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 Subject: [EXTERNAL] - Question marks dot House budget debate | Today's Sponsor — BTEA Building Trades Recovery Week

By Chris Lisinski, Ella Adams & Keith Regan

Four questions as House sets sail on budget debate

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Today's News

The week is two-fifths done according to the calendar, but if we're counting by debate on the House's \$57.9 billion budget for fiscal year 2025, it's just now about to get started.

Representatives will set off later this morning on several days of deliberations about the spending plan. The House will appear inactive for most of that time while decisions are made behind closed doors on which of the 1,495 amendments will make it into the final package, but there's still a lot at stake in those private talks.

With that in mind, here are some of the key questions to watch as the House budget debate unfolds:

- Just how much more spending will reps add? Speaker Ron Mariano warned at the outset that "this fiscal year is not going to be like the last few," when he and his counterparts oversaw a major increase in state spending. How much that message of fiscal discipline carries over to the earmark process remains to be seen. Representatives love to pack the budget bill with guaranteed funding for projects, organizations and needs in their districts, and depending on how much Mariano's team allows, the budget's bottom line could swell closer to the \$58.1 billion Gov. Maura Healey proposed.
- Will another push for shelter reforms gain traction? House Democrats proposed in their budget to steer \$500 million toward the emergency assistance shelter system in fiscal 2025, and some reps are hoping to use the measure to reopen debate on how the program works. Republican Rep. Steven Xiarhos of Barnstable filed [one amendment](#) that would allow only U.S. citizens who live in Massachusetts to access the system, while Cambridge Democrat Rep. Marjorie Decker filed [another](#) calling for an ombudsperson to advocate on behalf of shelter applicants, among other reforms.
- What's the appetite for policy riders? As much as legislative leaders might want to pitch the budget as a spending-only bill, it's long been used as a vehicle for various types of policy reforms. The current year's budget, for example, included language allowing high

- school graduates without legal immigration status to access in-state tuition and financial aid at public colleges and universities. And sometimes, those big changes come not in the original draft but on the floor — two years ago, with the U.S. Supreme Court about to strike down *Roe v. Wade*, the Senate [tacked on a budget rider](#) aiming to protect reproductive and gender-affirming health care providers from legal action in other states. Keep an eye out for similarly big changes this time around.
- Does anyone want to work Friday night? The House opted to start its budget proceedings Wednesday instead of earlier in the week in observance of the Passover holiday. It's not uncommon for budget deliberations to stretch two or three nights, but in this instance, representatives might opt to stay in session longer Wednesday and Thursday to avert the chance of needing to take votes Friday evening. After all, who could blame them? — Chris Lisinski

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Happening Today

9:00 | MassBio holds annual "State of Possible Conference" | Royal Sonesta Boston, 40 Edwin Land Blvd., Cambridge | [More Info](#)

10:30 | Children's Trust holds "Step Up For Kids" awareness event as part of Child Abuse Prevention Month | Grand Staircase

10:30 | Lyft and Uber drivers with Drivers Demand Justice Coalition gather ahead of 11 a.m. rally with national union leaders | State House steps

12:00 | Senate Post Audit and Oversight Committee holds its rescheduled hearing on the status of health care affordability, quality and staffing at southeastern Mass. and Cape Cod & Islands hospitals | IBEW Local 223, 475 Myles Standish Blvd., Taunton | [Livestream](#)

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Marshfield rejects MBTA zoning plan; AG responds

Marshfield Town Meeting voters rejected a proposal that would put the town in zoning compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Marshfield technically has until the end of the year to approve the zoning, but many voters don't like the state "strong-arming" them into compliance. This vote took place over two months after Milton voted against previously approved MBTA zoning changes, and town counsel doesn't believe Marshfield will see success with its opposition to similar zoning.

AG Andrea Campbell responded to the rejected proposal by noting that Marshfield still has over seven months — until the end of 2024 — to come to a different decision as far as MBTA Communities zoning is concerned because the municipality is considering a "commuter rail" or "adjacent" town under the law. There's no lawsuit at this point in time. — [Patriot-Ledger](#) | [State House News Service](#)

Hampshire Regional schools, union come to contract agreement

Hampshire Regional Education Association and the School Committee agreed to a tentative contract after a year of negotiations and 224 days without a contract, reports the Gazette's Emilee Klein. After a tense period of dispute, the contract between the district and the teacher, paraprofessional and administrative assistant union includes 20 days of parental leave for teachers and educational support staff and includes cost-of-living adjustments above 2 percent for staff for the first time in 16 years. The agreement is broken up into a one-year contract with a 2.5 percent raise and a three-year pact through FY27 due to the lack of contract for the current school year. — [Daily Hampshire Gazette](#)

Healey weighs in on campus protests

In the midst of pro-Palestine university and college encampment protests happening across the country and state, Gov. Healey said Tuesday on WBUR that protecting the safety and well-being of students in the midst of a rise in antisemitism, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment, and respecting "the dignity and worth of everybody," have to remain a focus. She said "there has to be" space for both pro-Palestinian protest and Jewish student safety, and that people have the "right to express their views and protest" within the bounds of the law. — [State House News Service](#)

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Former Cape Cod 5 banking HQ will become affordable housing

Developer Pennrose will transform the old Cape Cod 5 headquarters in Orleans into a multi-family rental development with 62 units, 47 of which will be affordable and 15 of which will be workforce apartments. The units will be broken up by various median household income figures as a way to aid the massive housing demand present on the Cape and Islands. The project is supposed to finish up next year, and has been made possible via MassHousing financing, a community preservation bond, an ARPA grant, federal and state tax credit financing, and funding from all eight Lower and Outer Cape towns. — [Cape Cod Times](#)

Salem council tees up vote on controversial anti-camping ordinance

A push to limit camping in Salem has won approval from a subcommittee that has spent the past month considering the controversial ordinance, Dustin Luca of the Salem News reports. The approval of the council's Public Safety Panel means the full council could vote soon on the measure, which was proposed by Mayor Dominick Pangallo last month and has the support of the police chief, who says homeless encampments make the city less safe. — [Salem News](#)

No more artificial turf for Oak Bluffs

The Oak Bluffs Board of Health banned the installation of artificial turf playing surfaces on Tuesday — a decision made to protect water quality from PFAS present in the turf. Martha's Vineyard Regional High School has been looking into renovating its athletic facilities, and initial plans involved a new track and a turf field — a plan the Oak Bluffs Planning Board rejected on the basis of chemical concerns from the plastic field potentially contaminating the island's main aquifer. The Vineyard Gazette's Ethan Genter dives into the years of context and plans that are now on hold at the high school. — [Vineyard Gazette](#)

Proposals in support of a generational ban on tobacco cascade across Mass.

More than half a dozen Greater Boston communities have passed or are considering banning tobacco and e-cigarette sales to people born this century — just weeks after the Supreme Judicial Court upheld Brookline's bylaw banning tobacco sale to anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 2000, reports the Globe's Matt Stout. Wakefield, Stoneham and Melrose boards of health have already approved various versions of the ban, and public hearings are upcoming in Winchester and Malden. Reading and Medford may be up after that. Some proponents want this to become a "mass movement" so that individuals can't just go across town borders to purchase tobacco, and the SJC upholding Brookline's ban shows promise for others across the state. — [Boston Globe](#)

Advocates push coverage for fertility services for those with sickle cell disease

Sickle cell advocates called for legislative action Tuesday to break down fertility-related health inequities those with sickle cell disease face. Among other items, the legislation in question would require MassHealth and commercial insurers to cover fertility preservation services for those undergoing fertility-impairing medical treatment, reports the News Service's Sam Doran. Insurers often do not cover fertility preservation services for patients receiving treatments like chemotherapy for sickle cell, as there's often a lack of attention on the disease, according to supporters, who say it's clearly because people of color are predominantly impacted by the disease, and a fairly small total number are affected overall. — [State House News Service](#)

Lowell Bridge Club partners with Amazon, helping formerly incarcerated get jobs

The Bridge Club of Greater Lowell is partnering with Amazon to help some of its clients who have been involved in the criminal justice system gain employment. The Bridge Club is Amazon's first community partner in the Greater Lowell area and the club's largest partnership. Through its re-entry program, the club will help clients apply for jobs at the new North Andover Amazon fulfillment center, and then provide transportation to said work for a year. — [Lowell Sun](#)

Audit slams New Bedford court over handling of public records

Auditor Diana DiZoglio says the Massachusetts Trial Court failed to follow its own rules for making information about closed criminal cases in New Bedford District Court available to the public. Will Sennott of The Light reports the audit covered a period ending in 2022 when the district was led by a now-former justice who has been accused in court cases still pending of concealing an affair with a prosecutor — and dovetails with DiZoglio's bigger-picture push to bring more transparency to state government. — [New Bedford Light](#)

Westfield councilor launches challenge for House seat held by GOP's Pease

Westfield City Councilor Bridget Matthews-Kane says a constituent's request to address issues of affordability spurred her to launch a bid to unseat Republican Rep. Kelly Pease in November. Matthews-Kane, who is in her third term on the council, will run as a Democrat against Pease, who has been representing the 4th Hampden district since 2021. — [MassLive](#)

Local budgets scrambled after voters in Pepperell, Townsend sink overrides

Two regional school districts serving New Hampshire border towns may have to rework their 2025 spending plans after voters in Pepperell and Tyngsboro rejected Proposition 2 ½ overrides at the ballot box on Tuesday. Prudence Brighton of the Lowell Sun reports both communities had previously endorsed operational overrides to fund growing budgets at the North Middlesex Regional School District and Nashoba Valley Technical High School, but voters apparently focused more on the impact on their personal budgets when they went to the polls. — [Lowell Sun](#)

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