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Young adult author shares insights with

Lamont: Cut borrowing

Towns fret as governor plans to reduce state bonding for projects by 40%

By Eric Bedner
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HARTFORD — Gov. Ned Lamont announced Tuesday plans to reduce state borrowing by nearly 40 percent in each of the next two years, which could put more of

a financial burden on towns to pay for projects, particularly school construction.

Lamont announced his plan to cut state bonding by about \$600 million, or nearly 40 percent from recent years, during a Waterbury Regional Chamber meeting. He later tweeted about the proposal.

He referred to the idea as a self-imposed "debt diet" that he said would save the state as much as \$2 billion over the next decade.

"We cannot put Connecticut's future on the credit card," Lamont said. "The state has had a problem putting costs on

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Plan to cut state borrowing shouldn't affect foundation fund

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Connecticut's credit card that it simply can't afford to pay."

The governor and the Office of Policy and Management intend to adjust the scale of projects such as school construction and other large infrastructure upgrades.

Projects already under construction will not be affected, the governor's office said.

Lamont, however, said "we're going to be selective" with school projects based on the number of students in a district, alluding to a potential benefit to districts that regionalize to increase their size.

"If you have a very small school that you'd like to build, God bless you, go build it," he

said. "We're not going to rubber-stamp everybody's bonding requests."

Lamont said he intends to examine everything, including bonding for state colleges.

The governor, who is chairman of the State Bond Commission and decides its agenda, is committed to allocating the remaining \$80 million slated for the captive insurance company established to assist homeowners with crumbling foundations.

"There is no intention to make adjustments to the existing authorizations for crumbling foundations," Lamont spokesman Christopher McClure said. "Governor Lamont is committed to helping homeowners through this program."

Although Tolland Town Manager Steven R. Werbner,

who is also president of the captive company disbursing the foundation funds, welcomed Lamont's assurance, he is still concerned about the timing.

The captive insurer's superintendent, Michael Maglaras, said the company already has more liabilities than it does assets and needs the next \$20 million installment before the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

Lamont canceled State Bond Commission meetings for January and February.

Tolland is hopeful that state bonding will help with fixing Birch Grove Primary School, which Werbner said will have to be replaced within 10 years because its foundation is laden with pyrrhotite, which causes concrete to crumble.

Before Lamont's announce-

ment Tuesday, Werbner said the state assured him it was likely to provide some assistance for the project, which is expected to cost \$35 million to \$45 million.

South Windsor is building two schools, already breaking ground on the first one. Town Manager Matthew Galligan said the town hasn't received any state money for either school yet.

That town also relies on about \$1.3 million in road aid from state bonding each year, he said.

Galligan lamented that the state continues to make changes to Town Road Aid while local leaders have to struggle to make up the difference.

"That's not the way you do business," he said.

Coventry Town Manager John Elseser said his town relies on about \$300,000 each year in state bonding for roads and about \$100,000 a year for the Local Capital Improvement Program, or LoCIP.

If the state were to cut back on those areas, "both of those would have to be replaced by property taxes," Elseser said.

Coventry already has had bonding approved for various projects, including the replacement of the Jones Crossing Bridge, and Elseser said he doesn't anticipate any other large projects in the immediate future.

Senate Minority Leader Leonard A. Fasano, R-North Haven, praised Lamont's pro-

posal, calling the cost-saving measure "encouraging and long overdue." He said bonding should be used only for essential functions of government and long-term investments.

"For years, Governor (Dannel P.) Malloy used the state's credit card as a way to assure alligances, borrowing to pay for political handouts," Fasano said.

"I agree with Governor Lamont that we need to refocus on the true purpose of bonding and prioritize the state's needs over its wants," Fasano said. "I look forward to continuing this important conversation about how we can invest in Connecticut's future at the same time we work to better control borrowing and reduce debt."

Lamont also proposed legislation this week that would streamline the Department of Motor Vehicles, make Election Day a state holiday, and continue to promote public-private partnerships.

He is suggesting extending the time between driver's license renewals from six years to eight years, and the time between vehicle registrations from two years to three, as well as enabling license renewals online.

Lamont also is proposing increasing the number of state agencies able to participate in public-private partnerships in order to spur economic growth and job creation.