

Adopt Local Tax Cap for Brookline

By Eric Pauer

This warrant article asks whether the town of Brookline should adopt the provisions of **RSA 32:5-b**, creating a **local tax cap** that limits how much the town's recommended budget can increase the amount raised by local taxes each year. The cap would be based on:

- **Last year's actual local taxes raised,**
- Adjusted for **inflation (CPI-U, Boston–Cambridge–Newton MA-NH)**, and
- Adjusted for **population change**.

This approach ensures that tax increases remain reasonable, predictable, and tied to real-world economic conditions. We have adopted an 8% local tax cap for our Brookline School District, so it makes sense to also do the same for the town. There is a warrant article to change the Brookline School District local tax cap to also use this inflation and population-based method.

Below are the key advantages for voters and taxpayers.

1. Protects Residents from Sudden Tax Increases

A tax cap prevents large, unexpected jumps in the amount raised by local taxes. Instead of fluctuating year to year, increases are limited to:

- Inflation
- Population growth

This keeps tax bills more stable and predictable for families, seniors, and homeowners.

2. Ensures Town Spending Grows at a Responsible Pace

The cap ties growth in the tax burden to measurable factors—not to wish-lists or last-minute additions. This encourages:

- Careful planning
- Prioritizing essential services
- Avoiding unnecessary spending

It helps the town live within its means.

3. Increases Transparency and Accountability

The tax cap formula is simple and public. Voters can easily see:

- How the cap is calculated
- Whether the proposed budget fits within it
- Why taxes are increasing

This clarity strengthens trust in the budgeting process and keeps officials accountable.

4. Still Allows Flexibility When Truly Needed

RSA 32:5-b includes a built-in safety valve. If the Selectboard believes the town must exceed the cap—for example, for a major project or emergency—they may propose doing so.

But **voters must approve it.**

This ensures:

- The cap is not a rigid ceiling
- Essential needs can still be funded
- Taxpayers remain in control of major increases

5. Aligns Taxes With Brookline's Growth

The cap adjusts for **population changes**, meaning:

- If Brookline grows, the tax base can grow proportionally
- If population stabilizes, tax growth stabilizes too

This keeps the tax burden aligned with the size and needs of the community.

6. Helps Long-Term Financial Planning

A predictable local tax cap helps:

- Homeowners plan their budgets
- Seniors on fixed incomes stay in their homes
- Families anticipate future tax bills
- The town plan responsibly for capital needs

Stability benefits everyone.

In Summary

Adopting a local tax cap under RSA 32:5-b gives Brookline a practical, balanced tool to keep taxes predictable and aligned with inflation and population growth. It protects residents from sudden increases, encourages responsible budgeting, and ensures that any major tax hike must be clearly justified and approved by voters. This article does **not** cut services automatically—it simply sets a reasonable limit on how fast the tax burden can grow.