

Adopt Town Budget Cap for Brookline

By Eric Pauer

Why Adopt a Town Budget Cap?

This warrant article asks whether the town should adopt the provisions of **RSA 32:5-g**, establishing a **budget cap** that limits how large a recommended town budget can be each year. The cap would be set at: **\$1,493 per resident × current town population, plus an annual inflation adjustment using the CPI-U (Boston–Cambridge–Newton MA-NH)**. Adoption requires a **3/5 majority vote**.

Current Brookline population per NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs is 5,881.

[https://www.nheconomy.com/office-of-planning-and-development/what-we-do/state-data-center-\(census-data\)/population-estimates](https://www.nheconomy.com/office-of-planning-and-development/what-we-do/state-data-center-(census-data)/population-estimates)

Estimated town budget cap would be \$1,493/resident x 5,881 residents = \$8,780,333

2025 total approved appropriations spending was \$8,485,277

Below are the key advantages for voters and taxpayers.

1. Predictable, Stable Budget Growth

A budget cap creates a clear, consistent formula for how much the town budget can grow each year. Instead of unpredictable increases, the town's spending is tied to:

- **Population growth**
- **Inflation (CPI-U) (Boston–Cambridge–Newton MA-NH)**

This ensures the budget grows at a pace residents can plan for.

2. Protects Taxpayers from Sudden or Excessive Increases

Without a cap, budgets can spike dramatically from one year to the next. A cap:

- Prevents large, unexpected jumps in spending
- Helps keep property taxes more stable
- Ensures increases are tied to real-world economic factors

This gives taxpayers more financial certainty.

3. Encourages Long-Term Planning and Fiscal Discipline

A cap requires town officials to:

- Prioritize essential services
- Plan ahead for major purchases
- Avoid last-minute or unnecessary spending

It promotes responsible budgeting and discourages “wish-list” items that don't fit within the town's means.

4. Still Allows Flexibility for Emergencies or Major Needs

RSA 32:5-g includes built-in flexibility. If the Selectboard believes the town needs to exceed the cap for a specific reason, they may propose doing so—but **voters must approve it**.

This ensures:

- The cap is not a rigid ceiling
- Voters remain in control of major spending decisions
- Essential or emergency needs can still be funded

5. Aligns Spending With Population and Community Size

The formula uses **per-resident spending**, which means:

- As the town grows, the budget can grow proportionally
- As population stabilizes, spending does too

This keeps the budget aligned with the actual size and needs of the community.

6. Transparent and Easy for Voters to Understand

The cap is based on a simple, public formula:

- A fixed dollar amount per resident adjusted annual for inflation

This makes it easy for voters to see:

- How the cap is calculated
- Whether the proposed budget fits within it
- Why the budget is increasing or decreasing

Transparency builds trust in the budgeting process.

7. Keeps the Selectboard Accountable

By limiting the recommended budget, the cap ensures that:

- Officials must justify spending decisions
- Budget increases must be reasonable and defensible
- Voters have a clear benchmark to evaluate proposals

It strengthens oversight and encourages thoughtful budgeting.

In Summary

Adopting a budget cap under RSA 32:5-g gives voters a powerful tool to keep town spending predictable, transparent, and aligned with the community's ability to pay. It stabilizes taxes, encourages responsible planning, and ensures that any major increase must be clearly justified and approved by voters.

This article does **not** cut services automatically—it simply sets a reasonable, population- and inflation-based limit on how fast the budget can grow.