

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 13, 2026
5:30 p.m.**

Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce Presiding

Present: Council Member Shane A. Garrabrant
Council Member Robert O. Kimball
Council Member Douglas E. Osborne, Jr.
Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen
Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce

Also Present: Eric F. Wagenaar, City Manager

City staff present: James Mills, Erica Anderson, Thomas Compo, Scott Weller, Matt Timerman, Michael Kellogg, Charles Donoghue, Erica LeClerc, Brian MacCue, Aaron Harvill

DISCUSSION

Changes to the Proposed Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget

City Comptroller James Mills reviewed his report updating Council with the effect of the changes that have been made to the proposed budget. He explained that bids on the processing chemicals for the Water and Wastewater Treatment Plants were received after the proposed budget was released so the proposed rate increases need to be adjusted accordingly. He advised chemical bids for water increased by \$150,000 causing the proposed water rate increase to change from 5% to 7% and the chemical bids for sewer decreased by \$220,000 causing the proposed sewer rate increase to go from 3% down to 2%. He then reviewed the adjustments that have already been made to the proposed project. They were the following: Decrease in the total taxable assessed value due to the completion of the finalized tax roll; Deletion of the basketball court resurfacing; Reduction in the amount for the self-contained breathing apparatus compressor maintenance and testing; Deletion of sidewalk repairs at the fire station; Elimination of the police evidence van; Elimination of the DPW municipal maintenance articulating loader; Elimination of the Engineering Civil Engineer II position; Elimination of the Police Department Records Clerk/Parking Enforcement Officer position; Elimination of the Code Enforcement Secretary position; Elimination of a Bus Driver position; Reduction in the transfer to the Library Fund due to the elimination of a Library Clerk position; and, addition of funding to open the North Hamilton playground. He indicated that these changes would bring the proposed tax levy increase of 12% down to 7.62% and the proposed tax rate increase of 11.1% down to 7.85%. He reviewed the changes that had been made to the Capital Projects Fund, which were the following: Moving the basketball lighting project from FY2027-28 to FY 2030-31; Deleting the fairgrounds YMCA parking lot project from FY 2027-28; and, deleting the golf course clubhouse roof project from FY2027-28.

Lastly, Mr. Mills reviewed the items that were outstanding and still needed approval from Council. They were the following: Increase funding for hydro consultant from \$50,000 to \$100,000 based on initial proposed scope of work; Increase Fire Department retirement expense by \$46,000 due to recent NYS Retirement System 207-a determination; and, increase revenue by \$80,000 and DPW Municipal Maintenance contracted services by \$60,000 due to the recent award of a NYS DEC Invasive Species

grant of \$80,000 (\$20,000 balance already funded by staff). He summarized that all of these changes will result in a proposed tax levy increase of 8.28% and proposed tax rate increase of 8.52%.

Wastewater Internship

A report was available for Council to review.

Council Member Shoen asked if the internships assist in covering vacation time.

Superintendent of Water Aaron Harvill provided more information regarding both the college and high school intern programs and described the purpose they serve as well as the functions performed. He indicated that they do not cover vacation time but do provide seasonal operational support as well as complete some work that otherwise would need to be done by an outside engineering firm.

Executive Session

Mayor Pierce announced that Council planned to move into Executive Session to discuss personnel.

Motion was made by Council Member Robert O. Kimball to move into Executive Session to discuss the employment history of a particular individual, or matters leading to the appointment, employment, promotion, demotion, discipline, suspension, dismissal, or removal of a particular person.

Motion was seconded by Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen and carried with all voting in favor thereof.

Council moved into Executive Session at 5:41 p.m.

City Manager Eric Wagenaar and City Comptroller James Mills were asked to join Council in Executive Session at 7:00 p.m. and returned to Council Chambers at 8:30 pm.

Council reconvened at 8:57 p.m.

Changes to the Proposed Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget (continued)

Mayor Pierce reminded Council that staff needs approval on the outstanding items listed on the last page of Mr. Mills' report.

Regarding increasing the funding for the hydro consultant from \$50,000 to \$100,000, Council Member Garrabrant, Council Member Kimball, Council Member Osborne and Mayor Pierce agreed.

Council Member Shoen said he would support this but asked if Council could provide guidance on how the money is to be spent.

Mr. Wagenaar agreed.

Regarding increasing the Fire Department retirement expense by \$46,000 due to recent NYS Retirement System 207-a determination, Mayor Pierce indicated that it was mandated.

The rest of Council agreed.

Regarding increasing revenue by \$80,000 and DPW Municipal Maintenance contracted services by \$60,000 due to the recent award of NYS DEC Invasive Species grant of \$80,000, all members of Council offered support.

Flynn Pool Update

A report was available for Council to review.

Council Member Kimball said the proposal was to open the pool for three days, and at the Budget Office Hours, a resident suggested opening the pool every day for fewer hours, so he forwarded this suggestion to the City Manager. He noted that he supports keeping the pool fully open because the operating cost, as well as the cost of chemicals, will be the same regardless of the number of days that it is open. He commented that the new proposal to open the pool five days a week for five hours each day is a better distribution of hours.

The rest of Council agreed.

Golf Course Update

Mayor Pierce summarized the report detailing the additional expense for properly closing the golf course in the fall in hopes of obtaining someone to lease it the following season.

Discussion ensued about the Request for Proposal (RFP) for leasing the golf course and the potential of receiving proposals within the timeline for this season's closing.

Mr. Mills clarified that the total expense would be approximately \$20,000 to properly close the golf course for use again next year.

Council Member Shoen, Council Member Kimball and Council Member Osborne expressed support for this funding to be in the budget

Demolition Costs

Mayor Pierce mentioned that during previous budget sessions, there was a proposal to decrease demolition cost from \$200,000 to \$100,000.

Council Member Shoen, Council Member Garrabrant and Council Member Osborne expressed support for this change.

Council Member Kimball advised that the funding should remain the same since there has been a push to get rid of blight.

Funding for the Zoo

Mayor Pierce mentioned that during a previous budget session, Council Member Kimball requested that \$50,000 be added to the budget for the zoo.

Council Member Kimball explained his reasons for this request.

Mayor Pierce noted that she supports the zoo personally as a membership holder and attends many zoo events, but reminded Council that the City already supports the zoo with in-kinds services totaling approximately \$80,000. She said that, given the current financial situation of the City, she cannot support any additional funding to the zoo.

Council Member Osborne agreed with the Mayor.

Council Member Shoen and Council Member Garrabrant also offered support for continuing with the in-kind services only.

Parades and Block Parties

In response to Mayor Pierce’s inquiry, Mr. Wagenaar explained that his hope is to have organizations reimburse the cost of City’s support for these types of events, mentioning overtime and equipment use.

Council Member Osborne and Council Member Kimball said this is a reasonable request.

Council Member Shoen wondered if block parties could be held on Court Street or in J.B. Wise parking lot at a lower cost than closing one side of Public Square.

Mr. Wagenaar replied that this option has been discussed with the block party committee, and they state that they are more comfortable with the current location.

Noting that the Farmer’s Market closes part of Sterling Street, Council Member Shoen wondered if the Farmer’s Market could be held in the Park once a month with different hours for individuals not able to attend during the workday.

Mr. Wagenaar said that it could be a consideration for next season.

Additional Budget Sessions and Timeline

Mayor Pierce reviewed the timeline from now until the approval of the budget. She said there is not a need to schedule another budget work session but there are personnel-related items to finalize which can be done during an executive session after the regular meeting held on May 18. She advised that the May 18 meeting will be left open so that Council can meet again, possibly during that week, to finalize the adoption of the budget.

Budget session ended at 9:23 p.m.

Ann M. Saunders

City Clerk