

[Mohawk Trail proposes \\$26.7M budget for FY25; public hearing set for Wednesday](#)

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BUCKLAND — The Mohawk Trail Regional School District School Committee is bringing a \$26.97 million total operating and capital budget proposal for fiscal year 2025 to a public hearing this week, representing a 5.34% increase over this year’s numbers.

The public hearing will be held Wednesday, Feb. 21, at 6 p.m. at the school. Subsequently, the School Committee will vote on the budget during a meeting at the school on Wednesday, Feb. 28, at 6 p.m.

Increases are being driven by virtually flat Chapter 70 state aid, which is being increased by the minimum rate of \$30 per student. According to the budget memo, the district has not received a “meaningful” increase in state aid in more than 20 years and has received nothing from Student Opportunity Act increases. The district also faces a 29% decrease in state Chapter 71 transportation revenue.

Significant increases in spending to meet the needs of special education students, the memo notes, reflect the district’s “inability to find special education professionals — teachers, paraprofessionals, etc. — to serve students in-house.” It also reflects closing locally based out-of-district programs for the same reason and increased tuition at available programs farther away, plus related busing costs.

“We’ve put a lot of time into this budget, keeping the needs and ability of the communities in mind and balancing that with the needs of our students,” Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance William Lataille said after a Feb. 13 Budget Subcommittee meeting. “We’re confident we can meet the needs of our students while respecting the ability of our towns to pay.”

Lataille pointed out that the proposed budget represents a 2.9% increase in local funding over this year — before factoring in mandated state minimum contributions.

“The state needs to figure out how they’re going help districts with funding,” he said. “The current Chapter 70 formula isn’t working for rural districts. [In particular], our cost for special education out-of-district placements is so high because we don’t have access. Here in the western part of the state, we don’t have that, so we’re transporting our children farther and we have fewer choices.”

Additionally, the budget increase is, in part, due to a 12% increase in busing costs due to the new contract with F.M. Kuzmeskus.

The budget as proposed includes a 1% increase in both salaries/benefits and operations/maintenance. Officials noted that expenses were reduced by \$406,000, mostly by

removing positions that have not been filled and/or reworking existing positions to meet students' needs.

There are no new projects being assessed in the FY25 capital budget, which includes only continued assessments from projects already in the works or completed during the past two years.

Emergency 911 system needs upgrade

One item not in FY25 capital assessments is an upcoming proposal to towns to upgrade the school district's emergency 911 system. The state is requiring the 911 emergency notification system so any teacher in any school can pick up a phone and call, and their location will be pinpointed for EMS responders, Mohawk Trail School Committee Chair Martha Thurber pointed out at the Feb. 13 meeting.

The 911 upgrade cost has been estimated at \$9,548 each for Colrain Central School and Sanderson Academy. For Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School, because it has such old infrastructure, the cost is expected to be \$29,024, and for Mohawk Trail Regional School, the estimated cost is \$21,421.

There is money left over from Mohawk Trail, Buckland-Shelburne and Sanderson renovation projects to cover the 911 upgrade in those schools. The School Committee's policy is that if money is left over from a project, towns can either receive checks for the remaining balances or can allow the School Committee to use the money for future projects, such as the 911 upgrade.

Colrain is different, as school improvements there, already approved in the current capital budget, are not yet done, including repointing.

In any case, the upgrade and how it will be paid for must be approved by district member towns.

Assessments to towns

Hawley's assessment is the largest jump at 19.09%. On the other end of the spectrum, Heath's assessment is 0.02% less than this year's.

"Those are numbers that are going to be hard to sell," School Committee member Scott Purinton, who represents Hawley, said at the Feb. 13 meeting.

Hawley's FY25 assessment is \$246,459, a \$39,509 increase. Hawley's assessment has gone up so much because the state changed its mandated minimum contribution for the town, which is based on real estate and income.

"If somebody sells a large piece of property or wins the lottery, the state contribution goes up," Lataille explained. "For Hawley, the required contribution went up 31% from the state.

"In the case of Heath," he continued, "the state minimum contribution went down, and the above-minimum contribution for the district also went down, so the town's total operating and capital assessment decreased by \$197."

The state-mandated minimum contribution for the district went up 5.09% while the local assessment is up by 5.34%. The total assessment to member towns is nearly \$14.36 million, a \$727,689 increase.

The remaining town assessments are as follows:

- Ashfield's assessment is nearly \$2.7 million, a \$185,983 or 7.41% increase.
- Buckland's assessment is nearly \$3.01 million, a \$125,216 or 4.34% increase.
- Charlemont's assessment is \$844,462, a \$44,627 or 5.58% increase.
- Colrain's assessment is nearly \$2.5 million, a \$142,099 or 6.03% increase.
- Plainfield's assessment is nearly \$1.09 million, a \$44,558 or 4.28% increase.
- Shelburne's assessment is nearly \$2.96 million, a \$145,895 or 5.19% increase.

Source: <https://www.recorder.com/Mohawk-Trail-proposes-26-7M-budget-for-FY25-public-hearing-set-for-Wednesday-54102445>