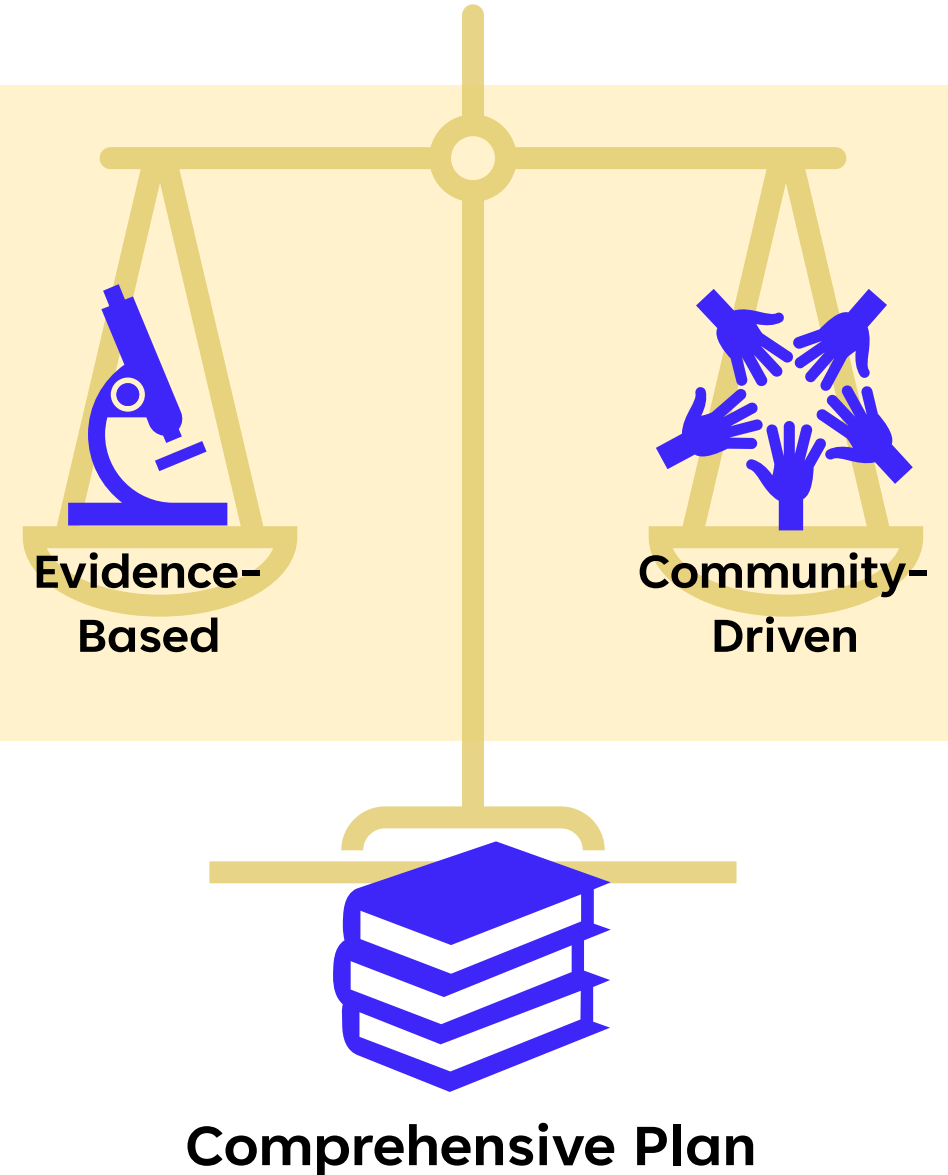
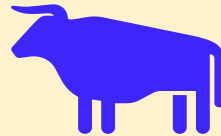


The Leverett Comprehensive Plan Logic Model

*A municipal cartoon
For Comprehensive Plan
Steering Group orientation.*



By Tim Shores
Planning Board member
Long Plain Rd
March 2023

This logic model describes factors of Town administration that have motivated Leverett to develop a Comprehensive Plan.



**Comprehensive
Plan**

The Leverett Comprehensive Plan will serve two fundamental goals:

- 1) Document and analyze existing conditions in terms of the factors of Town administration today.
- 2) Recommend specific actions the Town can take to improve conditions tomorrow.

This model is meant to help the Comprehensive Plan Steering Group acquire a common vocabulary of the factors they need to think about and discuss in the process of developing the Comprehensive Plan.

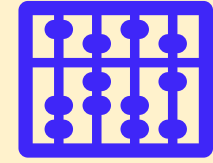
The model begins with Expenses.

Factors that push Expenses up or down:

- Services
- Administration
- Amenities
- Equity
- Legal compliance
- Debt



Services



Administration



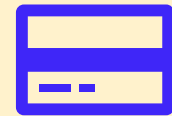
Amenities



Equity



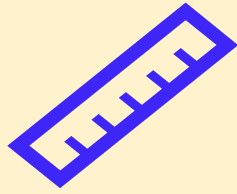
Legal
Compliance



Municipal
Debt



**Property
Tax Rate**



**Property
Value
Assessment**



Tax Base



PILOT



**State
Funding**



**Municipal
Debt**



Revenue



We collect Revenue to pay Expenses.

Factors that push Revenue up or down:

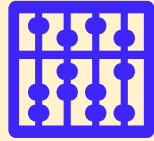
- Property Tax Rate
- Assessed Property Value
- Tax Base (the number and type of taxable properties)
- PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes)
- State Funding
- Debt



Services



Amenities



Administration



Equity



Legal
Compliance



Municipal
Debt



Livability

The factors of Expense and Revenue affect Town Livability and Affordability.



Property
Tax Rate



Tax Base



Property
Value
Assessment



PILOT



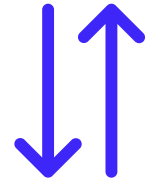
State
Funding



Municipal
Debt



Affordability



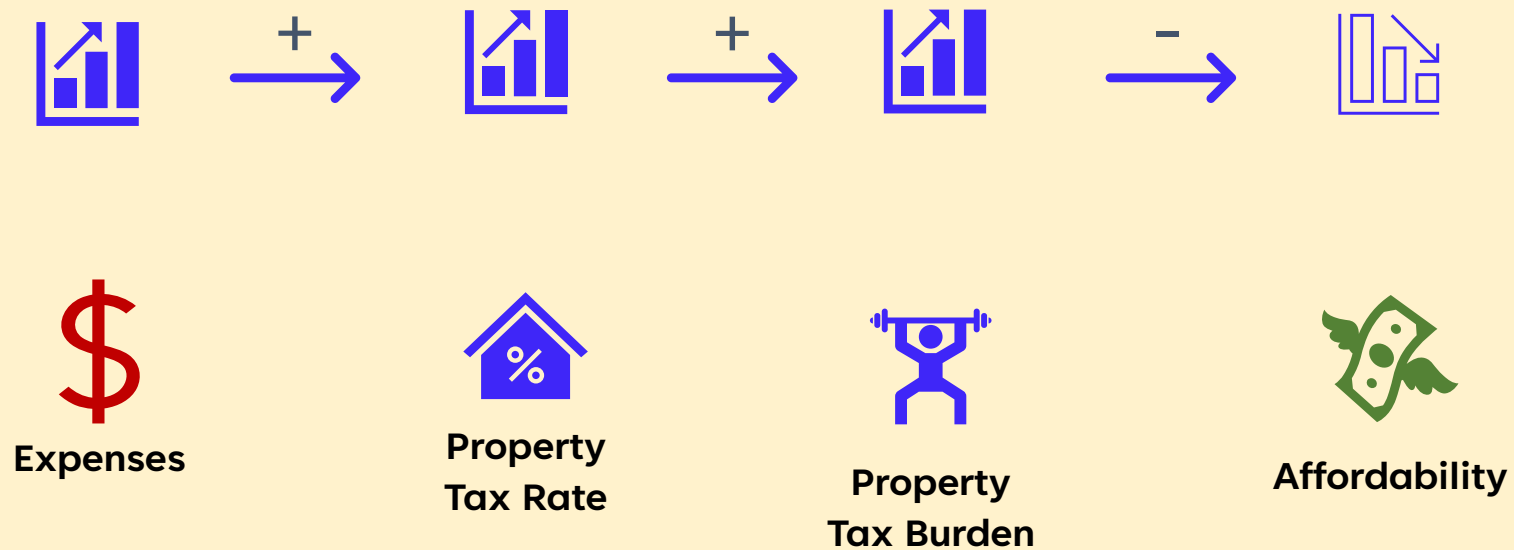
When Expenses go up, the Town's primary budgeting tool is to increase the property tax levy (the entire amount raised by the community as a whole) by increasing the Property Tax Rate.



The MA Proposition 2 ½ levy limit means annual Tax Rate increase can't exceed 2.5% of the previous year's levy.

(The levy limit does not include any amount attributable to taxes from new real property.)

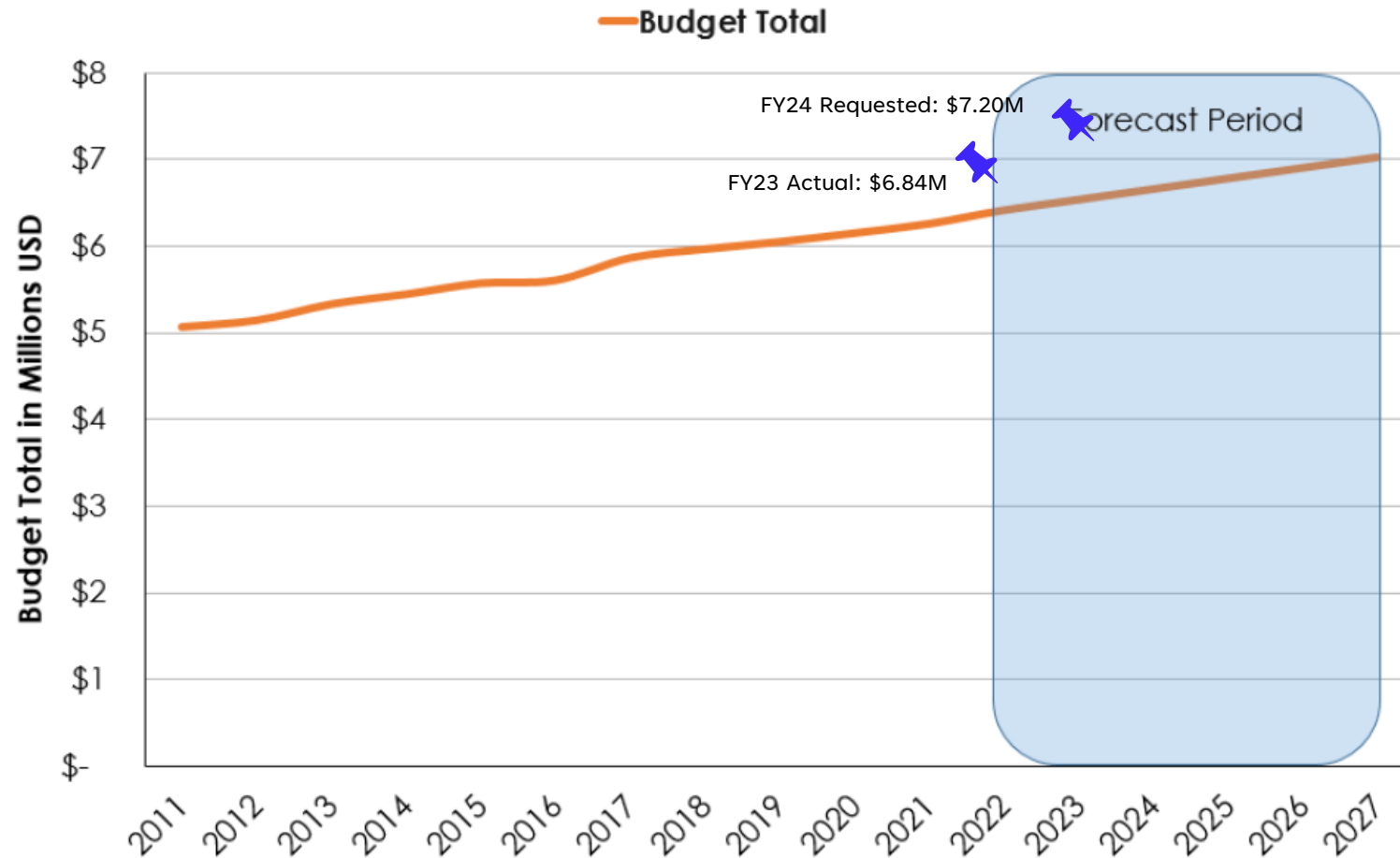
A higher Tax Rate increases the Tax Burden: How many dollars each household pays.



Increased Tax Burden pushes down Affordability.

Given these factors, will a commitment to reduce the Tax Rate help the Town reduce Tax Burden and increase Affordability?

Data show Town Expenses go up at a predictable rate every year. *



Budget total in millions during the period 2011 - 2021, forecasting until 2027.

Annual Slope: \$122,435

From the Leverett Revenue Committee FY21 Year-end Report

Historical data in Phase 1
Existing Conditions Budgets
folder:

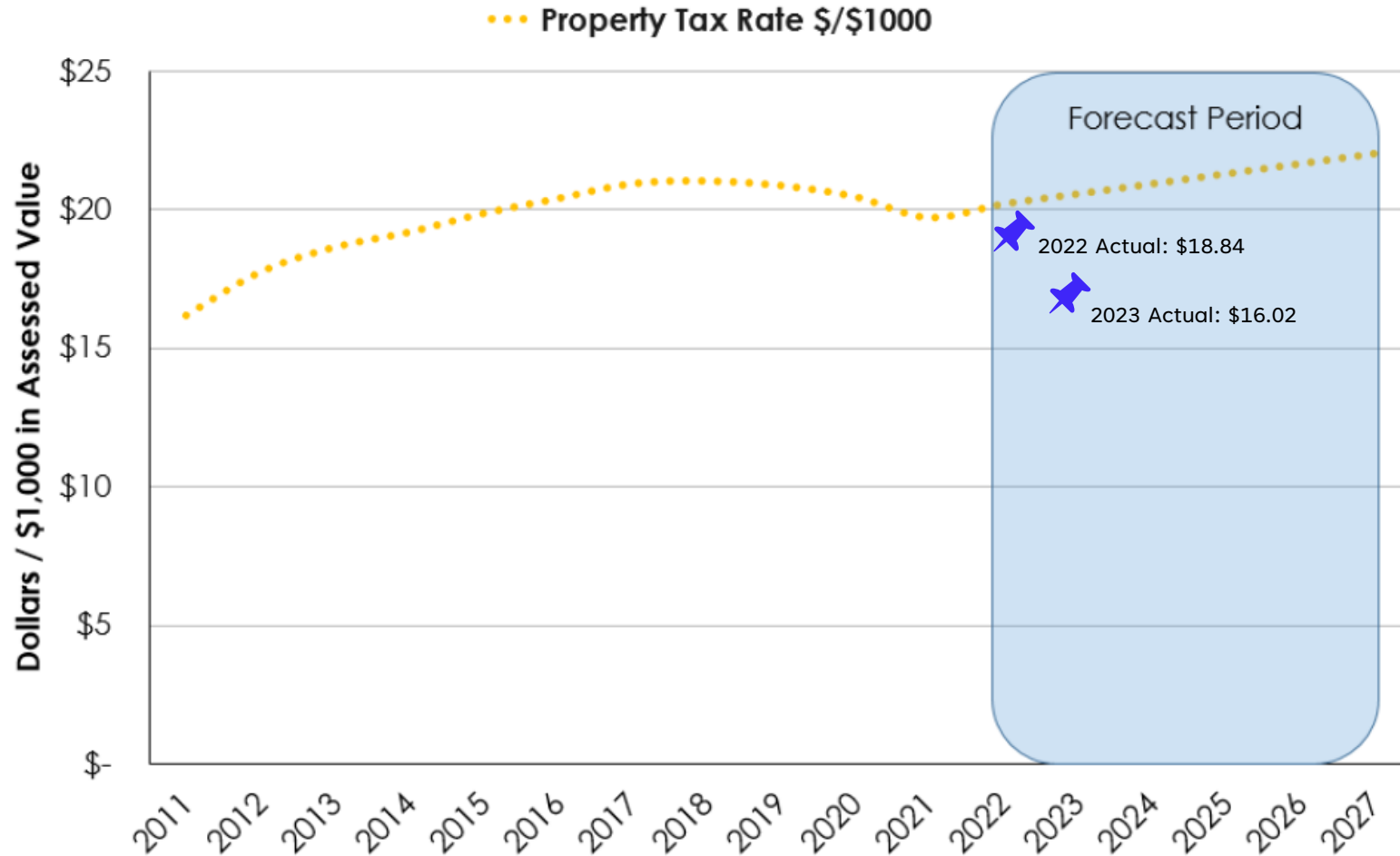
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jbDMe7X6OkWQQY0PVGQoU8j9Rhs2L_s6

2022 Actual from:

https://leverett.ma.us/files/Town_of_Leverett_budget_FY22.xlsx

* Without the hard work and attention of the Select Board, Finance Committee, Capital Planning Committee, School Committee, Town Administrator, and others, the history or our rate of budget growth could have been more volatile. We're lucky to live in a community of people dedicated to rational municipal management.

After soaring above \$20 per thousand from 2016 to 2020,
our Tax Rate has decreased while Expenses have continued to grow. Why?



Historical data in Phase 1
Existing Conditions:

Leverett Tax Rates 2003-
2021.xls

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-XZt65Q6EJNPccSxmQpCikoUlufQcNSs/>

2022-2023 Actuals from:

MA DLS Data Analytics and
Resources Bureau Tax Rates by
Class

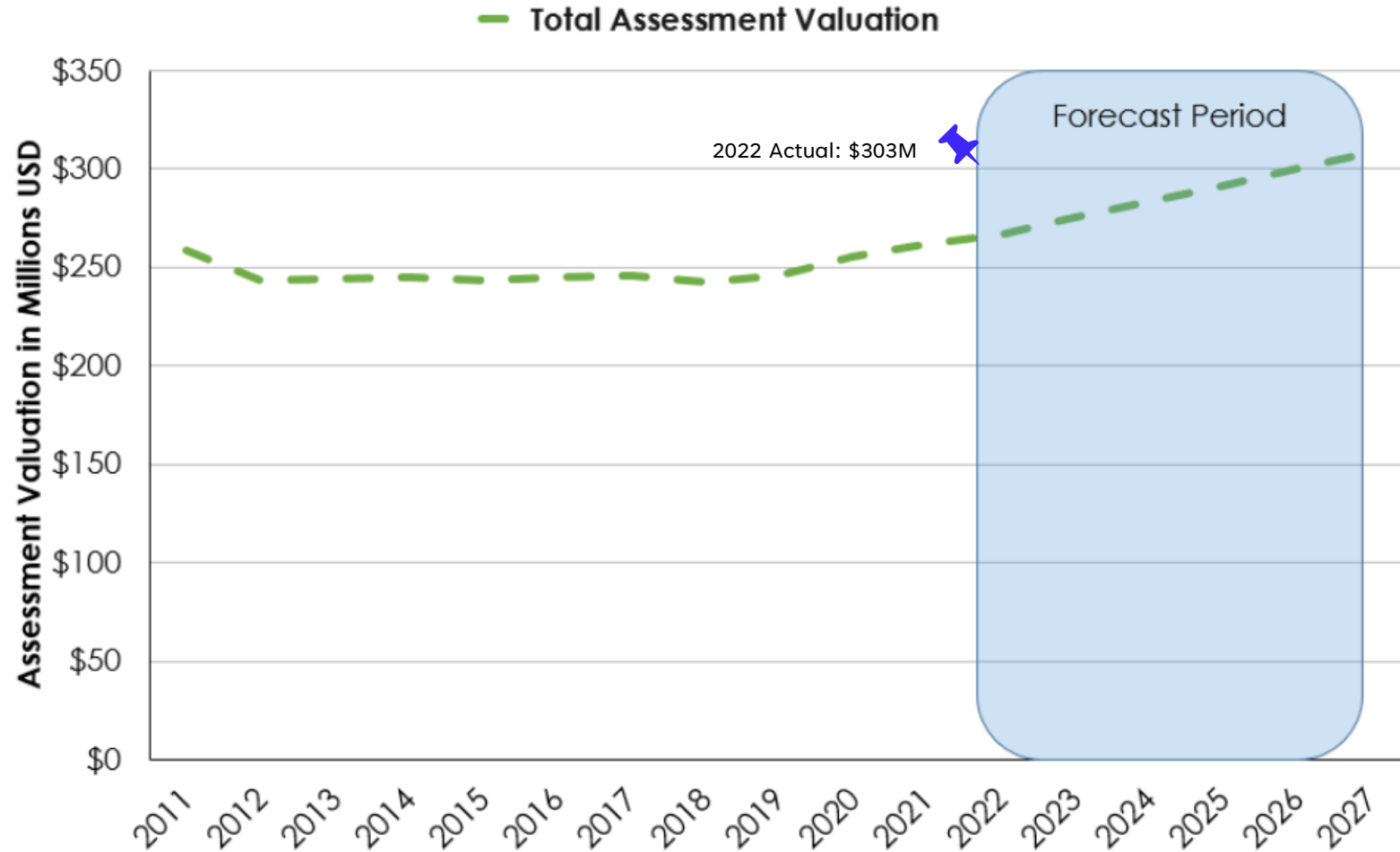
https://dlsgateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=PropertyTaxInformation.taxratesbyclass.taxratesbyclass_main

Property Tax Rate expressed in Dollars per \$1,000 in Assessed Property Value.

Annual Slope: \$0.24

From the Leverett Revenue Committee FY21 Year-end Report

Because Assessed Property Value went way up.
This means the Town collects a higher property tax levy at a lower Tax Rate.



Historical data in Phase 1
Existing Conditions:

Leverett Historical Real Estate
Valuations by Class from
Assessment Database.pdf

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/17rmVTFVRjYsmRC3P4CvGM-tZ3sPn69l6/>

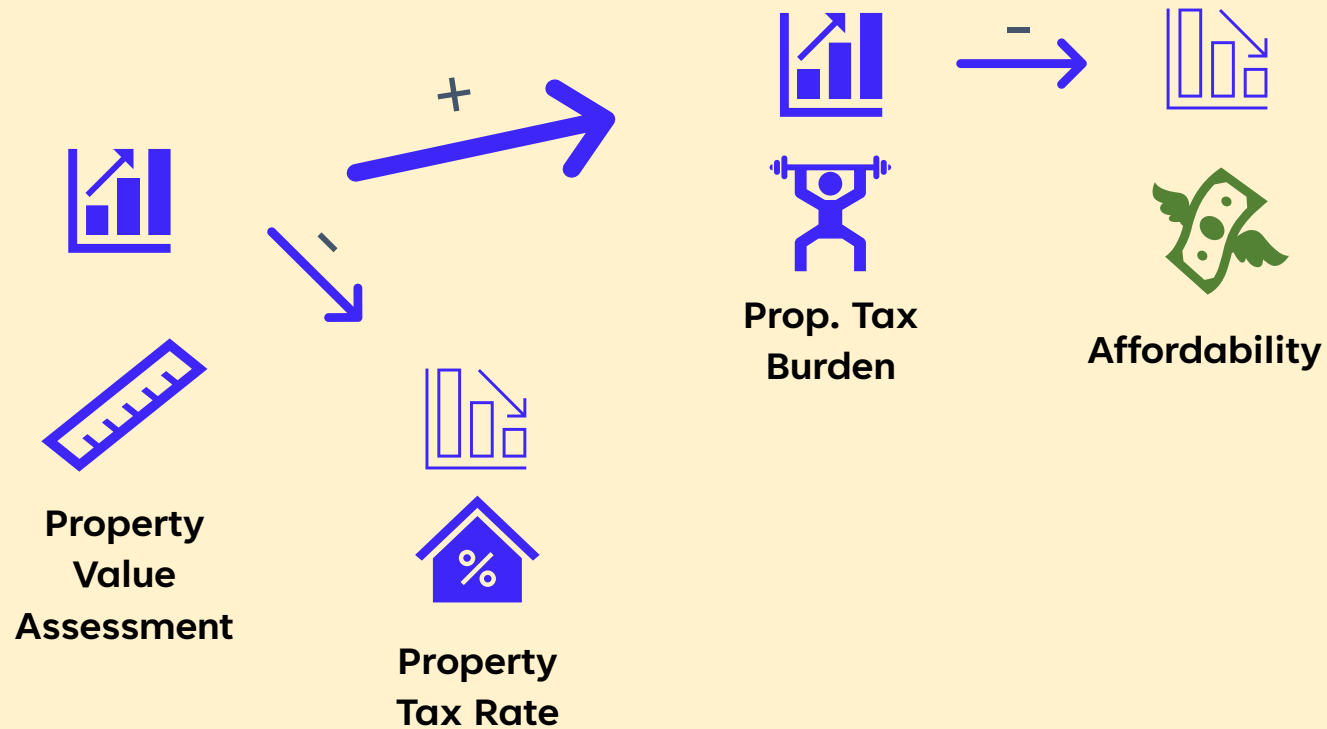
2022 Actual from:

FY22 Leverett Property
Assessment CERT DETAIL
REPORT.pdf

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/17aKOTbL1aTTwSLWGavfeBcLcUkW75-rO/>

Assessed Property Value of the entire town, in millions.
Annual Slope: \$3,700,280
From the Leverett Revenue Committee FY21 Year-end Report

Assuming consistent growth of Expenses, when Property Value goes up, the Tax Rate goes down. This means that Tax Burden can go up and Affordability can go down even if the Tax Rate goes down.

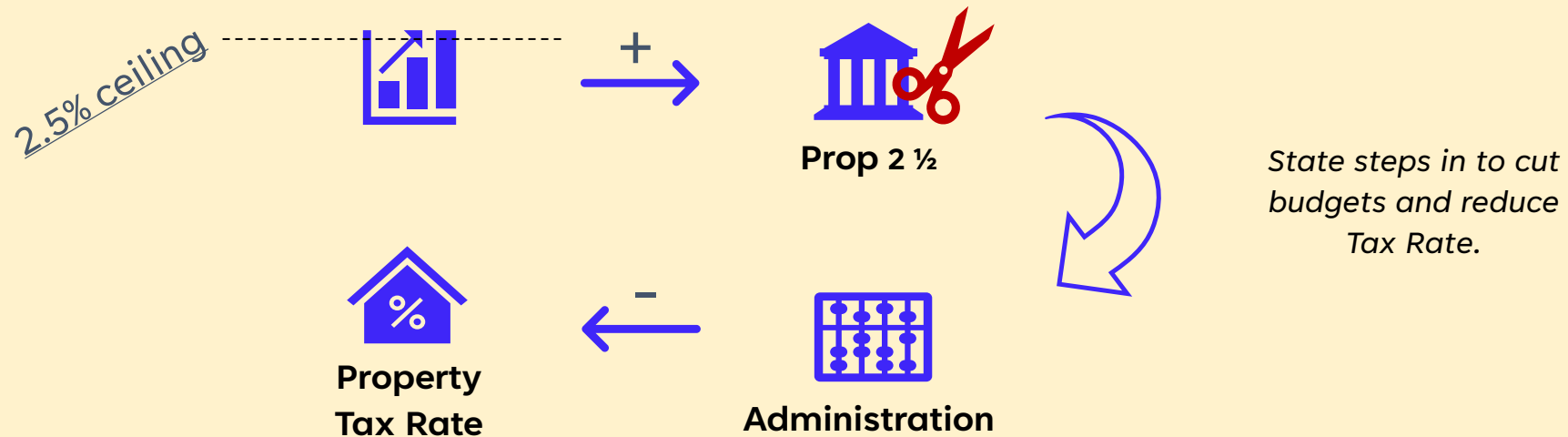


If our community aspires to be Affordable, decreasing the Tax Rate will not be enough.

Setting aside concerns about Affordability, the Tax Rate has a legal upper limit.

Prop 2 ½ imposes a levy ceiling: the Tax Rate can't exceed \$25 per \$1,000 of Assessed Value.

With the recent downward trend of our Tax Rate, Leverett is not at high risk of exceeding the ceiling.



Leverett owes its recent decline in Tax Rate to increased Assessed Property Value, which is primarily the result of macroeconomic factors beyond our control.

In a real estate market crash, Leverett will risk approaching the ceiling just as we did in 2016 – 2020.

It's possible for the Town to vote to override the ceiling, but we're confident that our community does not want to let the Tax Rate go back up at all, let alone go above the ceiling.

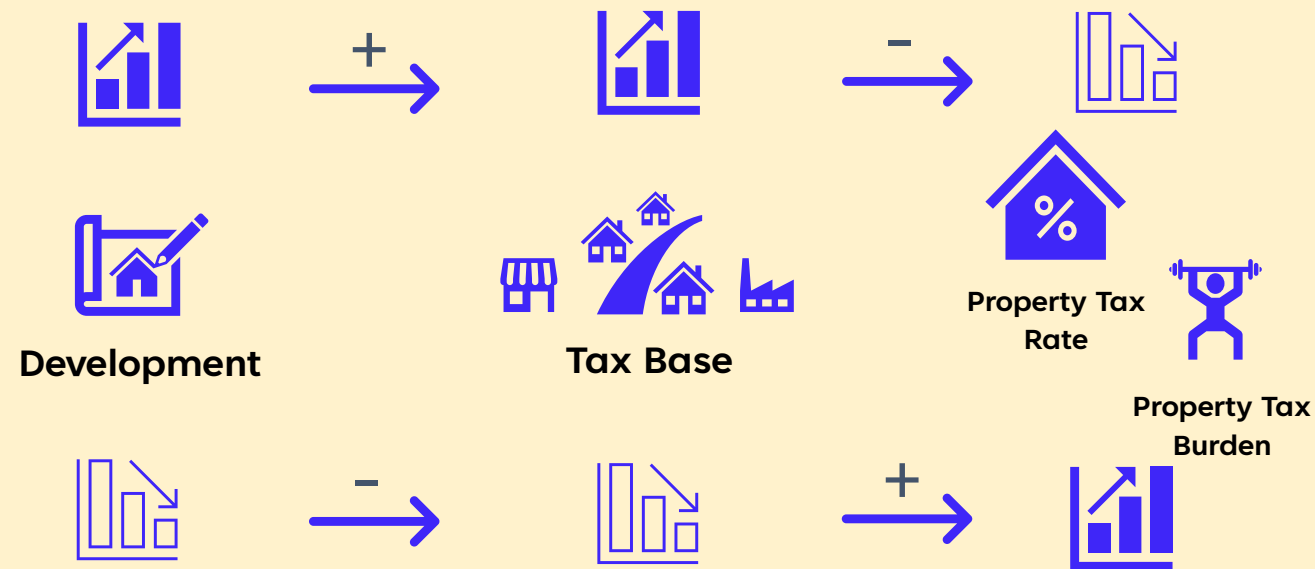


Property Value changes in response to a complex of macroeconomic and political factors that will never be subject to the influence of local decisions.

However, our local decisions can influence another important factor of our local economy:



In 2021, after two years of research, the Leverett Revenue Committee recommended increased Tax Base as a key strategy to alleviate budget conflict, reduce Tax Rate, improve Affordability, and sustain Livability.



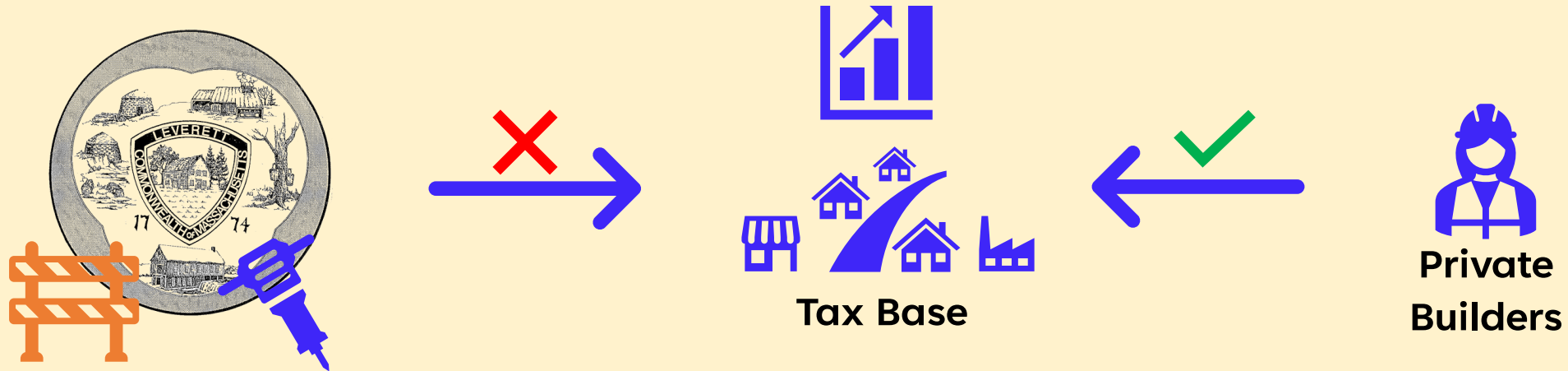
Building new houses or commercial and industrial facilities (AKA Development) adds to the Tax Base.

Increasing the Tax Base reduces every taxpayer's share of municipal Expenses.

Should we try to increase the Tax Base? **First, we need to ask the community.**

In public dialogue about Development, Leverett residents have raised valid concerns:

- 1 Does the Town think it's going draw up site plans and force Development?
- 2 Does Development align with the values of this rural community?
- 3 If Development results in a broader Tax Base, won't that just lead to greater Expenses?
- 4 How do we know what changes to make to policy and regulation?



1

In response to the first concern, the Town will not try to become a Developer or force Development.

The Town can nurture Development by changing zoning and other regulations, and investing in capital improvements to infrastructure, to make it easier and more attractive for private entities to build, for people and businesses to buy, and for current residents to remain.

2

In response to the second concern, the Town has a lot of data and a tradition of dialogue that we can use to plan Development policies that align with existing policy and community values. For example, Leverett's long-standing commitment to environmental conservation should be maintained by a Comprehensive Plan.

But there's an important question that we must not take for granted:

How do we know what our community values are?

This is a complex question.

Who lives here? Who is new to town, who has been here for generations? Does everyone feel that they belong?

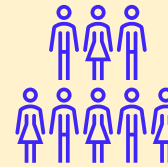
To be confident that we include everyone, we need to invest continuously in surveys and outreach to residents about policy and values.



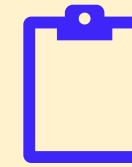
**Public and
Community
Meetings**

Leverett has about 100 people serving as elected or appointed government officials. Not all government bodies hold regular meetings.

Typical turnout is 15% of registered voters.



**Annual Town
Meeting**



**Surveys
and Research**

Recent examples:

- 2015 Affordable Housing survey
- 2018 Historical Comm. Preservation Planning Report
- 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)
- 2020 Revenue Committee Survey
- 2021 Revenue Committee Report
- 2021 Social Justice Committee Report
- 2022 Franklin County Age-Friendly Survey
- 2022 Leverett Elders Needs Assessment

The Comp Plan Phase 1 report includes an inventory of historical documents and data.



**Historical
Records**

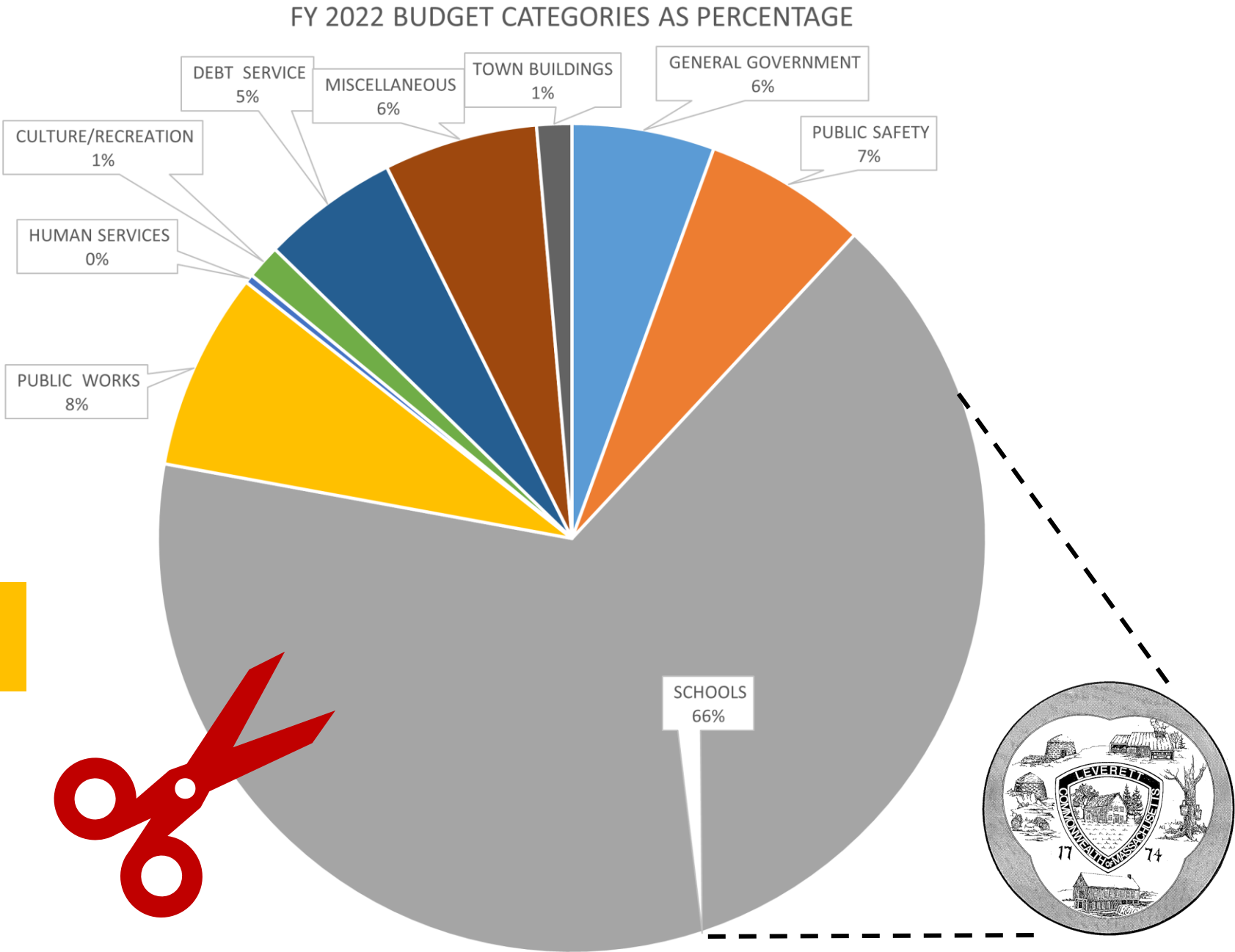
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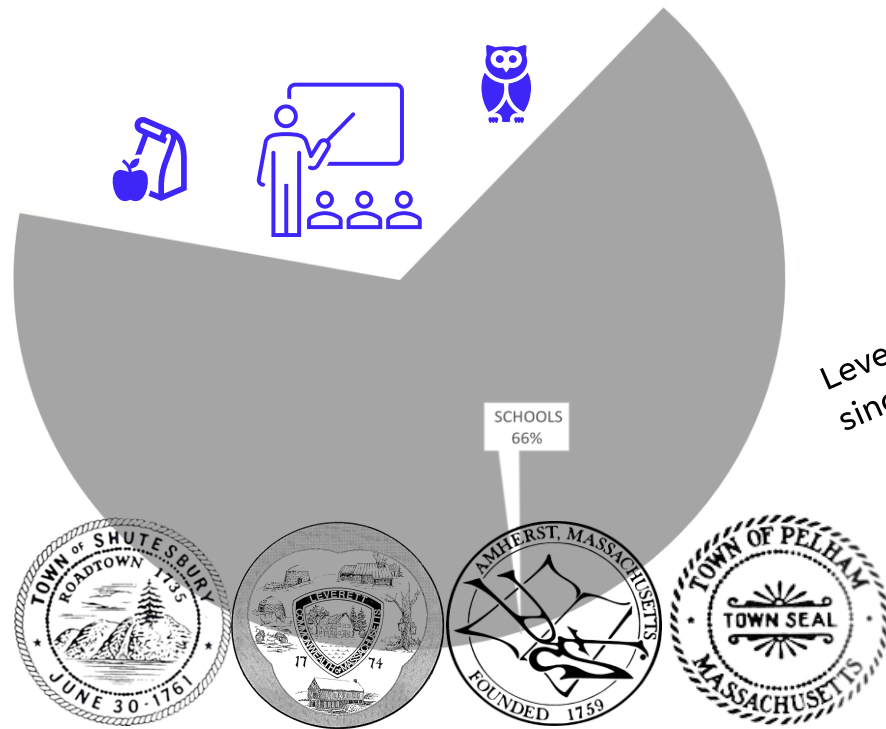
In response to the third concern, planning can account for both a broader Tax Base and a reduction of Expenses.

There are three basic strategies to reduce Expenses. Since the Town has managed its debt well, we can't do more to refinance. We can consider the other two strategies.

**Strategy 1:
Service Efficiency**

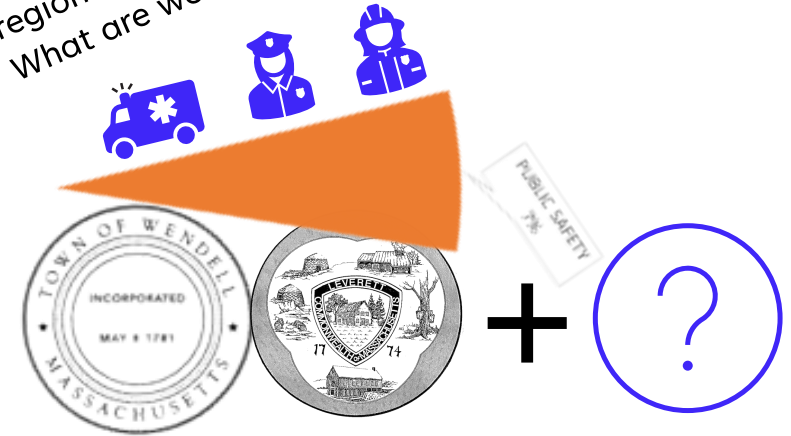
Efficiency can mean reducing the level of services or finding more cost-effective ways to deliver the level of service.





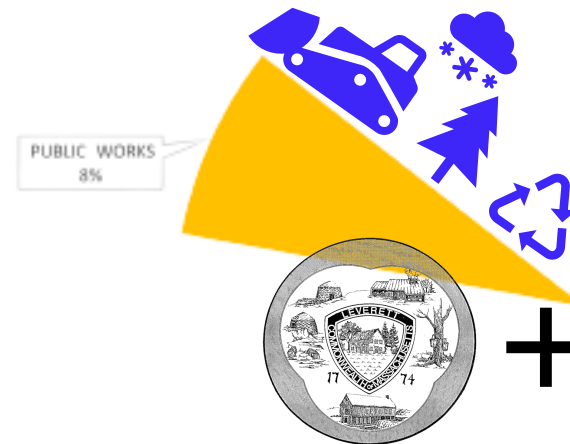
Leverett has been in a school regionalization agreement since 1954. How does that impact our Town?

Leverett and Wendell started a police regionalization agreement in FY21. What are we learning from that partnership?



Strategy 2: Regionalize Services

By joining multiple towns under service agreements, Regionalization is the Expense equivalent to the Revenue strategy of broadening the Tax Base.



Ambulance with Amherst, Emergency dispatch with Franklin County.

What other neighboring towns would like to collaborate?

This leaves the fourth concern: How do we know what changes to make to policy and regulation?

This is another complex question about evidence and community self-determination.

Whether we work to increase Revenue or decrease Expenses, a rural town government of dedicated volunteers doesn't have the expertise and data to forecast outcomes of solutions to complex problems.



Development doesn't just increase Revenue.
It increases Expenses. It can impact Livability.

Each new building needs services, families bring students.
Add a lot of new buildings? Hire more Town staff.
Bring a lot more students? Hire more school staff.

Does our community want Development?

If yes, how much? If no, can we accept the trade-offs?

Reduction and Regionalization don't just decrease Expenses.
They impact Livability. They can impact the local economy.

Will regionalization reduce our political self-determination?
Will service efficiencies deteriorate quality of service?
Will these policies result in reduced future Revenue?

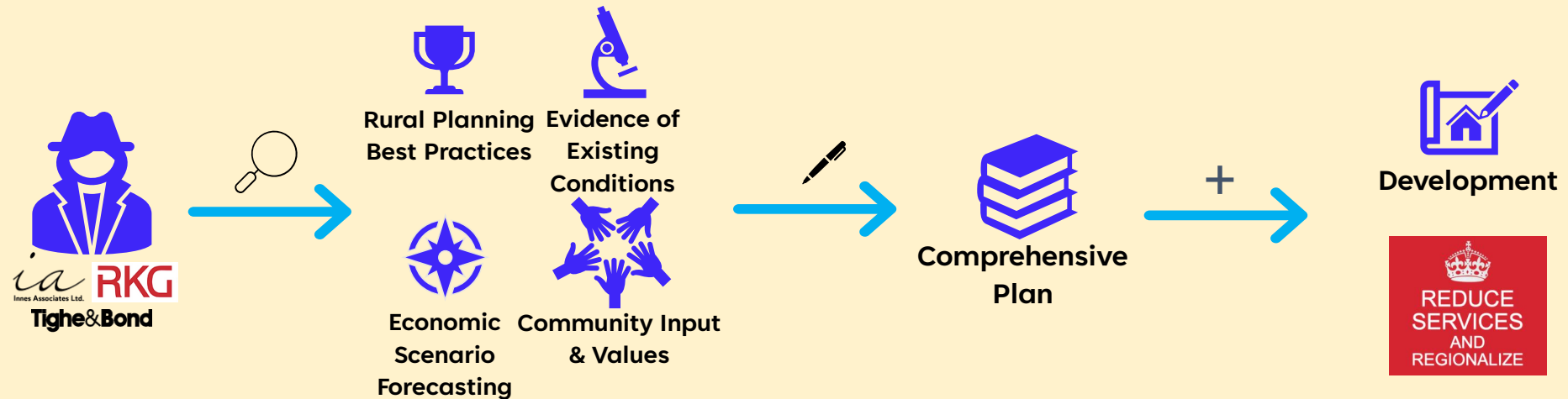
Does our community want Reduction and Regionalization?

If yes, how much? If no, can we accept the trade-offs?

That does not mean forecasting is impossible. The right expertise and data can help inform the Town about the best options to prepare for the future.

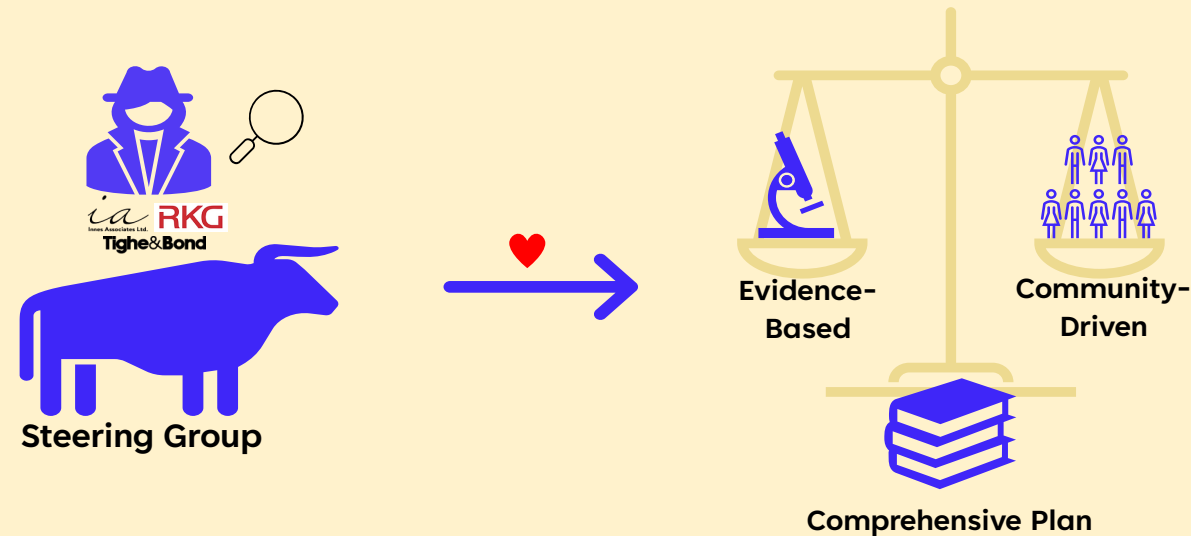
With funding won from the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development, the Leverett Select Board and Planning Board awarded a contract to planning consultants:

Innes Associates, RKG Associates, and Tighe & Bond



They'll bring experience, expertise, and best practices from their fields to analyze existing conditions in Town, forecast economic and policy outcomes, and develop recommendations to broaden the Tax Base and reduce Expenses within manageable levels of risk.

To help with the process of developing the Comprehensive Plan, the Leverett Planning Board has recruited a volunteer Steering Group of Town residents.

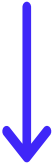


The Steering Group supports the experts, understands the evidence and analysis, coordinates community meetings, and advocates for a process and plan that is:

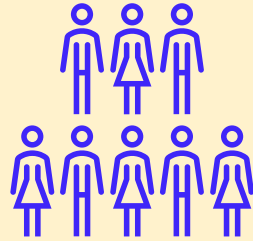
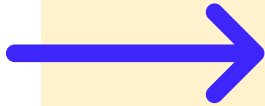
Evidence-Based and Community-Driven



Comprehensive
Plan

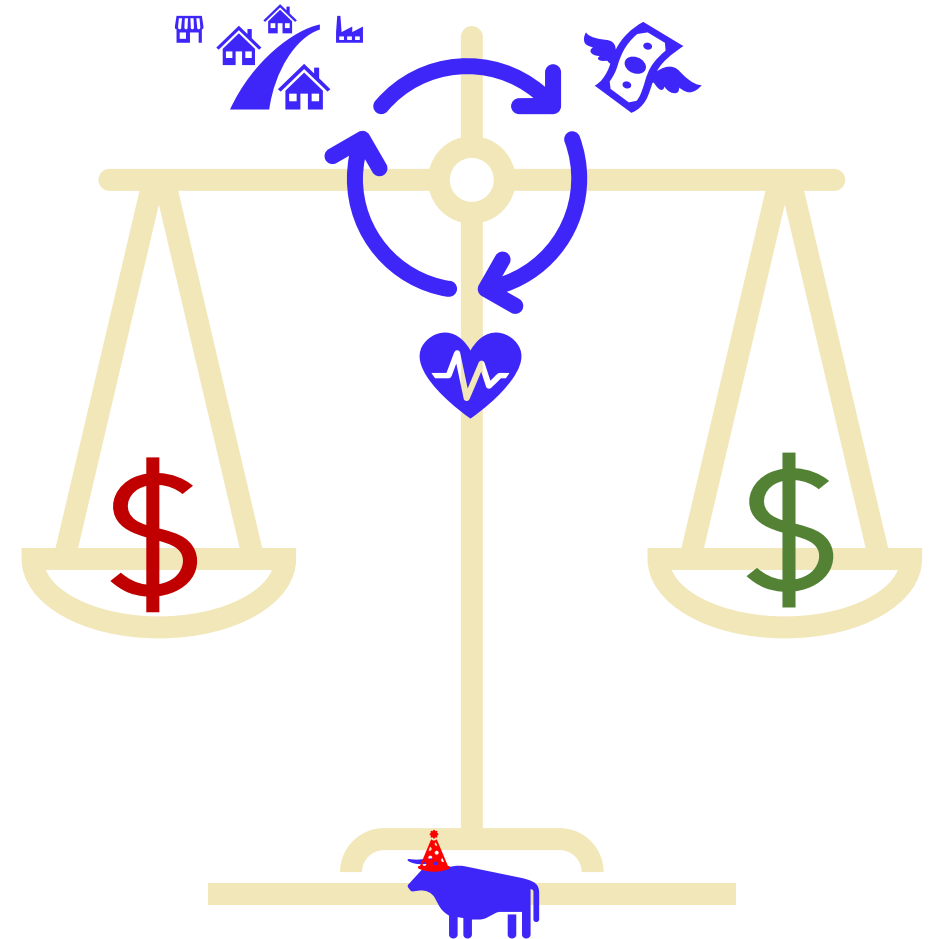
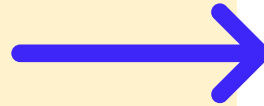


Warrant
Articles



Town
Meeting

'24, '25, '26,
'27, '28, '29,
'30, '31, '32,
'33, '34, '35,
'36, '37, '38,
'39, '40



Yes, Please

To decrease Expenses, Town policy can influence the following factors.
Efficiency and Regionalization policy can reduce Service cost.



Regionalize \ Find Efficiency



Expenses



Revenue

To increase Revenue, Town policy can influence the following factors.
Development policy can broaden the Tax Base.



Nurture Development



Services



Amenities



Administration



Equity



Legal Compliance



Municipal Debt Service



Property Tax Rate



Tax Base



Property Value Assessment



PILOT



State Funding



Municipal Debt



How do we decrease Expenses and increase Revenue,
and remain aligned with our community values,
without decreasing Livability or Affordability?



Livability



Affordability



Prop 2 1/2
2.5% levy limit &
\$25/\$1K levy ceiling



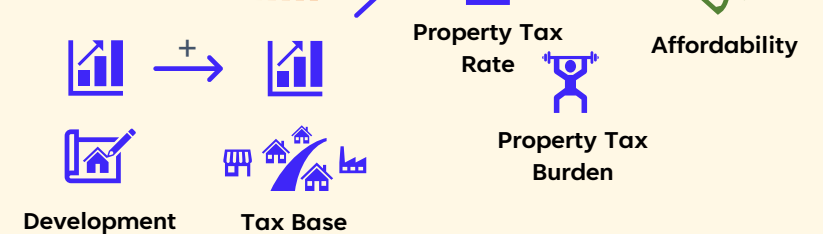
Expenses Property Tax Rate Revenue



Property Tax Burden Affordability

Property Value Assessment

Property Tax Rate



Comprehensive Plan logic model diagram A:

Diagrams of the factors of Town administration that have motivated Leverett to develop a Comprehensive Plan.

Leverett historical records of administration, bylaws and regulations, terrain, and research including:

- 2015 Affordable Housing survey
- 2018 Historical Comm. Preservation Planning Report
- 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)
- 2021 Revenue Committee Report
- 2021 Social Justice Committee Report
- 2022 Leverett Elders Needs Assessment

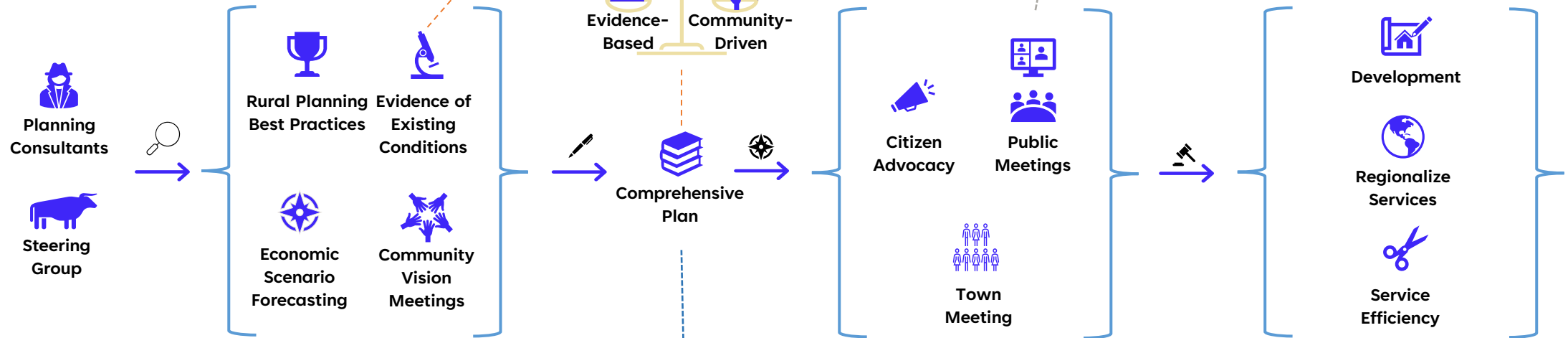
Comprehensive Plan Phase 1 Report

The Comp Plan will:

1. Document and analyze existing conditions today.
2. Recommend how to improve conditions tomorrow.

Successful implementation of a Comp Plan requires that the Planning Board collaborate with all Town offices, and especially:

- Board of Health
- Conservation Commission
- Finance Committee
- Selectboard



Steering will facilitate small group dialogues where residents come together to:

- Learn about existing conditions
- Advocate for community values
- Evaluate the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of different planning scenarios and forecasts
- Identify the future they want for Leverett

The Plan will include the following elements:

- Goals & Policies
- Land Use
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Natural & Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Services and Facilities (municipal and capital)
- Circulation (Transportation)
- Implementation
- Climate Adaptation and Sustainability
- Social and Economic Equity
- Energy
- Regionalization of Town services

Comprehensive Plan logic model diagram B: The Planning Process