Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
March 4, 2026
Special Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: T. Gelston; E Dill; T. Sevigny
Also Present: V. Belles; M. Callahan; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. Call to Order: First Selectman Gelston called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 4:36 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Gelston reviewed the meeting agenda.

2. 2026-2027 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. General Overall Operating/Capital Budget Review – Mr. Gelston solicited input from the Selectmen on the proposed FY2026-2027 Town government budget. Mr. Dill stated he would like to revisit any departmental budgets that increased by 3% or more this year. The Board reviewed the following budgets:

   - Public Works – Mr. Dill expressed concern about the lack of competitive bids for the Public Works vehicle. In response to a comment made by Mr. Dill, there was a general discussion about whether or not there is a need for a full-time director for Public Works. The Selectmen discussed the workload and the realistic potential for finding a qualified part-time director. Mr. Gelston noted that, considering the current market rate for Public Works' Directors, he felt they should leave $100k in the Salary/Wages budget line for the position. No changes were made to the proposed Public Works Operating or Capital budgets.

   - Finance Office – (+5.02%) Ms. Belles advised that the main driver of the increase in this budget was a result of contractual obligations for salaries and an increase in the hourly rate for overtime.

   - Insurance (Risk Management) - (+3.14%) Ms. Zemienieski reiterated that she estimated the increases in this budget because she has yet to receive premium notices from CIRMA with the actual rate increases. She noted that it is possible this budget can come down before a final budget is adopted for referendum.

   - Assessor – (+57.49%) Ms. Belles noted that the primary increase in this budget is in the Salary/Wages line and a result of the Town replacing its part-time (1-day per week) Assessor and two field assessors with a full-time Assessor.

   - Registrar of Voters – (+31%) It was noted that the increase in this budget was related to unfunded state mandates such as, extended voting hours to comply with statutorily required early voting, and software updates to the voting machines.

- Shared Services – (+8.14%) Ms. Belles advised that the increases in this budget are related to the increased cost of technology, a one-time increase of $10k to the IT Desktop Specialist position to bring it up to market rates, and the state mandated transfer of the Town's website to a .gov domain.

- Grange Hall – (+15.4) Ms. Zemienieski advised that the increase in this budget is driven by a $2,430.00 increase in the Building Maintenance line added for an electrical repair. Mr. Gelston noted that, while the percentage of the increase was significant, the overall budget is small in relation to other departments.

- Municipal Office Complex/Central Services – (+14%) Ms. Zemienieski stated that the main drivers of the increase in this budget were the increased cost of electricity and propane and the fee to join the River Valley Transit bus service.

- Economic Development Commission – (+7.24%) There was a $2k increase in this budget. Mr. Gelston reiterated that, while the percentage of the increase in this budget was significant, the overall budget base is small.

- Police Department – (+4.07%) Ms. Belles advised that the increase in the Police Department's budget is due to the increased cost of state mandated equipment.

- Building Department – (+8.88%) Ms. Belles noted that, per agreement, the Building Official's salary was increased 60 days after his hire date and again 6 months after that. She added that negotiations with the clerical union also resulted in an increase of $.50/hr. plus 2.5% overall for the department's secretary.

- Snow and Ice Removal – (+3.76%) Mr. Gelston noted that the FY2025-2026 Snow and Ice Removal budget has been significantly depleted due to this winter's storms.

- Senior Services – Ms. Belles advised that the Salaries/Wages line for the drivers of the Senior Center buses had, since COVID, historically exceeded its budgeted amount and that was corrected in the FY2026-2027 budget.

- Cemeteries – (+88.24%) Ms. Zemienieski advised that $15k had been added to this budget for tree care/removal and provided the history of that budget line item.

- Recreation Commission – (+4.6%) There was a brief discussion regarding the increase in the Salaries/Wages budget line for parking lot attendants. Ms. Belles advised that the attendants monitor the beach parking lot for resident passes and purchased season pass holders.

- Greens, Grounds and Fields – (+4.07) Ms. Zemienieski advised that most of the increase in this budget is driven by an increase from two to three employees and adjusting overtime pay to match what other Town employees are receiving.

- Fringe Benefits – Ms. Belles stated that the municipal coalition is still negotiating with health/dental/life insurance providers; however, the Social Security, retirement, and Unemployment benefits are all based on percentages of the Town's payroll.

In response to a request from Mr. Dill, Finance Director Belles provided the following information:

- FY2024-2025 Town government operating actuals were $14,503,705.00.
- FY2025-2026 Town government approved Operating budget was $18,806,987.00.
- FY2026-2027 Town government proposed Operating budget is $18,048,199.00.

There was a general discussion regarding the Ambulance Association's request for a budget line of $126k in FY26-27. Ms. Belles advised that she will include the Ambulance Association's funding request in the Contingency line and the BOF will have to make the decision as to whether that subsidy will remain in Contingency or if a new budget line will be created for the Association.

Mr. Sevigny advised that the proposed FY26-27 Town Operating budget is $632,788.00 (3.4%) less than last year's approved Town government budget, exclusive of Capital. In response to a question from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles confirmed that Debt Service was reduced $176k this year because the Town had paid off some debt.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to recommend to the Board of Finance for fiscal year 2026-2027, a budget of $18,174,199.00 which represents town government, debt service and interfund transfers. The Board of Selectmen budget has made no provision for any capital within the interfund transfers that would be funded by taxation. The Board of Selectmen requests the opportunity to work with the Board of Finance to evaluate capital needs (in accordance with the Capital Policy) and any state and federal grants. Unanimous aye.

Mr. Gelston thanked all of the Town's department heads for their work on the FY2026-2027 budget.

3. Public Comment: Mr. Callahan congratulated the Selectmen, Ms. Belles, and Ms. Zemienieski of their good work on the FY2026-2027 budget. He added that the Town also has an opportunity to look at increasing revenue; Mr. Callahan suggested that the conveyance tax is low but noted that the Building Department's revenue has gone up. He recommended that, at the Public Hearing on the budget, the BOS should note that the Town's budget includes some BOE expenses in addition to the typical Town government expenses.

4. Potential Budget Resolution: The Selectmen voted on a budget resolution earlier in the meeting and it is included in the minutes above under the General Overall Operating/Capital Budget Review.

5. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to adjourn the meeting at 6:29 p.m. .

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary