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## By 2-1 margin, South Hadley voters back merger of fire districts

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SOUTH HADLEY — By a wide margin, voters at Tuesday’s election said they want the town’s two fire districts to merge.

Of the 2,973 residents who answered the nonbinding ballot question, 2,029 people voted “yes” to petition the Prudential Committees of the two Fire and Water Districts to “take whatever actions are necessary to complete a merger.” The remaining 944 people rejected the nonbinding question, and 729 left the section blank.

“I’m not at all surprised. It’s coming,” Water Commissioner for District 1 Dan Luis said about the possibility of merging the two districts. “We should share and we do share services now. How (a full merger) is really going to work, it’s too early to tell.”



In February, Fire District 2 secured a technical assistance grant with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to begin discussion of shared services between the two districts. Prudential Committee Chair Kenneth LeBlanc said these discussions will contribute to the first steps toward merging.

“Who wouldn’t vote for something that could potentially save money in the long run? So we knew it would be a positive outcome,” LeBlanc said. “The DTLA (technical grant) is a great way to segway the conversation into the possibility of a merger because we are covering all the same topics.”

LeBlanc said a district merger is the same as creating a new government and will require lots of planning. Both the internal process of combining personnel, services and operations, plus the external process of filing for a new municipality with the state will take a minimum of five years, although LeBlanc said that is his very conservative estimate.

He adds that, if the districts do decide to merge, jobs won't go away overnight. The districts will use retirements, promotions and other turnover to slowly ease into the transition.

“(The outcome of the vote) is still a positive and that's why I'm really excited to go forward with that grant because it can't hurt to have the conversation,” LeBlanc said.

## Elected town, district officials

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The rest of the town election featured one contested race to serve as a trustee of the South Hadley Public Library. The three incumbents seeking reelection prevailed, with Lanette Dawn Sweeney getting 2,471 votes, followed by Mitchell Barry Resnick at 2,422 votes, and Timna Tarr with 2,056 votes. Newcomer Neil Michael Broome's bid fell short with 1,267 votes.

In Fire District 1 races, newcomers Kurt Schenker and Pauline McClaffin won spots for Prudential Committee member and water commissioner, respectively. Schenker received 349 votes, besting Mitchel Malinowski by 14 votes. McClaffin received almost double the votes of Robert Authier, with 498 to 242 votes.

Nearly 7,400 people voted in Tuesday's municipal election, about 42% of the town's population.

In the uncontested races, Jeffery Cyr and Carol Constant each secured another three-year term for Select Board. Danielle Cooke won reelection to the School Committee along with new candidate John Witkowski.

John Hine will serve as town moderator for three Town Meetings and District 1 moderator at the next District 1 Meeting.

Ronald Coutu is the next Municipal Light Board member and Evelyn Masson will serve once again as a Board of Assessors member.

All eight candidates running for reelection as Town Meeting Member in Precinct A — Pauline Louise Casey, Laurie Casolari, Leonard Michael Finkowski, William Foley, Kenneth Jaffe, Andrea Miles, Charles Miles, Adam Reid — will serve for another three years. Residents of Precinct A voted for Melissa Dresler to participate as a Town Meeting member for two years.

Deborah Bergeron, James Bruce Bosman, Diane Laroche, Natasha Zebrowski Matos, Jodi Miller, Scott Moore, Susan Newton, Nathan Therien, Geradine De Berly and Leo Labonte were voted Town Meeting members for Precinct B.

Unofficial results show Town Meeting Members for Precinct C will be David John King, Kenneth E Kostek, Anthony J. Pluta, Christie A Reardon, Daniel M Vieu, Laura Bruschi Friesner.

Town Meeting Members for Precinct D will be Mark Cavanaugh, Harriet Corbin Finkel, Margaret Elizabeth Jodoin, Allison R Schlachter, Barry CD Waite, Marc A Desrosiers, Ann M Stockton.


The six Town Meeting Members of Precinct E include Nicole Casolari, M P Chevy Cevrette, Kathleen Davis, Christopher F Geraghty, Daniel J Kelleher and Thomas Gibson Lake.

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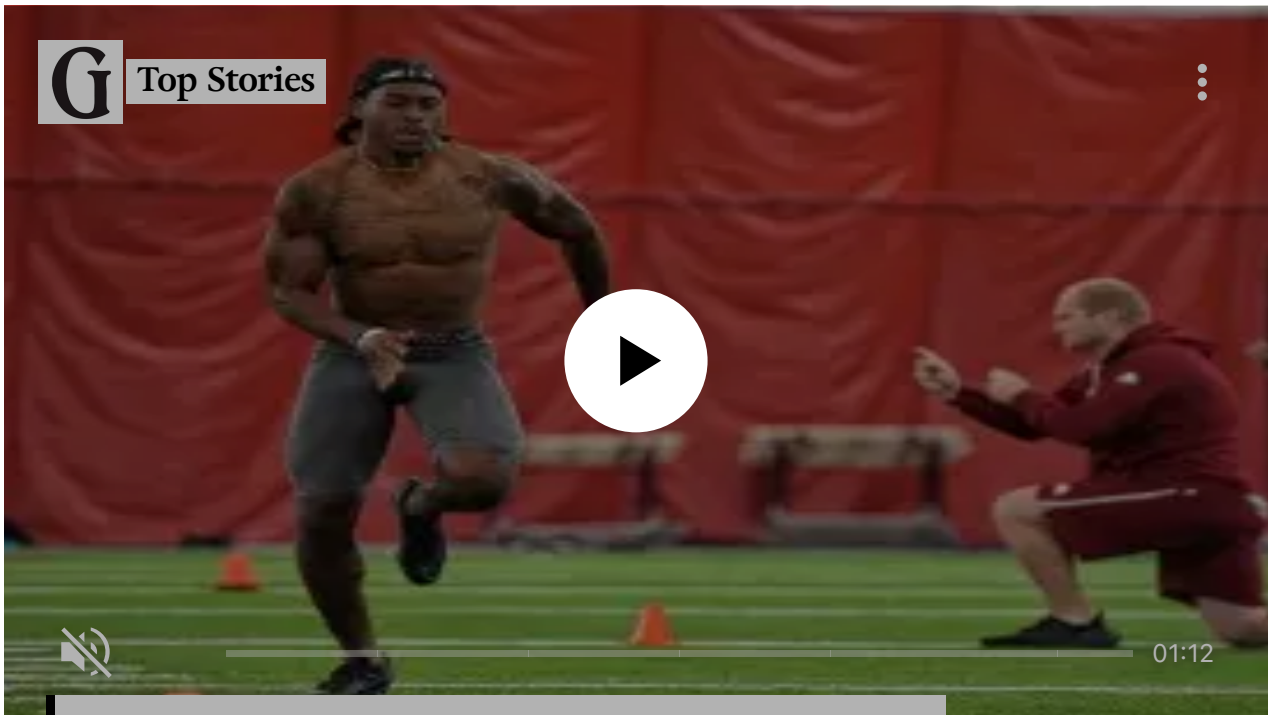
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