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PRESS RELEASE

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Senator Anne Gobi and Representative Whipps Lee Secure FY16 Funding for North Quabbin Projects

BOSTON – Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer) and Representative Susannah Whipps Lee (R-Athol) are happy to announce that House and Senate approved the FY16 budget today. Included in the final version is funding for multiple local projects in the North Quabbin area relative to economic development, regional transportation tourism and parks and recreation.

The local legislators were able to secure \$125,000 for UMass Amherst to conduct studies and develop plans for economic revitalization in the North Quabbin area. These include: a study for the regeneration of former North Quabbin area mill buildings and the impediments found in the state building code, development of a plan for eco-tourism along the Millers River, development of a municipal agricultural plan for North Quabbin communities, to conduct a study to determine the means and methods to expand hydro power along rivers, and for the development of an affordable housing plan in the Town of Wendell.

The FY16 budget also included \$75,000 in funding for the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of establishing a regional tourism council. The Commonwealth's investment in the creation of this tourism council will be repaid in future years by the benefits it will bring to the North Quabbin Region.

“Athol and the North Quabbin area have so much to offer but there needs to be assistance to reach full potential. I was proud to advocate for funding for a regional tourism council which will assist in highlighting the natural treasures of the area,” said Senator Gobi. “In addition, working with UMass to help identify and enhance economic vitality is money well spent.”

“This has been a difficult budget process, given the many challenges posed by the \$1.8 billion structural deficit, but Senator Gobi and I were able to work together in a bipartisan effort to address the needs of our districts,” said Representative Whipps Lee. “I’m pleased that we were able to secure funding for several important local initiatives in the budget, including a new regional tourism council overseen by the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce, as well as a UMass Amherst study that will assess our current state building codes to determine how we can better promote the transformation of abandoned mill buildings throughout the district into more productive, tax-generating uses to help pay for critical municipal services.”

The Town of Templeton was granted \$85,000 in the FY15 budget to construct a playground in town, but the funding fell victim to 9C cuts. The Town had completed construction on the playground and then learned that the funds would no longer be appropriated, leaving them in a financial bind. Senator Gobi was able to successfully include the funding in the FY16 budget, ensuring that the Town would be able to afford the project.

“It was important to me to make sure the funding was restored for the Gladys Salame Memorial playground,” said Senator Gobi. “The playground is built and enjoyed by many and the town has had to make difficult decisions because of the loss of the funding. Hopefully the Governor will not veto this funding.”

The budget also included \$400,000 for the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority for operations. The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) is one of Massachusetts’ 15 regional transit authorities. MART provides public transportation to 22 area cities and towns including the cities of Fitchburg, Gardner, and Leominster and the towns of Ashburnham, Ashby, Athol, Ayer, Bolton, Boxborough, Hardwick, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Littleton, Lunenburg, Royalston, Shirley, Sterling, Stow, Templeton, Westminster, and Winchendon.

“The people of the area rely on the CTS bus and van service to get to jobs, medical appointments and daily necessities,” said Senator Gobi. “I will continue to work with the community and MART towards a sustainable bus and van service.”

The budget now goes to the Governor’s desk where he will make amendments and vetoes or sign the budget as is.

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