

# Local/Region

## Leverett says 'No' to shared chief

### Votes to implement 'weak chief' statute

By DIANE BRONCACCIO  
Recorder Staff

LEVERETT — Residents said "no" to Leverett's sharing a full-time police chief with nearby Shutesbury at Saturday's annual town meeting.

The shared-chief article was defeated in a ballot vote of 60 to 107, after lengthy debate.

Selectboard member James Lyons, a former University of Massachusetts police officer, said now is the time to consider sharing a chief because both towns, with populations of around 2,000, are without police chiefs.

"We would be sharing a chief — not combining departments," he stressed.

"Regionalizing services is something that the town has had a lot of success with over the years. We have all the answers with how it will be implemented," he said.

"What we're asking for is approval of the concept and (our) continuing to negotiate with Shutesbury."

Selectboard Chairwoman Fenna Lee Bonsignore explained that, if the proposal were defeated at either Leverett or Shutesbury's annual town meeting, Leverett would look to hire its own full-time chief.

"I think we should have our own chief," said John Abbott, a 45-year resident. "We've spent millions of dollars building buildings; I think we should spend a few thousand more to have our own chief who knows the area and our town." Saying Leverett is "not exactly reality," Michael Katz, a 32-year resident, described how former chiefs and current office-in-charge, Sgt. Kelson Ting, have been able to handle problems and avert larger ones just by knowing the community.

"Kids broke into the school a couple years back," he said. "It was handled by (former Chief Frederick) Bixby, and they never got into trouble again." "We need a chief with soul. This is our town. These (Leverett and Shutesbury) are not similar towns," Katz said. "Is our police chief going to have a split personality? I really think we need to keep (a chief) here, within our borders." Shutesbury was to have voted on the identical warrant article at its town meeting May 7.

After learning how voters responded, Lyons commented that, "In a sense, it's a relief that this is behind us. But we still have a lot to do. We have police contracts to negotiate and the hiring of a chief. But now we can move forward."

On another highly debated issue, the selectboard's request to implement the state's "weak chief" statute, the townspeople supported the board, by a vote of 152 to 19. The statute means the selectboard has more control over police department policies than it would if the town adopts a "strong chief" statute.

Without a police chief in place, and with the idea that the town could adopt a "strong chief" statute in the future, residents said they wanted the town to have a stronger say in how the department runs.

In contrast to the police chief articles, the rest of the warrant was approved with little dissent.

Voters OK'd a \$4.3 million budget request, which was about a 9.5 percent increase over last year's budget of \$3.9 million.

After approving the budget and breaking for lunch, the main problem at town meeting was regaining the quorum of 65 needed to act on the remaining 25 articles. Adult volunteers who had assisted in serving a fund-raising lunch were called in from the Leverett Elementary School cafeteria, and other residents, summoned by telephone to come back to the town meeting, were greeted with applause as they entered the school auditorium. Moderator Gary Gruber joked that he was going to hold a "closed door" meeting — to keep people inside — until the warrant was finished.

All warrant items were approved. They included money spent from the town's "free cash" reserves for the following:

- ◆ \$23,000 for a new police cruiser.
- ◆ \$30,500 for a new tractor for the elementary school and highway department.
- ◆ \$6,200 for a new furnace and new overhead doors at the North Leverett Fire Station.
- ◆ \$2,000 for a high-speed Internet connection between the elementary school and the town's Public Safety complex.
- ◆ \$67,100 to be transferred into the town's Stabilization Account.
- Also \$50,000 in "free cash" and \$87,000 from stabilization were to be used to offset the tax rate for debt payments from building projects.
- \$82,000 from stabilization and \$28,000 from free cash were to be used to buy a John Deere loader for the Highway Department, to replace its 1986 loader.

Townspeople also approved a new 10-year recycling agreement with the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility, which will give the town \$15.67 per ton of recyclables, plus a share of revenue generated from the sale of recyclables.

They also agreed to spend \$35,440 in Community Preservation Fund revenues to restore the existing, original windows in the Leverett Town Hall.

Voters gave the selectboard authorization to negotiate for lower electricity rates with other municipal groups.

They also approved a citizen's petition to send a resolution to national leaders and the media to develop a plan for the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Iraq. The petition is on several town meeting warrants throughout the area this spring.

### Leverett, Shutesbury turn to business of hiring police chiefs.

James Perkins is now on the Finance Committee.

Joan Godsey was elected to a three-year library trustee term, replacing Sandra Corcoran, and Peter Cinner replaces Barbara Tiner on the School Committee.

Incumbents re-elected to office are:

- ◆ Selectboard, Richard Brazeau.
- ◆ Planning Board (five-year term), Stephen Freedman.
- ◆ Moderator, Gary Gruber.
- ◆ Assistant Moderator (one-year term), Fay Zipkowitz.
- ◆ Library Trustee, Chris Condit.

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## Voice votes carry Leverett election

By DIANE BRONCACCIO  
Recorder Staff

LEVERETT — Without any election contests, there was no need to cast ballot votes, so candidates were voted into office in the traditional way, by voice votes on Saturday's annual town meeting floor.

Frank Edge is a new Board of Health member. He is serving a three-year term, while Charles Dauchy, who has been filling a health board vacancy, was elected to a two-year term of office.

Former selectboard member

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