

## **Talking Points – \$2.7M Free Cash Allocation for Tri-County Assessment**

### **1. This is a Capital Cost, and We Selected the Most Responsible Funding Path**

- The Tri-County building project is a capital obligation, not an operating cost.
- The Town had two choices:
  - (1) pursue a debt exclusion, or
  - (2) temporarily stabilize the impact through Free Cash.
- We elected not to seek a debt exclusion at this time because the Town is already asking taxpayers to support the new \$287M North Attleborough High School.
- We are trying to avoid placing two significant capital questions before residents simultaneously.

### **2. Protecting Departments From a 2.5% Across-the-Board Budget Reduction**

- Moving the entire Tri-County assessment into the FY26 operating budget immediately would require a 2.5% cut to every department.
- This would jeopardize:
  - Public safety staffing
  - DPW operations
  - School support
  - Senior services
  - Day-to-day municipal operations
- These reductions would come on top of inflationary pressures and the upcoming year of town-wide collective bargaining.
- Using Free Cash avoids destabilizing core services in the next fiscal year.

### **3. New Growth Is Coming – but We Need a Time to Absorb This Cost**

- New growth is forecast to come online in the next 12–24 months:
  - Kelley Blvd mixed-use development
  - Draper Ave redevelopment
  - Other commercial and residential projects already in permitting or construction
- This new growth will offset the recurring impact of Tri-County’s assessment—just not immediately.
- The Free Cash strategy buys us one fiscal year to let this new revenue materialize and be incorporated into future budgets.

### **4. This Fiscal Year Is a “Riding Year”**

- We are entering a year where every union contract—fire, police, AFSCME, dispatch, laborers, non-union—is up for negotiation.
- Large operating shifts during a universal bargaining year are both unpredictable and risky.
- Using Free Cash preserves flexibility while we negotiate fair, sustainable agreements.

## **5. A Future Debt Exclusion Is Still an Option—But Not the Right Option Today**

- A debt exclusion for Tri-County could be placed on a ballot as early as April 2026.
- That option remains open and may be revisited when:
  - New growth revenues are clearer,
  - We understand the full impact of the high school debt exclusion, and
  - We have completed the upcoming year of labor negotiations.
- If the Town ultimately decides to pursue a combined debt exclusion for Tri-County + the new Fire Headquarters, that is a strategic conversation for a future budget cycle—not today.

## **6. The Vocational Lottery System Changes the Equity Equation**

- The newly implemented vocational school lottery system has changed the admissions landscape statewide.
- North Attleborough taxpayers currently shoulder nearly 25% of the Tri-County assessment.
- With a lottery system, enrollment is no longer proportionate to community population—yet the assessment still is.
- It is time for the Town to consider a policy limiting annual Tri-County student placements to be consistent with our share of the district population and our financial share.
- This protects North Attleborough taxpayers and ensures fairness across all communities in the Tri-County district.

## **7. The Proposed Approach Is Responsible, Strategic, and Transparent**

- This plan:
  - Protects municipal services
  - Prevents a forced 2.5% departmental cut
  - Allows new growth to come online
  - Preserves taxpayer capacity during a major high school construction effort
  - Leaves open future debt exclusion options
  - Acknowledges changing vocational school enrollment dynamics

This is a measured, fiscally conservative, and strategic approach that positions North Attleborough effectively for FY26 and beyond.