

**Marblehead Beacon Questions to Ballot Committees**  
**For June 20, 2023 Election**

**Questions for Vote Yes for Marblehead**

**Marblehead Beacon:** Should I credit responses to one of you or to someone else or the Committee in general? (It's preferable to have a named person but I will go with whatever is your preference.)

**Marblehead Beacon:** What is the general composition of your committee? (i.e. elementary school parents, elderly, large group, small, organized, unofficial, etc.)? You've raised \$2,125 of a \$2,250 goal on Act Blue. Is this sufficient for your stated goals of yard signs, door hangers, and GOTV efforts?

**Marblehead Beacon:** The ballot question this year wrapped town-related budgetary matters with school-related ones. Do you think this is going to be beneficial in terms of being more likely to succeed on election day than if the two had been bifurcated? Why?

**Marblehead Beacon:** As noted above, two initiatives were rolled into one, for better or worse. Does your committee support the town side of the increase in the same way as it supports the school side (or vice versa)? In other words, do you believe that all the funding in the ballot question is of equal importance? Why?

**Marblehead Beacon:** Proponents on the Select Board and in the community have framed Question 1 as a Bandaid and the minimum necessary to keep things level funded. If it passes, taxes will increase more than nominally. Next year is a collective bargaining year. Will those anticipated raises be paid for with another override? If not, how do you expect they will be funded?

**Marblehead Beacon:** Do you believe the taxpayers of Marblehead can afford to pay for this permanent override, particularly during such a precarious time in the

economy, and particularly those on fixed incomes or those facing higher food and cost-of-living costs?

**Marblehead Beacon:** Finally, as many in the community are aware, tens of millions of dollars have been managed by the Town of Marblehead in ways that have led to suboptimal results for the taxpayers. For instance, multiple overrides took place and bonds were issued in order to cover a new transfer station some years ago. The majority of those many millions of dollars has been spent in a non-transparent way, yet to date we have no new transfer station building, and are likely to be forced to turn away significant revenue due to our lack of a sorting floor. This might require another request for revenue via an override. With that as a backdrop, how would you explain to voters that this Question 1 override will be money well spent when they're still paying taxes for something that never materialized.

### **Vote Yes for Marblehead's Statement**

The "Vote Yes for Marblehead" Committee was recently established by a small group of residents to advocate for the passage of Question 1 on the June 20th ballot. Question 1 will restore the "Reduced Services" cuts imposed on many town departments' budgets to "Level Funding." The "Level Funded" budget will provide funding for the same services and employees as the current fiscal year and does not fund new or expanded programs for any town departments.

We are a small committee made up of people from the community and we're all pitching in, wearing whatever hats fit best. Maggie O'Reilly and Vinny O'Reilly are named on the forms as chair and treasurer, respectively, because we had to designate people for those roles. Other members of the committee include David Wedel, Sarah Magazine Yount, and Jaime Siegrist. "While we came together as parents and taxpayers because of our concerns about the impact a "Reduced Services" budget will have on our schools, we fully support the override which will provide Level Funding for education, public safety, and other critical Town departments and services. We have been heartened to see the support for our advocacy efforts by members of the community from all walks of life.

“At the end of the day, while our town has many complicated issues to confront, we believe our children and citizens are best served by a budget that maintains critical education and public safety services. It is our expectation that if the override is successful, the school department will reinstate the positions and programs identified on the projected cut list, that the public safety positions identified will be maintained, and other town positions and services restored.”

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### ***Marblehead Beacon Questions and Six Percent is Too Much Answers***

***Marblehead Beacon:*** Should I credit responses to the committee, to you personally, or to someone else on the committee? (It's preferable to have a named person but I will go with whatever is your preference.)

***Six Percent is Too Much:*** The Six Percent is Too Much Committee is truly grassroots-led. While I [Sue McInnis] am the Chairwoman and Treasurer of the Committee for reporting purposes, our distributed leadership is a very diverse group of like-minded individuals from all walks of life.

***Marblehead Beacon:*** What is the general composition of your committee? (i.e. elementary school parents, elderly, large group, small, organized, unofficial, etc.)? How are you planning to raise money and what is your dollar amount goal? What will you be doing to get your message out?

***Six Percent is Too Much:*** Our group spans almost 4 generations - from thirty-somethings with young children not even in school, to long-retired citizens. We have people with children in every school in Marblehead, including Tower and Charter. We have native and long-time Marbleheaders, as well as newcomers. All of us have come together to try to stop the mismanagement that has plagued our town.

**Marblehead Beacon:** The ballot question this year wrapped in town-related budgetary matters with school-related ones. Do you think this will make it more or less likely to succeed on election day than if the two had been bifurcated? Why?

**Six Percent is Too Much:** We believe that both the school and town leadership have exhibited well-known and terrible fiscal mismanagement. Examples include the lost interest revenue from National Grand Bank and the failure to manage school spending to declining enrollments. We believe that separate or alone, this override would have defied any notion of fiscal responsibility. It would have failed either way.

**Marblehead Beacon:** As noted above, two initiatives were rolled into one, for better or worse. Does your committee oppose the town side of the increase in the same way as it opposes the school side (or vice versa)? In other words, do you believe that all the funding in the ballot question should be shut down or would you have preferred to support a piece of it?

**Six Percent is Too Much:** We believe this was a deliberate strategy since the school override for basically the same amount overwhelmingly failed last year. Both the school and the town side have indicated that this override is necessary to avoid “cuts” to important positions, yet many of these positions are currently vacant. They have also both talked about the need for this override to fix a one-year problem while they formulate a “long-term plan,” yet they have chosen to make this a “forever” general override. Not only will this override cost taxpayers \$2.5 million this year and every year going forward, but because of automatic yearly increases of 2.5 percent, the cost will actually be larger and larger with each year that goes by. We believe that prudent management requires a strategic plan PRIOR to proposing any tax increases, and that even basic strategic fiscal management might have made this tax increase unnecessary. In addition, the phrasing of the ballot question is itself misleading, making it appear that this is a one year override when it is in fact a FOREVER tax increase.

**Marblehead Beacon:** The name of your committee suggests that the rationale for your opposition to Question 1 is that the amount of taxes levied on taxpayers would be too much. Could you explain your six percent calculation and if this is the only rationale? Do you support the measures but not the amount, or find the whole thing objectionable? Why?

**Six Percent is Too Much:** Until we have better management it is impossible to accurately assess how much more, if any, the town actually needs. This override states as its justification to maintain the *status quo*. This is simply unacceptable.

Under Proposition 2½, Marblehead is able to raise the taxable levy ceiling (the total tax amount raised) by 2½ percent annually plus new growth. (It should be noted that many cities and towns do not always raise taxes by 2½ percent automatically. These well managed entities only tax for what they need - not for how much they can legally raise.) As reported by the Finance Committee Chair at Town Meeting, new growth this year was ½ percent. This means that Marblehead will be raising approximately 3% in new real estate taxes even if Question 1 does not pass. Question 1, the \$2.5 million tax increase, adds another 3.1%, bringing the total real estate tax increase to more than 6%.

Most of the town's budget is spent on the schools. In fact, the schools absorb as much as 75% of the total budget when benefits are included. Yet the schools have seen enrollment drop by 500 students in recent years, from 3100 to 2600, and have made little to no staffing changes. In fact, according to the Massachusetts Department of Education, Marblehead is one of the most overstaffed school districts in the state.

At any given time, Marblehead has between \$15 million and \$25 million cash in the bank, yet our town leaders failed to place this money in a competitive interest bearing account like most of the other municipalities in Massachusetts. At a time when any town could earn 4% to 5% or more annually, risk free, Marblehead's town funds were earning less than 2% . Prudent fiscal management would have required little effort and could have significantly reduced the cost of this proposed override.

**Marblehead Beacon:** Proponents on the Select Board and in the community have framed Question 1 as a Bandaid and the minimum necessary to keep things level funded. If it passes, taxes will increase more than nominally. Next

year is a collective bargaining year for municipal employees. How do you think these costs will be funded, and do you expect the Select Board and "Yes" folks in the community will come back with more override requests?

***Six Percent is Too Much:*** For most of the last year, the Town Administrator, Superintendent, Select Board, and School Committee have been talking about the need for an override in 2024 to pay for raises. This year, without even taking the time to put a strategic plan in place, they are asking taxpayers to fund an additional \$2.5 million permanent tax increase simply to afford what they are calling a "level funded" budget. Yet taxes will automatically go up this year by 3% even without the override, and most of the positions they claim are "at risk" are currently vacant. All of this indicates extremely poor planning and decision making by our current elected officials.

***Marblehead Beacon:*** The proponents of Question 1 suggest that there is no fat in the existing budget, that the initiative is vital, and that without it there will be cuts that harm our schools and our town in general, and that for these reasons we can ill afford not to pass it. What is your answer to this sentiment?

***Six Percent is Too Much:*** On the school side, the Superintendent has suggested cutting \$16,000 for MHS freshman coach stipends next year if the override doesn't pass. Yet every 9th grade athlete pays \$500/year in sports participation fees. With 200 students in the class, more than half of whom play sports, the elimination of this extracurricular will in fact cost the schools more than \$50,000 in lost fees. Suggesting a \$16,000 cut that will cost \$50,000 is beyond absurd, and simply indicates that the Superintendent is targeting popular programs to scare citizens into supporting the override. Even worse is the fact that the so-called "base" budget proposed by the Superintendent, which will be funded even if the override fails, includes almost \$12,500 in non-student facing DEI training. The schools also recently spent over \$1,000/hour on an outside consultant/trainer for similar DEI training.

If the override fails, we believe it is highly unlikely that the threatened school-side cuts to popular and important student-facing programs will actually be

implemented. There are many other areas that can and should be cut first, which will have minimal impact on serving student needs.

**Marblehead Beacon:** As many in the community are aware, tens of millions of dollars have been managed by the Town of Marblehead in ways that have led to suboptimal results for the taxpayers. For instance, multiple overrides took place and bonds were issued in order to cover a new transfer station some years ago. The majority of those many millions of dollars has been spent in a non-transparent way, yet to date we have no new transfer station building, and are likely to be forced to turn away significant revenue due to our lack of a sorting floor. This might require another request for revenue via an override. With that as a backdrop, do you believe that there is no way around another override for the transfer station issues?

**Six Percent is Too Much:** Sadly, few Marblehead departments have long term strategic plans for anything. While we as a ballot committee are focused primarily on Question 1, this year's ballot also includes a large number of "reform" candidates, all of whom have pledged to stop the opaque and "business as usual" approach that has put Marblehead in this mess. Keep in mind that the town is currently sitting on millions of unspent dollars in ARPA money (Covid relief) that could be used, and would be appropriate to use, to fix the transfer station. But in addition to defeating Question 1, it will be essential for there to be an electoral change in leadership. There are some great candidates and some truly frightening "do more of the same" candidates on the ballot this year (especially on the Select Board, School Committee, and Board of Health). We are confident that Question 1 will be defeated, and we hope that those voting No on Question 1 will take the time to learn who the "more of the same" candidates are and vote them out as well.