

Town Meeting approves 15 a

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results came from the efforts of many.

"We are the envy of other cities and towns," he said. "I accept this award not for myself but as a very, very proud citizen of our home, Reading."

Under Article 1, Reports, Superintendent Patrick Schettini gave the State of the Schools Address. His address was filled with praise for the school system and how programs are progressing.

"What makes Reading so great is the quality of instruction," Schettini said.

Schettini outlined areas of progress, such as the high-quality literacy program developed at the elementary school level.

"Both teachers and parents have reported good results," he said.

Schettini cited several recent awards received by the schools in general as well as awards earned by the RMHS drama club, marching band, and sports teams across the board.

He also spoke of the school building projects currently on the table — the improvements at Barrows, he said, has a target completion date of summer 2005, with the high school following suit two years later.

Vincent Cameron of the Reading Municipal Light Department (RMLD) also gave a report. The department plans to change its fiscal year to coincide with the town's, he said.

Cameron outlined the various sources from which Reading takes its power. Fossil fuel is currently the biggest source.

"Green power resources," or natural resources, are not as practical, he said, but some are worth looking into. Solar, wind, biomass and fuel cells are just a handful of the natural resource options for Reading.

"Solar power is not a great alternative in the northeast,"

Cameron said. "RMLD does look for green power, but it is not the most economic power that you can buy."

Cameron said that any steps forward in the area of green power would require research and analysis. Cameron also reminded customers that their bills will reflect a refund of a total of \$3.5 million that the department is giving back to its consumers.

Article 1 was then tabled, as well as Article 2, Instructions. Article 3 requested that Town Meeting amend the Capital Improvements Program for fiscal 2005 to fiscal 2014.

"Any capital project must be listed in the capital plan," said Town Manager Peter Hechenbleikner. He showed Town Meeting members slides of past and present capital projects, illustrating what the money has been used for. Many of the capital improvements have been new water mains across town, the paving and repairing of roads, and elements of the Downtown Improvement Project.

Under Article 3, Town Meeting was also asked to approve a transfer of \$650,000 from the school department's special education budget to the capital budget in order to help with school improvement costs at Reading Memorial High School, Barrows Elementary School, and Wood End Elementary School.

Schettini explained that the schools received more special education circuit breaker money than anticipated.

The School Committee report in the Town Meeting warrant reads, "Since the fiscal 2004 School Committee budget was developed prior to the enactment of the circuit breaker, and state reimbursements for any new educational program was questionable due to the financial crisis at the state level, the town accountant and the School Committee could not budget with certainty the anticipated

reimbursement for fiscal 2004. This, along with a very aggressive effort to include all possible expenses that the circuit breaker program would allow, resulted in a much higher-than-anticipated reimbursement in the amount of \$563,000. Furthermore, a sound fiscal oversight resulted in additional budgetary savings in fiscal 2004."

The School Committee originally transferred the funds into the capital plan for building projects itself, but the Department of Revenue thinks Town Meeting should authorize the transfer instead.

"All the money that was needed to be spent on special education was spent," Schettini said. "We were then reimbursed, and we got more money than we expected."

Schettini said Reading received far more circuit breaker money than surrounding communities, and he attributes that the aggressiveness of the Special Education Department.

The Finance Committee recommended approval of the contents of Article 3.

Town Meeting member Linda Phillips spoke up, saying she did research on the circuit breaker program, and she has heard stories from parents of special education students who said their children did not receive the services they should have. She encouraged Town Meeting to vote against Article 3.

"This money should be put in the special education fund," she said. "The fiscal 2004 budget should be amended."

Almost immediately after Phillips spoke, Article 3 was approved.

Article 4, approving the payment of the prior year's bills, was indefinitely postponed. Article 5 asked Town Meeting to amend the fiscal 2005 budget. The following budget transfers were requested for fiscal 2005: a human resources expense; DPW high-



Town Meeting members can look in the IMAX theater in the new J

way and equipment maintenance expenses, as well as lin painting; capital improvements for Wood End, Barrows and the high school; decrease in funds needed for Reading's contribution to the vocational school district; finance department salary expense, and highway equipment expenses.

Town Meeting member Carolyn Johnson requested an amendment to Article 5, with the addition of \$12,500 for Hunt Park improvements.

Town Meeting member Bill Brown suggested the transfer be pushed to annual Town Meeting, as he thinks the money does not meet the requirements of emergency funds.

Town Meeting member Peter Coumoundurous led the task of improving Hunt Park, a project which has spanned over the last year. Phase I is complete, and a new playground has been installed. Phase II will be an area geared toward 2-5 year-olds.

"If you haven't been down