

Five-Part Plan to Stabilize our Budget

Draft as of August 23, 2023 with live updates

As Mayor, stabilizing the city's budget will be my number one priority. Our budget needs to be open, accessible, and engaging, so community members can see where our investment is going throughout the year. While I believe the first step is to get extreme clarity around the school department's spending, I will also start aggressively pursuing other ways to support the city's budget.

I will be a hands-on mayor, leading weekly, internal budget meetings focused on creating budget controls in the school department and across the city that will flag increases in real time to eliminate surprises, lead an ongoing community dialogue about the city's fiscal realities, and implement a five part plan to get us back on track.

Part 1: Aggressively Increase State and Federal Funds

There are currently a number of state and federal funding opportunities that we need to proactively pursue. In recent years, Melrose has benefited from several state grant programs including MassWorks (which will help redevelop the Caruso's property), Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grants to address the impacts of climate change, and Complete Streets, which provides planning, design, and construction funds for local roadways.

We need to ensure that Melrose isn't leaving any state funding on the table.

Two federal laws will be providing major investments in the near future, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. I want to make sure that Melrose is prepared to compete for these funds, which will be used to improve our infrastructure, such as dated water and sewer pipes, and making systems more energy efficient.

Part 2: Find Ways to Save Money and Create Efficiencies

We need to evaluate our city services to find ways to reduce costs without sacrificing quality. Invest in in-house services or find ways to share services with neighboring communities.

- For example, one of the major budget increases for the Melrose Public Schools, is the cost of transportation for students who require special education services outside what our district is able to currently provide. In these cases, students are placed in an out-of-district special education school and Melrose is responsible for paying the transportation costs. With limited transportation service providers, these costs have dramatically increased. We need to explore options that are safe, reliable, and cost effective, which might mean purchasing city vehicles, rather than paying for high-priced contracts. We should also be exploring the possibility of bringing back critical

specialized services for students within the district, keeping students in the Melrose Public School setting with their siblings and neighbors.

Part 3: New Growth Development

Real Estate Development is an opportunity for Melrose to provide more resources for our residents and also increase our tax base. New housing development projects should work for everyone. Melrose is an attractive community for builders and I want to work with developers to invest in Melrose through their structures as well as through a community benefit that all Melrosians can enjoy.

- We must first create a Shared Vision for areas with development opportunities that weave responsibly into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhoods, provide first-floor retail and publicly-accessible commercial space, allow for us to create affordable housing, and have a public benefit.
- The engagement of residents in development projects builds trust between the local government and the community, creating a more transparent, inclusive decision-making process and makes it a better decision-making process. Ultimately, public participation in new developments can lead to more sustainable and well-designed projects that meet the needs and aspirations of the residents while preserving the unique character of our city.

Part 4: Scale our existing revenue-generating business models

The City of Melrose has several accounts that generate revenue for the community that can be scaled not only to increase revenue, but also to support our young families and small businesses.

- City-owned Building Plan:

We have beautiful city-owned buildings in Melrose. In order to keep rental costs low for Melrose residents and organizations, maximizing revenue from outside events will be instrumental. As Mayor, I want to work with DPW, building staff, Trustees, and Friends organizations to build a profitable business plan that serves all of our city-owned buildings to the levels they need for maintenance and improvements, while pushing costs lower for our own community organizations to benefit from our spaces.

- Support for our families:

The profit from our tuition-based after school program is used to support the annual budget for the Melrose Public Schools. Currently this program, known as Education Stations, has a lengthy waiting list, presenting both a challenge to families who need after school care, as well as missing an opportunity to increase revenue. Let's meet the demand of our families who rely on before and after-school Education Stations and Summer Camp, and strengthen this business model and our families at the same time.

Part 5: Invest in Ourselves

While we are exploring all other opportunities for funding, I will also lead community conversations about potential planning for ways in which the community can choose to invest in the City of Melrose. Whether it is seeking funding for infrastructure needs or for our operating budget, I will lead these community discussions, solicit community input, and clearly articulate my reasoning before bringing any request for additional investment before the voters.

- Public Safety Buildings:
 - Our first responders deserve safe buildings and a workplace that respects the value they give our community. The time to act is now. Melrose Police and Fire Department staff need our support for a **full investment** in our public safety buildings.
 - The financial ask for this project is a big one, but we must put the economics in clear and honest, real-terms as it compares to other debts we will be paying off.
- Community Preservation Act:
 - The additional revenue from the CPA can be used to preserve “public space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities.”
 - Additionally, participating communities are able to leverage matching funds for projects from the CPA Trust Fund managed by the Department of Revenue.
 - For more on the Community Preservation Act, visit: www.communitypreservation.org
- Proposition 2 ½ Override:
 - Only after all of these other funding possibilities are explored and trust in local government is restored can we go to the residents of Melrose to ask for an additional investment by increasing our property taxes.

Read more at samformelrose.com.