

Shall the Town of Plymouth exempt the state portion of Bethany Birches' property tax?

By state portion we mean the education rate.

Questions or comments? Call Brandon at 802-672-5220 or email brandon@bethanybirches.org

What is Bethany Birches Camp?

Bethany Birches Camp is a rustic children's camp located on Lynds Hill Rd. The Camp was established more than fifty years ago by Plymouth residents who saw that there was a need for a summer camp which was accessible to all local children regardless of economic status. The Camp continues to strive to provide the most affordable (and fun!) camp experience possible, offering more than \$100,000 dollars in discounts to local kids in need every year. Hundreds of volunteer hours are given annually (some years, thousands). As a non-profit organization, the price of attendance is set at cost; the camp raises funds from many kind supporters to pay for all overheads, capital improvement projects and for discounts for those in need. Currently, campers who qualify for free lunch pay \$25 for a winter weekend of camp and \$95 for a week of summer camp. ***Voting yes to this helps ensure Bethany Birches is here another 50 years and can serve more local children!***

The founders were Mennonite by creed, and the camp continues in this tradition by emphasizing aspects of Jesus' teachings including peaceful resolution of differences, showing love and compassion to others and to the environment, and being honest in word and deed. Learn more about Bethany Birches throughout our website and especially here: <http://www.bethanybirches.org/new-parents>

What is at issue?

While many religious and educational institutions are exempted from paying property taxes, the State of Vermont has begun to exclude summer camps from such status. The town listers determined in 2017 that the Camp ought to be exempted from property taxes – but were overruled by the Asst. Attorney General. At that point there were three reasonable paths forward. The camp could continue to fundraise to pay its own tax bill, the Town could sue the State of Vermont arguing that the Attorney General was incorrect in overruling the lister's determination, or the Town (i.e. the residents) could vote to exempt Bethany Birches, the option which this ballot measure is pursuing.

How does this impact Plymouth residents?

If the Town votes to exempt Bethany Birches Camp, it does not reduce the overall tax bill the Town must pay to the State, effectively passing along to the residents through a Local Agreement Rate. The education portion of the camp's tax bill is about \$17,000. Divide this by the current grand list and the rate comes to about .007. This figure was determined by Jill Remick and Teri Gildersleeve (property valuation operations chief for the state) working with Sandie Small (town clerk). This amounts to an additional \$7 in property tax for each \$100,000 in assessed property value. This is a small burden to some, and a significant burden to others, and we recognize that this would be an act of generosity on the part of the town residents. We are asking you to help us keep the summer-camp experience affordable for all area kids (80% of Bethany Birches campers live within a 40-mile radius of Plymouth and that has been roughly true since our start in 1965).

The petition is written so that voting yes would exempt Camp from the education (State) portion of its property tax bill. The camp would continue to pay the municipal taxes which support Plymouth services such as road maintenance, recycling, etc.

We believe that the value the Camp provides to the local community – especially the children of Plymouth and surrounding towns – is great and worth paying for. Beyond the camp-related benefits, the camp is also available for use by residents (snowmobile trails, playground, basketball court, and ice rink being some of the benefits). We would be glad to share with you the ways in which the camp property is available to you and in the case of a yes vote we would extend additional benefits including discounts on property rental and program fees.

Thank you for considering supporting Bethany Birches Camp in this way, and we are excited to answer any questions you may have about the camp, or the long process which led up to this vote.