

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
REGULAR SESSION MEETING MINUTES  
BLACKSTONE MUNICIPAL CENTER  
15 ST. PAUL STREET  
JOHN ELDRIDGE MEETING ROOM**

**JANUARY 6, 2026 (6:30 PM)**

Town Clerk  
Town of Blackstone

FEB 25 REC'D

Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
RECEIVED

**1. Pledge of Allegiance & Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by Chairman Keefe. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the Board members and meeting attendees.

**2. Roll Call - Attendance**

Present were Chairman Daniel Keefe, Vice Chairman Michael Sweeney, Selectwoman Mary Bulso, Selectman Edward Castonguay, and Selectman Gino Olaes. Also present were Town Administrator Chad Lovett, Assistant Town Administrator/Town Accountant Lauren Taylor, Department of Public Works Superintendent James Sullivan, Department of Public Works Assistant Superintendent Gary Bibbo, Water and Sewer Commission Chairman Bruce Paterson, and engineer representative Sam Kenney from Weston and Sampson.

**3. Accept Minutes of Meetings of Workshop Sessions & Regular Session**

None.

**4. Citizens Forum: Good & Welfare - Public**

Jeff Silverstein (Chair, Finance Committee) asked about potential future use of the largely vacant JFK/Maloney school building and whether the Town plans to formally reclaim or repurpose the space.

Chairman Keefe noted this would be addressed under future Board agenda items.

Michael Catalano, 20 Mendon Street, raised concerns about rising property taxes and questioned why the Town did not pursue a split tax rate, citing the burden on fixed-income residents and the rising costs of services.

Chairman Keefe acknowledged the concerns and noted the Town had voted for a single rate as it has for several years, including when Mr. Catalano was a Selectman himself.

**5. Public Hearings-**

None.

**6. Correspondence**

None.

**7. Town Announcements & Events**

Chairman Keefe announced that the Budget Workshop is scheduled for this Saturday, January 10 at 9:00 AM in the Town Hall. Department heads will present preliminary FY27 budgets.

**8. Liaison Reports/Boards & Commissions**

Selectwoman Bulso stated the Central Mass Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) will be having their quarterly meeting this Thursday, January 8th. She also noted that the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's monthly Executive Board meeting will be January 15. They are also hosting a free networking event (hospitality & food/beverage sector) on January 8, 9:00 AM at Linwood Mill.

Selectman Castonguay also noted that CMRPC is going to be doing an integrated land use strategy regional dialogue meeting on January 20th as well.

Chairman Keefe provided a detailed update regarding the potential future use of the JFK/Maloney school complex and broader municipal facilities planning efforts. In recent weeks, he toured the Maloney building with the Senior Center Director, Town Administrator Chad Lovett, and other Town officials to evaluate its potential as a site for an expanded Senior Center or community center. The Maloney side of the building, which is no longer used for regular school functions, offers extensive square footage, including a gymnasium and dozens of classrooms. Keefe noted the space could support multiple uses such as senior housing, recreational programming (including pickleball), or even housing multiple town departments. He stated that he will be meeting with representatives from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) and the school superintendent to explore whether the space could be repurposed without triggering a financial clawback from the MSBA related to a prior roof project. He emphasized that the school district still actively uses the Kennedy side of the complex. Any transition in use must follow proper procedure: the School Committee must declare the property surplus, and the MSBA must agree. Some potential programming, such as intergenerational or educational partnerships, might allow continued use of the space without violating MSBA requirements.

Selectman Sweeney requested to the Chair prior to the meeting that the Board include a discussion of the recently completed feasibility study for the Town Hall and Public Safety buildings on a future agenda.

Chairman Keefe confirmed that the study is complete and ready to be reviewed by the Board. The presentation of the study is tentatively scheduled for the January 27, 2026 Board of Selectmen meeting, pending availability of the project architect.

Mr. Silverstein asked when the facilities study would be made public and discussed.

Chairman Keefe confirmed it will be placed on the January 27 agenda and encouraged Mr. Silverstein and other residents to attend and participate.

The Board emphasized the importance of maximizing use of existing town-owned buildings, rather than pursuing costly new construction, and acknowledged the tremendous potential offered by the Maloney building for a variety of community needs.

## **9. Town Administrator Report**

Mr. Lovett reported that the Roosevelt Electrical project's engineering evaluation is still ongoing but they have more on site inspections scheduled for Thursday (weather dependent).

Mr. Lovett also reported that the bridge boring tests are complete. Resistance was found at 45 feet and one boring reached 3 feet of bedrock. The preliminary design work is now underway.

Mr. Lovett stated that no bids for the 250th Carnival Contract were received during the RFP process. Chairman Keefe independently contacted Fiesta Shows, who have now committed to the event. Town Counsel reviewed procurement rules and found it acceptable due to lack of bids and scope. Contract review is in process.

The FY27 Budget process is ongoing. Departmental budget requests and capital items are under review. Warrant article requests are due by January 29, 2026.

Mr. Lovett will be sending a poll to the Site Prioritization group for availability to hold an initial meeting and organize membership.

## **10. Old Business**

- **a) FY27 Budget and Warrant Article Updates**

A draft budget was distributed to the Board for review ahead of the January 10 budget workshop. It will also be posted on the Town Website prior to Saturday. Ms. Taylor cautioned that the 10% increase is preliminary and includes several items that will be reduced or shifted to warrant articles. Major contributors include fixed costs (e.g., school retirement assessments), with adjustments expected before finalization.

- **b) Preliminary Review of Budget**

Saturday's budget workshop will feature department-level presentations, including DPW, Fire, Police, Town Clerk, Assessor, Council on Aging, Treasurer/Collector, Library, and General Government. It starts at 9 AM at Town Hall.

## 11. New Business

- **a) Discussion of Water Treatment Facility/Discolored Water Issue with Water Operators and Engineers**

Chairman Keefe moved out of agenda order to address the discolored water concerns in Town.

Town Administrator Chad Lovett provided a brief timeline of the events. In early December, the final pipe segment was cut to connect Elm Street to the new filtration plant (per DEP requirements). There was an unexpected outcome where valves failed to hold pressure, requiring a wider shutdown of Elm Street, which led to brown water throughout sections of Town. Right before and after Christmas there was a significant uptick in resident complaints about discolored water. DPW responded with emergency flushing, especially near Pickering Road, Farm Street, and Park Street.

Engineer Sam Kenney (Weston & Sampson) explained that the new plant is effectively removing iron and manganese from groundwater using a pressure filtration system. Discolored water is aesthetic and not a health hazard. The water is continuously monitored by real-time chemical analyzers (chlorine, pH) connected to automated alarms. Water operators are well-trained, proactive, and closely monitor the system.

Mr. Sullivan (DPW) confirmed that the sediment accumulation in water mains is normal for aging infrastructure. Flushing was conducted extensively after complaints. Brown water was likely caused by flow reversal, stirring up sediment in mains. Despite effective treatment, residual iron/manganese in older pipes will take time to clear.

Ms. Doreen Stockman, a resident of Glenside Drive, voiced frustration over the Town's handling of the December water disruption and subsequent discoloration. She questioned whether the Board of Selectmen was aware of the incident on December 10, when hydrants on Elm Street were open and brown water was reported. She noted residents on sewer lines face additional costs when flushing their systems as advised by the town. Ms. Stockman claimed she did not see the promised December 11th public notice from the Town and pressed officials for clarification.

Chairman Keefe responded that he had been on-site for several hours during the incident and had been in communication with DPW and the Town Administrator.

Mr. Lovett stated that a website notice was posted but acknowledged it may not have been easily visible or properly linked.

Ms. Stockman strongly emphasized that better communication protocols are essential, particularly for those not on social media.

Resident Tanya Polak, 10 Meadow Lane, presented physical evidence of the water quality issue by bringing a jar of brown water collected after it had already passed through her home's filtration system. She described the water as "tea-colored sludge" and noted that the sample came after filtration, raising serious concerns about health and safety. She stated the brown water has caused plumbing issues, damage to household appliances, and forced costly repairs. She expressed frustration that no official updates were provided prior to or immediately following the incident and said she relied on social media posts from the Police Department to understand what was happening. She urged the Town to take proactive responsibility, both in communication and in reimbursing affected residents for damage and excess usage.

Town Administrator Lovett admitted the December incident revealed gaps in notification. Residents were advised to call DPW during business hours, or police dispatch after hours to report brown water. Notifications are now being posted on the Town website, social media, and email/text alerts via the Town's Notify Me platform. Residents must opt-in to receive notifications (only 73 residents were subscribed at the beginning of the meeting and later increased to 76). Proposed improvements included adding top-banner alerts on the website, including mailers and magnets with water bills outlining flushing steps and emergency contacts, promoting sign-ups during elections, town meetings, and through the Senior Work-Off Program, and continuing cross-posting website updates to social media. He also stated that CodeRED, the Town's former reverse 911 system, is down nationwide due to a cyberattack. Until restored, the Town will use the

website & Notify Me system, social media, in-person alerts and door knocking (e.g., flyers at homes), and coordination with Police and Fire Departments. Emergency Management Director Chief Roy would lead an Incident Command System (ICS) response if needed.

Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Kenney provided further education about the water system's aging infrastructure and pipe conditions. Water mains, especially those from the 1950s to 1970s, are prone to biofilm buildup. Older pipes (1890s-1930s) in some regions suffer from tuberculation, a thick mineral crust inside the pipe. Blackstone's system is typical for New England and is not worse than other towns. Discolored water may recur during system flushing or flow changes, but the water remains safe.

Selectman Castonguay shared sentiments about his visit to the water treatment plant after Christmas. He reported being impressed by the professionalism of the operators. He also emphasized their deep concern and commitment to water safety. He advocated for a video tour of the treatment plant to educate the public.

Chairman Keefe added that plans are in motion to film a walkthrough with Weston & Sampson however the video will exclude sensitive infrastructure details to maintain security. Similar content will be considered for the sewer system, to improve public understanding of infrastructure. He also noted that residents who flushed water for days were concerned about rising water/sewer bills. He stated he had previously emailed the Town Administrator requesting a plan to consider abatements for those impacted and/or a review of flushed gallons and potential credit on next bills. The Water & Sewer Commission will discuss possible relief packages. He reiterated that the water is safe; all testing confirms this and the oversight remains tight. He also agreed that communication must improve. Additional flushing and plant calibrations will continue in upcoming weeks/months. Residents should report discolored water to the DPW during business hours and call Police Dispatch after hours (non-emergency line). Residents should also sign up for email/text alerts via the Town of Blackstone website. Engineer Sam Kenney, DPW Superintendent James Sullivan, and Water/Sewer Chair Bruce Patterson were thanked for their time and insight. Chairman Keefe also reiterated the Town's focus on public trust, transparency, and system improvements.

- **b) Approve Home Occupation License Renewal for Bruce Wilson, G.W. Site Solutions, 25 Milk Street**
  - Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve Home Occupation License Renewal for Bruce Wilson, G.W. Site Solutions, 25 Milk Street; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.
  
- **c) Matters that the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen did not Reasonably Anticipate Discussing Forty-Eight Hours Prior to the Meeting**

None.
  
- **d) Approval of Payroll Warrant #26EWA16, #26PW16**
  - Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve payroll warrants #26EWA16 and #26PW16; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.
  
- **e) Approval of Vendor Warrant #26EW16A, #26EW16B**
  - Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve vendor warrant #26EW16A and #26EW16B; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

## 12. Future Board Agenda Items

Vice Chairman Sweeney requested the Feasibility Study for Town Hall & Public Safety Complex be added to an upcoming agenda for discussion. The Board agreed to bring forward the recently completed facilities study. He also requested an update on the police and fire departments' proposed radio system upgrade.

Mr. Lovett confirmed that Police Chief Gilmore had visited earlier that day regarding including the upgrade in the FY27 capital plan and warrant articles.

Mr. Sweeney recalled prior discussions about bringing in a radio engineer for further review and requested a follow-up meeting be scheduled before Town Meeting, due to the size and scope of the potential million-dollar expenditure.

The Board briefly discussed exploring the potential for dispatch regionalization, possibly in cooperation with neighboring towns. It was noted that 911 funding can support such transitions in regional systems. The Board

agreed this would be a future agenda item, potentially requiring Executive Session discussion due to service structure implications. The Board expressed interest in pursuing regional partnerships only if local departments remain under Blackstone's operational control.

### 13. Good & Welfare - Selectmen

Selectman Castonguay began by wishing a happy birthday to Zach Zielinski and Ray Nault, the Town's very own Nashville recording artist, both celebrating birthdays on this day. He expressed hope that residents are finding value and solace in watching the Selectmen meetings, encouraging more people to tune in as these meetings are the best source of reliable town information. He cautioned residents against relying on Facebook for accurate answers, emphasizing the importance of utilizing official town services and contacting Town departments directly. He acknowledged that communication around recent water issues could have been significantly improved, stating that a proactive approach is always better than a reactive one. He shared that he would soon be taking a short vacation to Puerto Rico, planning to relax on the beach with a couple of books, including *Code of the Heart*, a book written by resident Tanya Polak. He concluded with optimism about the new year and gratitude for the work everyone does for the Town.

Selectman Olaes encouraged residents to check out the Council on Aging and Senior Center for a wide variety of January activities. He also highlighted several upcoming programs at the Blackstone Public Library:

- Lego Club (Ages 6+): Blackstone residents can sign up starting January 5th; open to the public January 12th.
- Jigsaw Puzzle Donation Drive: From Jan 5–22, adults can donate puzzles in exchange for tickets to claim a different one.
- Music & Movement (Ages 1–5) with Deb Hudgins: Registration opens January 12th.

He also wished residents Ron Baillou, Keith Van Syke, Chairman Dan Keefe, and Wendy Greenstein happy birthdays. He praised the dedication and commitment of the DPW staff, highlighting their willingness to work long hours, sometimes unpaid, to respond to issues like the recent water discoloration event. He emphasized the professionalism and deep care these employees show for the Town and its residents, stating it's humbling to know that while most residents are asleep, Town workers are out resolving issues for the community. He thanked them for their service, especially during the holiday season.

Selectwoman Bulso offered thanks to Mr. Lovett and Joe from the DPW for quickly installing a new flagpole holder at the museum, allowing them to fly their open flag again. She reminded residents that tax abatement forms are now available in the Assessor's Office and online, with a strict deadline of February 1st. She also promoted the upcoming Budget Workshop on Saturday, January 10th at 9:00 AM, urging residents to attend, learn, and ask questions about how the Town budget works. She concluded by thanking the DPW for their excellent work during the recent snowstorm and for their efforts addressing the brown water issue, noting that she believes many concerns were clarified during this meeting.

Vice Chairman Sweeney added his thanks to Superintendent Jimmy Sullivan, the Water & Sewer Commission, and Town staff for maintaining clear, safe water 99% of the time, despite the occasional incidents during firefighting or hydrant flushing. He acknowledged he personally experienced brown and cloudy water during the recent event but expressed satisfaction with the water's taste and quality. He also extended condolences to the Salomi family on the passing of Billy Salomi, a longtime Millville resident and friend from his youth.

Chairman Keefe expressed appreciation to all who attended the meeting and shared concerns. He thanked Superintendent Sullivan, the water operators, and representatives from Weston & Sampson for their efforts during the water event. He reiterated the importance of communication and urged residents and officials alike to share official notices and posts on social media to reduce misinformation and disinformation. He offered strong praise for Superintendent Jimmy Sullivan, who is expected to retire in December 2026 after 45 years of service. He described Sullivan as a dedicated and invaluable asset to the town, with deep institutional knowledge that cannot easily be replaced. He shared an anecdote about Sullivan correctly predicting underground infrastructure location within half an inch, underscoring his unmatched expertise. He also addressed misinformation about recent property tax bills, specifically responding to public comments made earlier by former Selectman Mr. Catalano. He clarified that town spending is not determined by the Board of Selectmen but by Town Meeting, the Town's legislative body. He noted that Mr. Catalano had previously voted for the single tax rate during his tenure and emphasized that not much has changed since then to warrant such concerns. He concluded by reiterating that communication improvements, including exploring the development of a video tour of the new Water Filtration Plant, are priorities moving forward. He encouraged more residents to sign up for Town website notifications to ensure timely and accurate updates.

### 14. Adjournment

- Motion: Michael Sweeney made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 PM; seconded by Mary Bulso. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

**Time:** 8:35 PM

**Next Meeting:** January 10, 2026

**Meeting Minutes Respectfully Submitted By:** Sara Peters