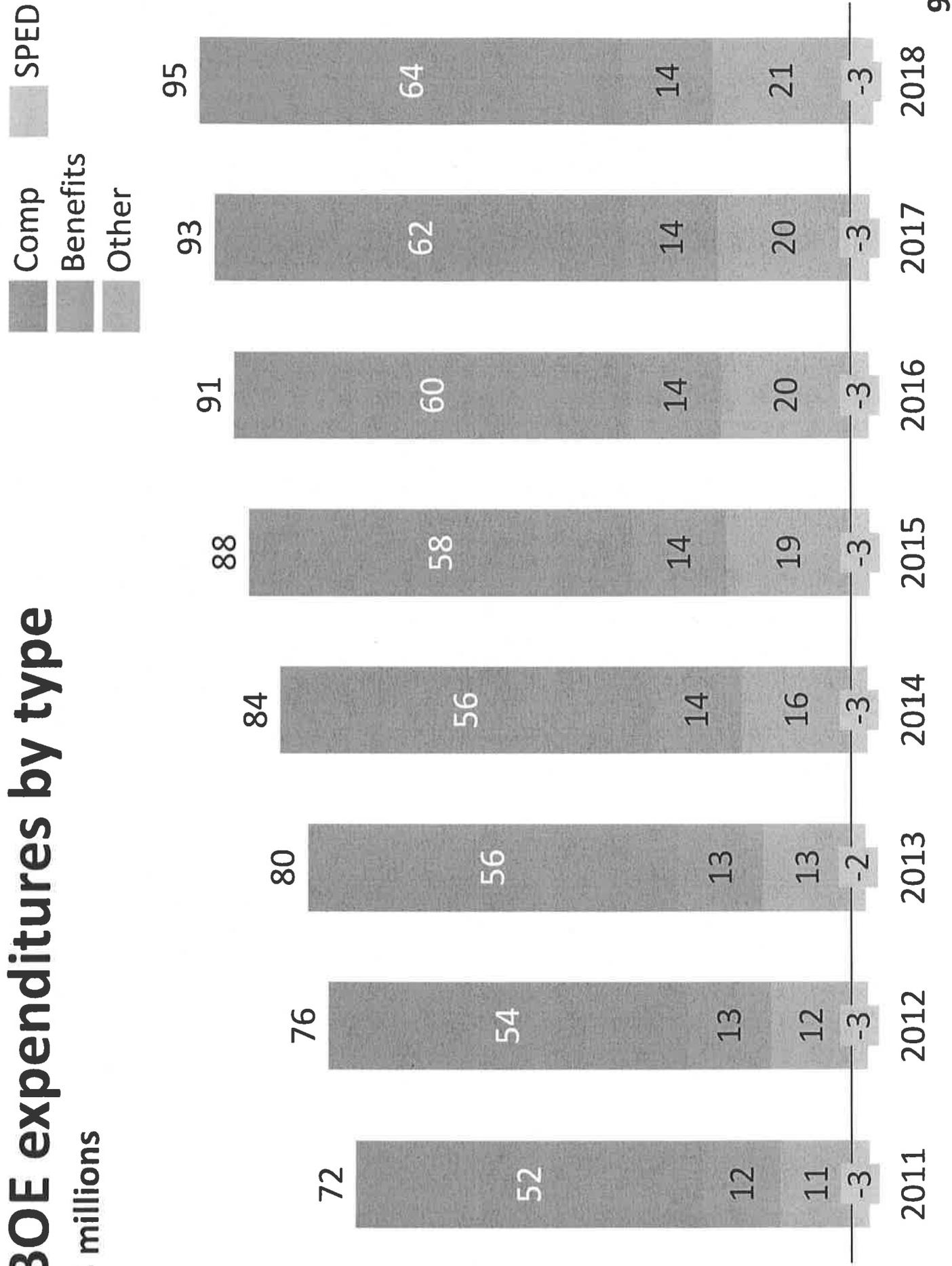
Town expenditures by department

\$ millions



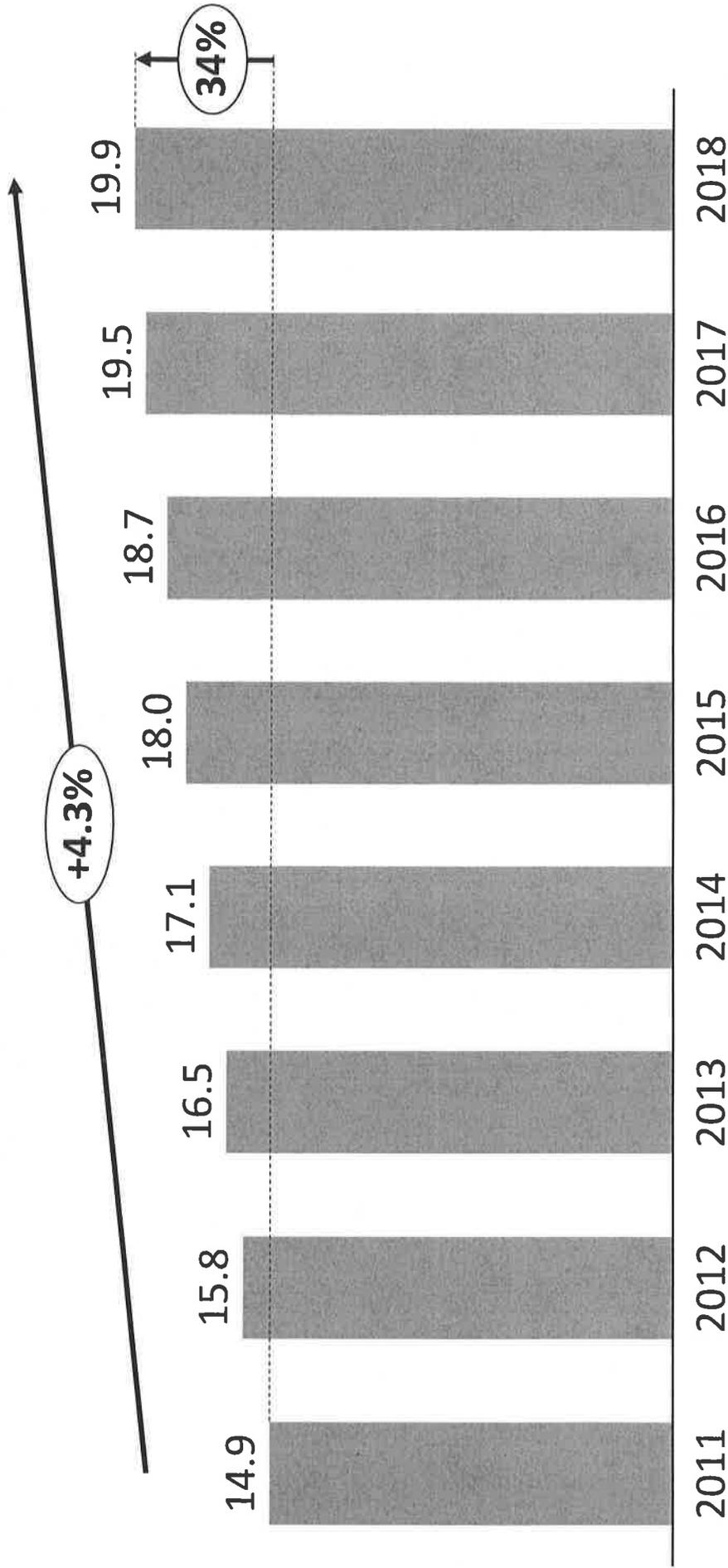
BOE expenditures by type

\$ millions



BOE expenditures per student

\$ thousands



4841	4817	4846	4895	4899	4847	4792	4781
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Spending growth not due to enrollment growth
(60 fewer students in 2018 versus 2011)

Special education

\$ millions

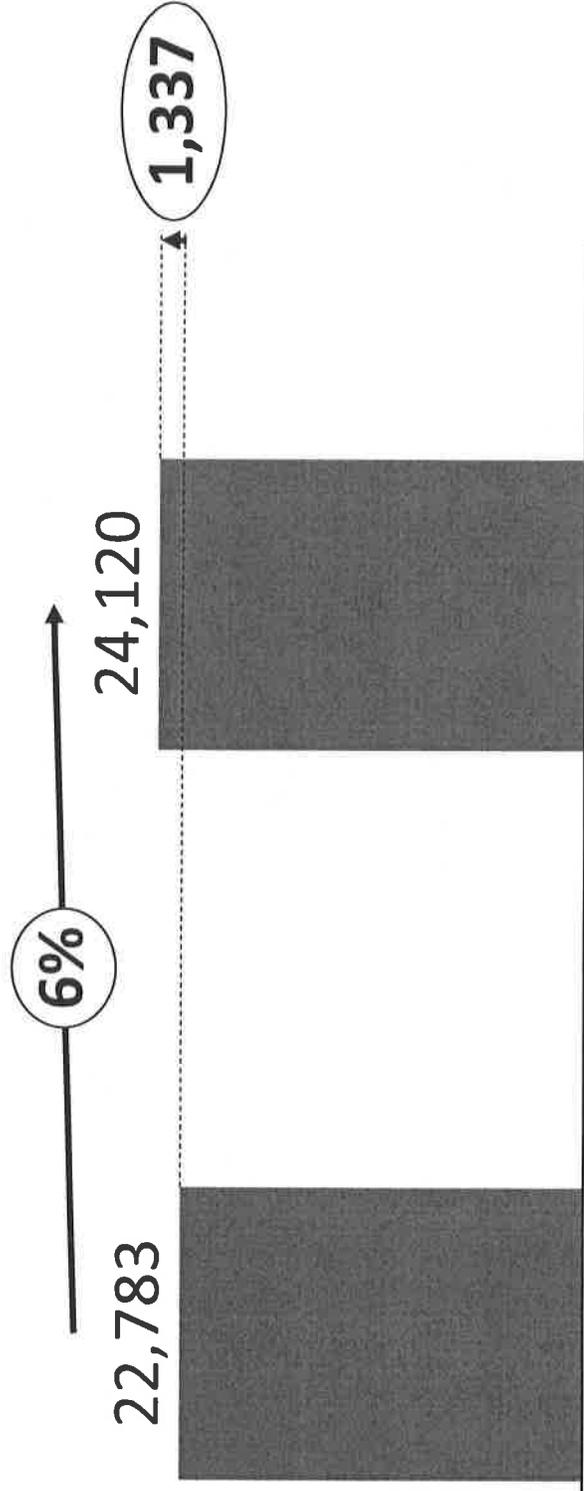
Rounded!

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	CAGR %
Net SPED, ELP	14	16	17	18	21	22	23	24	8.2%
% change	15%	5%	6%	18%	7%	3%	3%	3%	
Other BOE	58	60	63	66	67	68	70	71	3.0%
% change	4%	4%	5%	2%	2%	2%	3%	1%	
Total	72	76	80	84	88	90	93	95	4.1%
SPED % total	19%	21%	21%	21%	24%	25%	25%	25%	

Special education – implications

\$ dollars

2018 taxes on \$1.5 million home



SPED at BOE growth

3.0%

SPED at actual growth

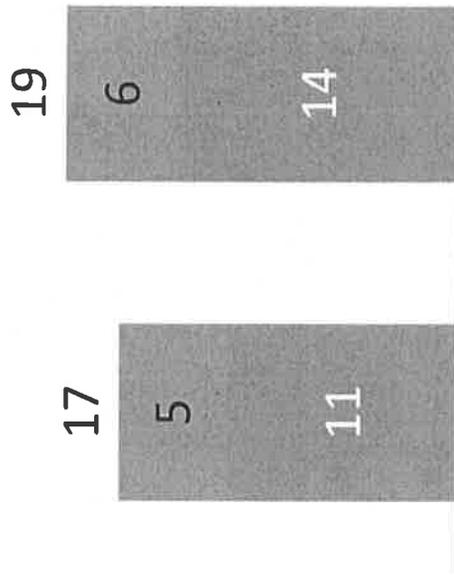
8.2%

2011-2018

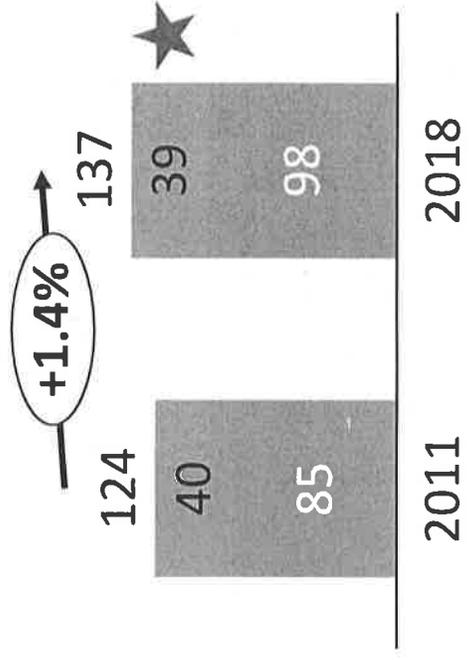
Comp and benefit costs



Town

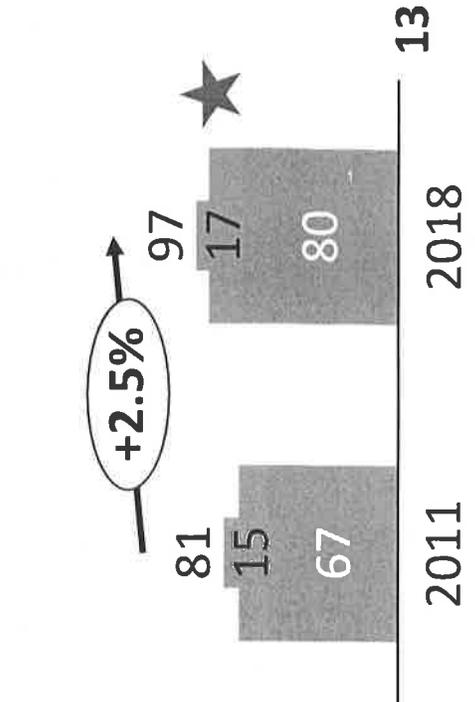
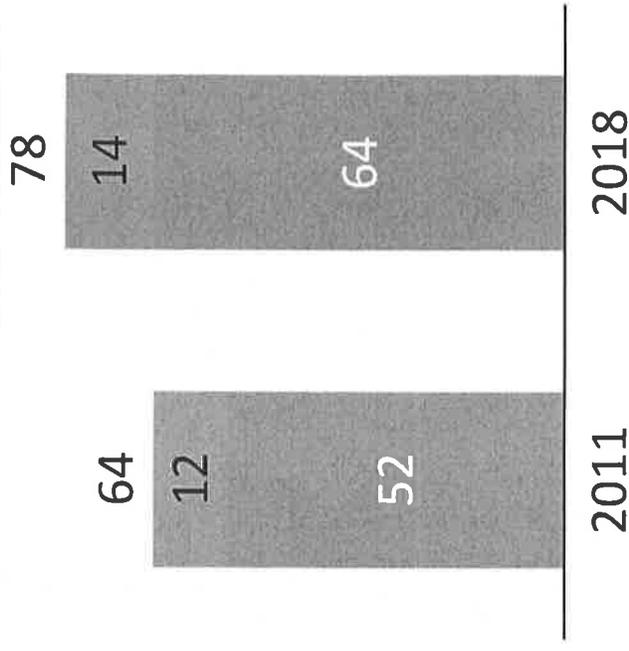


Total
\$ millions
Not to scale



Per FTE
\$ thousands

BOE



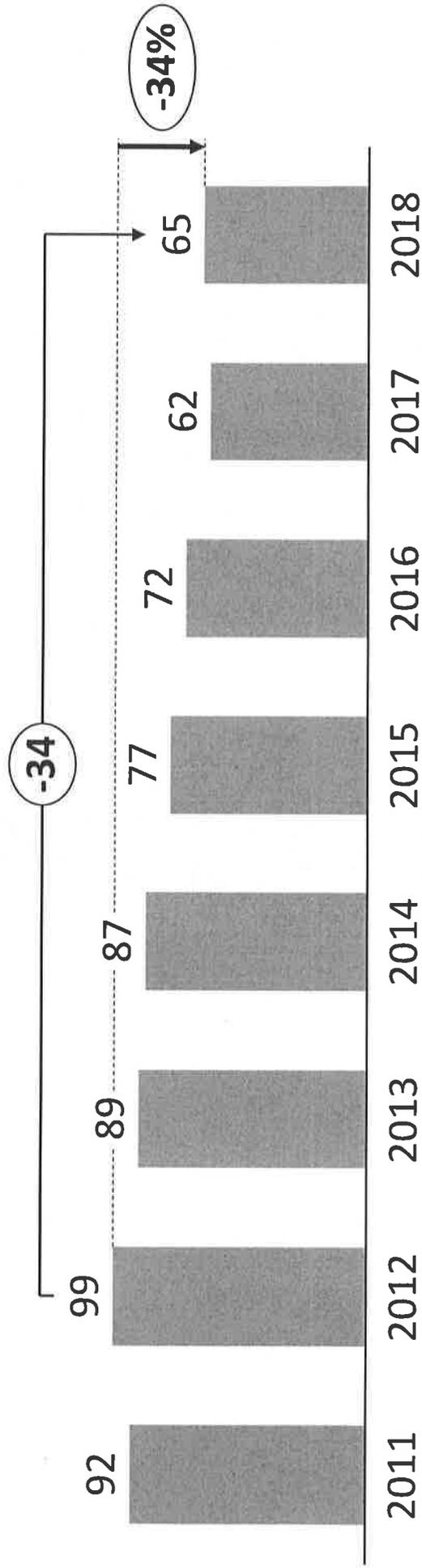
Debt and debt service

\$ millions

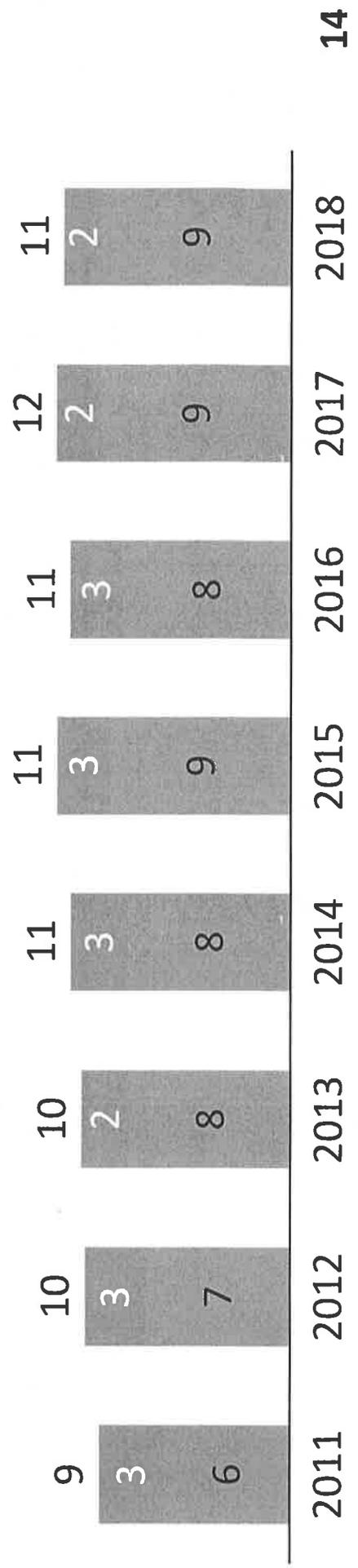
Not to scale



Outstanding debt

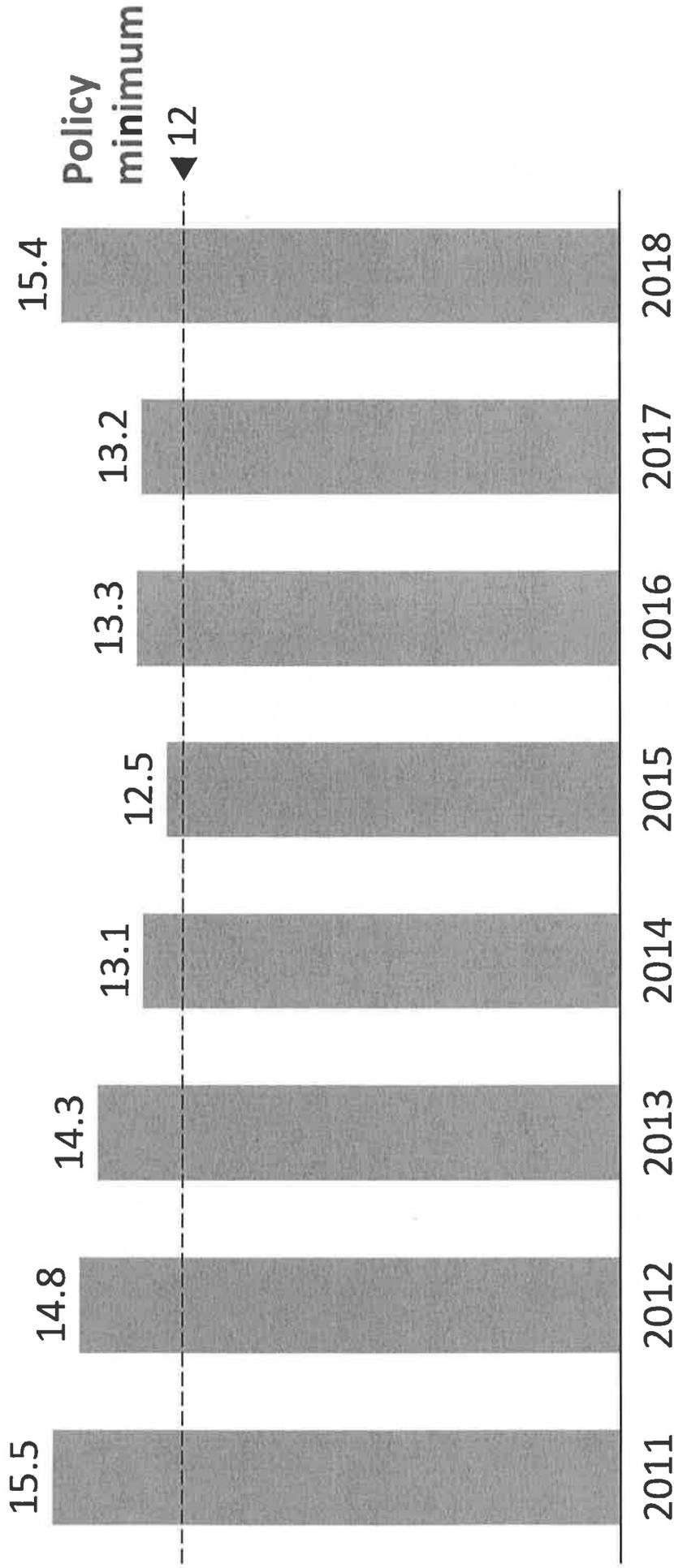


Annual debt service costs



Fund balance

Unassigned Fund Balance – % of Budgetary Revenues



Unassigned Fund Balance – \$ millions

17.2	17.0	17.4	16.5	16.7	18.2	18.4	22.3
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Recent history – observations

Stable situation – Grand List, taxes, spending

- Overall
- Relative mix

Balance sheet in good shape

- Debt levels and capacity
- Fund Balance

A concern:

- SPED costs, but limited power to change

The town and the schools have been well-managed from a financial standpoint

Topics

- Yesterday: recent financial trends

- **Today: current finances**

- Tomorrow: five-year forecast
 - Base case
 - Scenarios and implications
- 2019-20 budget guidance
- Another thought

2018 – budget versus actual

\$ millions	Budget	Actual	\$ variance + / (-)
Property taxes	136.1	137.3	1.2
State grants	0.2	0.5	0.3
Other local	9.0	7.9	-1.1
Subtotal – revenue	145.3	145.7	
Town	31.4	29.8	1.6
BOE	95.9	95.1	0.7
Debt service	11.7	11.2	0.5
Capex	6.3	6.1	0.2
Subtotal – expenses	145.3	142.3	
Surplus/(deficit)	0.0	<u>3.4</u>	

Surplus added to Fund Balance

2019 budget versus 2018 actual

\$ millions	2018	2019	Comments
Property taxes	137.3	137.2	• Output (but < last year)
State grants	0.5	0.1	• Prudence
Other local	7.9	7.9	• Flat
Subtotal – revenue	145.7	145.3	
Town	29.8	31.4	• 2018 performance
BOE	95.1	95.9	• Various
Debt service	11.2	11.7	• As scheduled
Capex	6.1	6.3	
Subtotal – expenses	142.3	145.3	+2.2%
Surplus/(deficit)	3.4	<u><u>0.0</u></u>	Balanced budget required

Current situation – observations

Modest growth, no unknown major issues

Growing cooperation and collaboration

- Board of Selectmen
- BOF, RTM, F&B

Lots of people paying attention

Pretty good, for the moment

Topics

- Yesterday: recent financial trends
- Today: current finances
- **Tomorrow: five-year forecast**
 - Base case
 - Scenarios and implications
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- Another thought

Baseline five-year forecast

Historic growth rates

- Town and BOE
- Personnel and benefit costs
- Grand List
- Non-personnel costs

“Status quo – nothing new”

- Current debt and debt service
- No new capex
- No changes in state funding

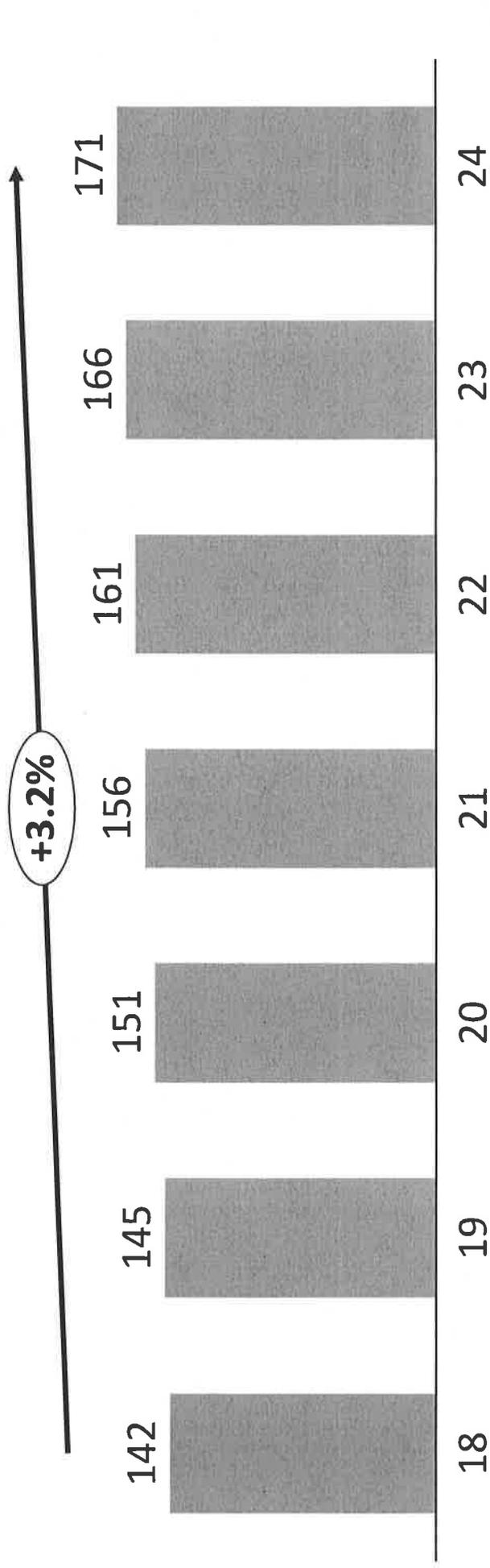
Five-year output

- Spending and taxes
- Debt levels
- Taxes on a \$1.5 million house

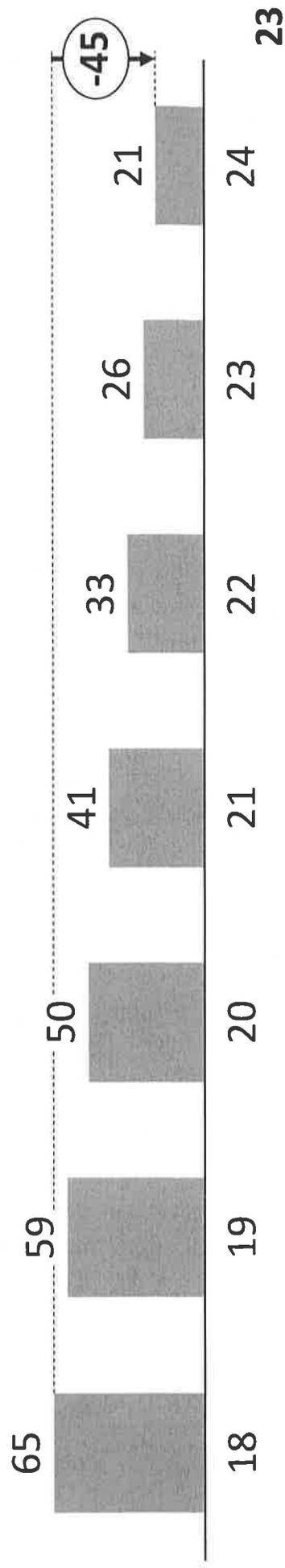
Not overly sophisticated, but we hope to evolve the analysis in the coming year

Baseline five-year forecast

Expenditures (\$MM)



Debt (\$MM)

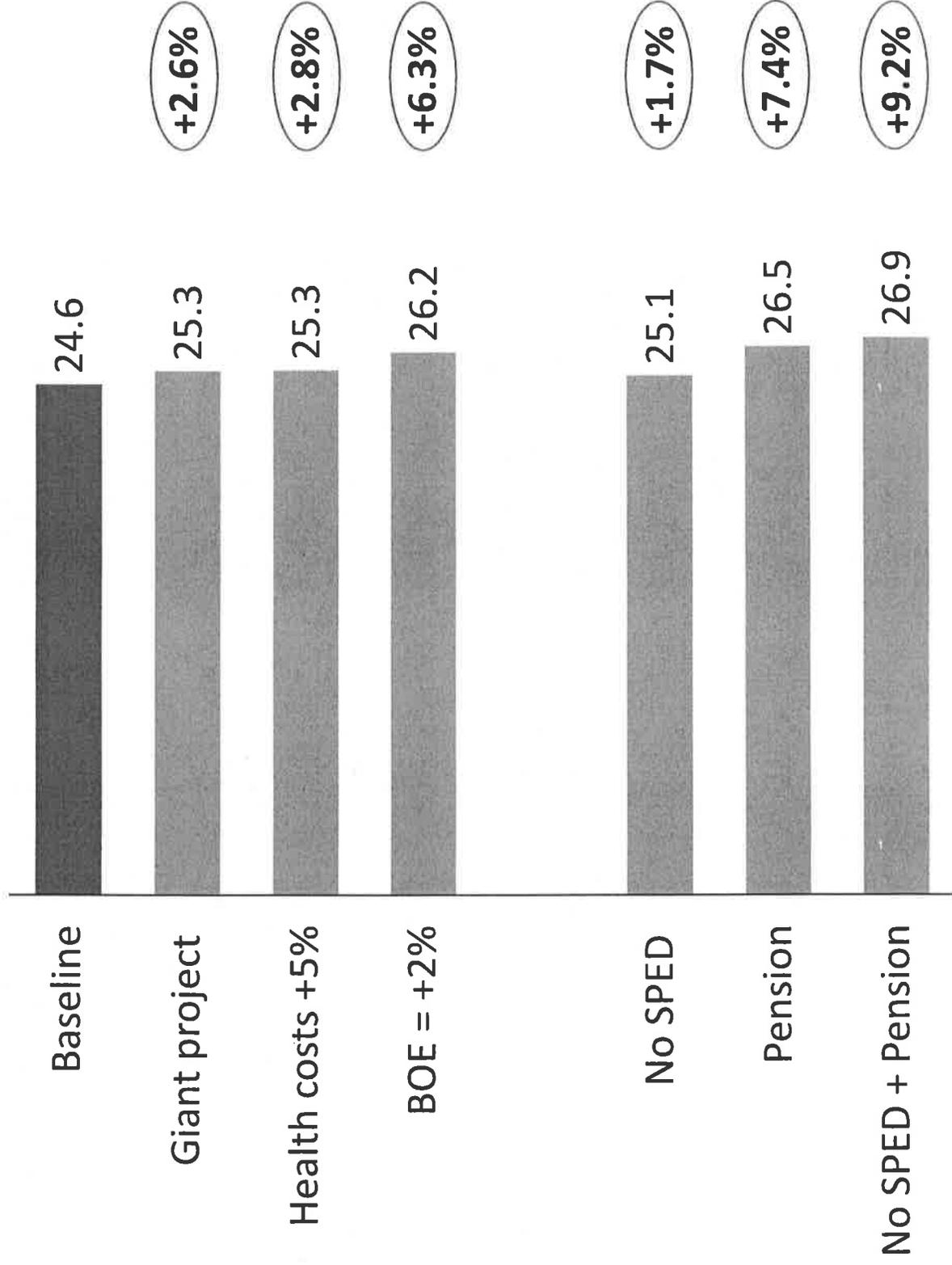


Scenarios – “what if’s”

1. Board of Education +2% versus trend
2. Giant project = \$50 million (debt +\$10 in 2020, +20 in 2021, +20 in 2022)
3. Health insurance inflation +5% versus trend
4. SPED reimbursement drops to **zero** beginning in 2020
5. State imposes teacher pension costs
 - \$4 million in 2019
 - \$12 annually in 2020 and going forward
6. SPED to zero + pension costs imposed

Scenario – tax impact

Taxes on a \$1.5 million home in 2024



Implications

What matters more

- State support changes or cost impositions
- Education cost growth – even small percentages on big numbers have out-sized impact
- Benefits cost growth
- Staff growth

What matters less

- Town departments over-budget
- Higher cost beach passes
- More summer programs
- Etc.

Management philosophy

Loss of state support; imposition of pension costs

- Elections matter
- Contact your State officials

Major items under our control

- Focused attention
- Multi-board engagement
- Thoughtful scrutiny

Minor items, even if the movement is significant

- Avoid micromanagement
- Let the professionals do their jobs
- Focus on the overall guidelines

Topics

- Yesterday: recent financial trends
- Today: current finances
- Tomorrow: five-year forecast
 - Base case
 - Scenarios and implications

• **2019-20 budget guidance**

• **Another thought**

2019-2020 budget guidance

Core operations

- Existing personnel, benefits
- Existing operational requirements
- Initiatives already in place

New projects or investments

- Net headcount growth
- New capital projects
- Significant changes in programs or benefits
- Significant new initiatives

Total spending growth should not exceed 3% in any case

1.5 to 2.5% increase, flat headcount

- New efficiencies?
- Same with less?
- Over this guidance → let's talk

For discussion!

- Thorough presentations and explanations
- “Make the case”

Another thought...

To the Board of Education:

The Town has implemented OpenGov, a “cloud-based solution that transforms how governments budget, measure performance, and engage the public.”



- Improved budgeting and reporting; access to benchmarks
- New transparency, with better ways to understand government

We have gently asked the Board of Education to adopt this product, to no avail

It is now time for the Board to do so

Thank you!



First Selectman's 2018 State of the Town Remarks

Jayme J. Stevenson

12/10/18

Good evening Mr. Moderator, members of the RTM and my fellow elected and appointed colleagues. Would the new RTM members please stand so we can welcome you appropriately! The Board of Selectmen is looking forward to continuing our work together to ensure Darien remains the special place it is to raise a family and operate a business. Although he couldn't be with us tonight, I want to thank Interim Superintendent, Dr. Elliot Landon, for his guidance and leadership while we search for a new Superintendent.

Chairman Sini acknowledged his "retirement" from the Planning & Zoning Commission at the end of his term this November. I want to express to John our deep gratitude for his 5 years of excellent leadership and thoughtful guidance as we continue through this exciting time of historic redevelopment. You should be very proud of what you and your commission have accomplished.

Congratulations to Representative Terrie Wood and State Senator's Bob Duff and Carlo Leone on their re-elections and a warm welcome to our new representative to Darien and Stamford, Matt Blumenthal. My door is always open to collaborate on legislative matters that impact our town.

Last week, I had the honor of meeting with Governor-elect Lamont. I left the meeting feeling hopeful and optimistic about Connecticut's future. Governor Lamont promised to "do no harm" to cities and towns, address long term pension and healthcare liabilities and he will seek operational savings by breaking down silos and barriers to coordinated and more efficient government service delivery. In his interview with the Darien Times, he pledged to hold the line on taxes including reducing business taxes and regulations to help make Connecticut more competitive and to invest in education, infrastructure and workforce development. These are policies I think we all can get behind!

As we know, the devil's in the legislative details so we must stay fully engaged on issues that would impose new unfunded mandates or shift financial burdens from state government onto our local property tax base like pension-sharing and statewide car and/or property mill rates. Bottom line...I remain hopeful that Governor Lamont's business background and understanding of the challenges and opportunities here in Southwestern Connecticut will be a benefit to us in the long run. I recommend reading the study completed in 2018 by the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth. The legislature will likely take up many of the revenue-neutral tax rebalancing suggestions in this report during the coming session.

Tonight is my 8th State of the Town address as your First Selectman. What an honor it is to lead our town alongside Chairmen Zagrodzky, Ochman, Sini, my board and all the volunteers who generously give their time and talents to support our town. As we just heard from my colleagues, our schools are among the best in the state, we are in the midst of significant commercial development revitalization and our fiscal house is in order. Our town administrative staff, police, our 3 all-volunteer fire departments, Post 53, Darien-based paramedics, public works personnel and our teachers deserves our debt of gratitude for their dedication to our community. Town Administrator Kate Buch, Finance Director Jennifer Charneski, Human Resource Director Laurie Dunn and our assistants Linda O'Leary and Karen Dunn deserve special thanks for their administrative leadership and support of our staff throughout the year. We are very fortunate indeed.

I want to thank my fellow Selectmen Susan Marks, Pam Sparkman, Kip Koons and Marc Thorne for their bi-partisan collaboration and contributions to our board's work. That's what makes local government service so rewarding – the ability to put aside political ideology to support the town that we love so much. This year's statewide election brought out the best and worst of political discourse and I don't imagine that will change much as we move through the municipal cycle and onto the 2020 Presidential election. I'm grateful that here in Darien, we govern with open minds and in doing so, not only do we accomplish our goals but we serve as positive role models for our children as they make their way in a tumultuous world and become our next generation of community leaders.

It's my pleasure to share with you a sampling of our 2018 accomplishments and give you a preview of more good things to come in 2019.

It's been a very busy year for our Parks and Recreation Commission and Department. The Parks Master Plan is complete and a building committee has been formed to undertake renovations to Pear Tree Beach. Parks staff cleared the Short Lane property...what a wonderful addition of precious waterfront property to Weed Beach. Park staff also cleared and laid a wood chip path through Hecker Woods connecting Hecker Avenue and Town Hall property. This beautiful passive pocket park was made possible by a generous contribution from the Darien Land Trust and a grant from the State of Connecticut.

Highland Farm is now available for the whole community to enjoy. Installation of the required permanent fence and the temporary parking area begins this week. Funding for permanent parking areas will be included in the Board of Selectmen's budget request. The holiday season is a great time to go and enjoy the site but please remember...dogs must be on leash and flying objects, including drones and model airplanes are not permitted. We are grateful for our Parks Department stepping up to help organize the Town Fireworks, year 2 of the Weed Beach Fest and Tree Lighting at the Darien Sport Shop. I hear time and time again that along with our great schools, easy commute, great shops and restaurants and relatively low taxes, it's our parks, beaches and access to the Long Island Sound that draw families to our town.

Mark your family calendars for our first annual "Old Fashioned Holiday" at Tilley Pond Park on Saturday, December 15th from 4-6pm. This new event is sure to become a Darien holiday tradition just like the Caroling Sing Along hosted by the Friends of Gorham's Pond. This year's caroling event will be held at Pear Tree Beach this Sunday, the 16th at 5:00pm. The Darien Tutor Singers will be on hand to help keep us in tune! These wonderful community traditions help Darien keep that small New England town spirit alive.

In addition to critical roadway, sidewalk, solid waste, sewer, storm and recycling center management and a host of state government mandated reporting requirements, 2018 was a year of infrastructure planning and construction activity for our Public Works Department. Notably, the Town Garage Renovation Project was completed in June, ahead of schedule and \$500,000 under budget. I want to thank our dedicated staff and members of the building committee who oversaw this complicated project. It's not easy to rebuild a building that houses maintenance crews and equipment for 3 town departments with uninterrupted daily activity! The Town Garage project set the new standard by which we will manage all capital building projects going forward, including the renovations of Pear Tree Beach and the redevelopment of Ox Ridge Elementary School.

I also want to thank Board of Education member Jill McCammon for her great work chairing the Darien High School Cafeteria project. I'm sure Jill will think of 2018 as the year of the 'duct bank'. The Board of Selectmen is grateful for her diligence and professionalism throughout this challenging project. The result is very well done and hopefully being enjoyed by our students and staff.

DPW is coordinating with Eversource on the installation of 21,000 feet of natural gas main. That project will be complete in 2019. The Town Garage, Middlesex Middle School and the Darien High School will all be running on natural gas for this heating season and gas main will be in place for future connection to Royle School and the Noroton Heights Fire Department.

Planning work continues for the intersection and signal improvements at Noroton Avenue/West Avenue and Noroton Avenue/ Ledge Road. These projects will be funded over the next several years by a combination of state funding and small local contribution. These improvements enhance road performance in connection redevelopment activities in Noroton Heights.

The Old Kings Highway North Bridge over I-95 was completed and work begins soon to replace the Noroton River Bridge. As I reflect on the significant amount of state infrastructure investment here in Darien between bridge, roadway and Noroton Heights Train Station Platform improvements, I believe our collaborative working relationship with the State of Connecticut is serving us very well.

The Noroton Heights Station Area Study was completed in October. Key recommendations were provided for both on and off-site areas and the Noroton Heights Station itself. Consultant proposals have been received for the design of a new station building, expanded platform canopies and new pedestrian bridge. We will work closely with CTDOT and Metro North to help ensure that these needed improvements move forward. All of these recommended improvements coordinate well with proposed commercial redevelopment in the area.

New sidewalk installations were completed on Tokeneke Road and Ledge Road by Post 53 with more new sidewalks planned for Locust Hill and Edgerton in 2019. In response to ongoing resident and business requests, I will be requesting budget dollars for a Master Sidewalk Plan that will include safe walking routes to all of our schools. I look forward to coordinating this master plan with the Board of Education and school administration.

Pedestrian safety improvements are a high priority for our residents. Coordination between our Local Traffic Authority, DPW and the State of Connecticut has resulted in the installation of permanent dynamic speed signs along the Post Road and the installation of an over-height warning system at the railroad overpass. Three independent studies support enhanced pedestrian safety measures along the Route 1 corridor but getting CTDOT support for Post Road crosswalks is elusive. I'm confident that the Baywater redevelopment project will facilitate these much needed safety improvements.

Darien experienced significant flooding rain events in April, June and September. In response, we are working with one homeowner who is seeking FEMA grant funding to raise their home and are undertaking a campaign to educate homeowners on best-practice watercourse management. Please be mindful that grass clippings, leaves and tree limbs in your pond or stream negatively impact your neighbors both up and down stream. In addition, the town will be dredging the sedimentation basin in front of Town Hall and assisting the Friends of Gorham's Pond with the dredging of the sedimentation basin in the Upper Pond. Gorham's Pond is a town treasure...a plan to begin dredging the pond proper is very much needed.

You heard from Chairman Sini that significant storm water systems will be required as part of the redevelopment of the Noroton Heights commercial area. In addition, in 2019, the town will install a new drainage system in the commuter parking area near The Depot. The combined projects by Federal Realty, the Palmer Family and the Town of Darien are anticipated to significantly improve flooding conditions along Heights Road. DPW will also be undertaking a resiliency project to locate and remedy ground water infiltration and illicit connections to our sanitary sewer system.

Darien is leading the way on sustainability initiatives. Thanks, in large part, to the work of our newly renamed Advisory Committee on Sustainability, with Craig Flaherty at the helm, our recycling center is the envy of SWCT. Our new food scrap composting and robust recycling program is saving taxpayers' money through cost avoidance. Thanks to Carolyn Bayne, Pam Sparkman and fellow volunteers who are working hard to make the food scrap composting program a success! The Board of Selectmen recently approved Darien's participation in the SustainableCT program...a voluntary program to enhance municipal sustainability across all areas of government responsibility.

We have already accomplished many things for which we will receive program credit. By spring of 2019, solar installations at the Darien Police Department, Town Hall and Town Garage will be operational with anticipated savings of nearly \$500,000 over 20 years. We've also added a sustainability goal to future capital building projects. As part of our town efforts, I would like to work on developing incentives to further encourage low impact residential and commercial development. Achieving recognition as a "Sustainable Connecticut Town" will be another positive attribute for folks when they are deciding where to buy a home or start a business.

Our police officers both human and K9, 3 all-volunteer fire departments, Post 53 volunteers and Darien Paramedics continue to provide outstanding public protection services to our town. We are fortunate to have Chief Osborne and Captains Anderson and Lawlor leading an exceptional team of skilled law enforcement professionals. Congratulations to Lieutenant Shredders for graduating from the FBI National Academy and to Officer Amanda Hinkley and K9 'Argo' for successfully completing their Patrol Certification. Did you know that you can follow K9s Argo and Kenny on Instagram? The Department received State of Connecticut Tier II Reaccreditation in May and received a Gold Award for achievement in traffic safety this year. Two new officers joined our patrol ranks and are currently completing their field training. Check out the new crime mapping tool our DPD has added to their website. My public service announcement the evening on behalf of our hard-working police department is: Please lock your cars!

The Juvenile Review Board, now in its second year of operation, is proving to be a very successful solution to helping keep kids who get arrested for minor offenses out of the court system. To date, the JRB has adjudicated 18 cases with no repeat offenders. A very positive outcome so far. Thank you to the officers and civilians who volunteer their time to serve on the JRB.

Many parents have contacted me over the past year to talk about school security. Important collaboration is required between Darien Police, First Selectman, District administration and Board of Education on all school safety issues. The current DHS Student Resource Officer program has proven to be a great benefit to our high school environment. Having a specially trained SRO in the high school each day gives students, staff and parents added comfort. We are dedicated to supporting the placement of an SRO at Middlesex Middle School and I am currently working with the Darien Police Department and the school administration to bring this to fruition in the summer of 2019. I welcome the opportunity to engage our parents and Board of Ed in a conversation about school security at our elementary schools. Each city and town has different policy standards for school security. I've suggested that the Council of Small Towns (COST) add to their legislative agenda this year the creation of a statewide school security best-practice template.

Town government works best when in partnership with non-profit organizations. The Darien Library and our places of worship are critical partners in serving the educational and spiritual needs of our community. Thank you to the Darien Athletic Foundation and DAF Media for supporting our student athletes and to The Depot and The Community Fund for their continued commitment to positive youth development; to the Darien Foundation for their grant to improve TV79's operations; to At Home In Darien for their support for our seniors and to the member organizations of the Human Service Planning Council who collaborate to address critical

needs as they arise. The Cemetery Committee continues their hard work cleaning up our historic cemeteries and just in time for our Bicentennial Celebration in the year 2020. Post 53 will turn 50 in 2020 so we will have much to celebrate.

In 2018, I continued my role as Chairman of Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) and the Southwest Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO), Vice-Chairman of Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA) and Board Member of the Connecticut Council of Municipalities (CCM). I'm currently Chairing a CCM task force convened to offer input on addressing the state's pension issues. Having a leadership seat at the regional and state table gives Darien a voice in policy-making. I'm honored to serve you in these capacities beyond my role as your First Selectman.

WestCOG is doing valuable work. We are finding common ground among our 18-town membership on shared service projects like snow plow route optimization, tree canopy analysis, regional GIS, municipal healthcare cost containment and online service delivery. With a stronger majority in Hartford, we may see a renewed push for proportional voting in our COGs. Our small COG towns stand in strong opposition to this effort.

Chairman Zagrodzky's deep dive into our town finances was excellent. There is much to glean from his analysis. Just a few comments from me on the topic.

As the state economy continues to erode and household incomes are negatively affected by federal tax changes and other job market factors, we have seen some weakness in our local and regional real estate market. In Darien, we have 20% more inventory this year over last and sale prices are down by an average of 20%. On a positive note, the October revaluation shows grand list stability and evidences strength in the entry level sector of our market. Darien continues to be the town of choice here in SWCT. Great schools, easy commute, low mill rate and a commitment to thoughtful redevelopment are working in our favor...even the New York Times had great things to say about Darien in yesterday's paper! Darien has always 'sold' itself without much effort but a challenging economy has encouraged a new collaboration between the First Selectman, local developers, the Board of Realtors and the Chamber of Commerce to create a Darien PR campaign. I have a short video to share with you at the conclusion of my remarks.

Our taxpayers generally support our annual town budgets because they know their tax dollars are well-managed and they can see a positive return on their investment. However, we must be mindful that year over year tax increases are unsustainable. I will continue to challenge us to do better.

Darien, we are holding our own. Our own fiscal stability and economic growth has helped us manage significant reductions in state aid while providing the services our residents demand. If we stay the course with discipline and conservative long-range planning, we will not only survive the state's fiscal crisis...we will thrive and continue to be one of the very best towns in which to raise a family and own a business!

Thank you and Merry Christmas!