

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

Town Clerk
Town of Blackstone

JANUARY 10, 2026 (9:00 AM)

FEB 25 REC'D

Time: _____
RECEIVED

1. Pledge of Allegiance & Call to Order

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the Board members and attendees. Chairman Keefe called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

2. Roll Call - Attendance

Present were Chairman Keefe, Vice Chairman Michael Sweeney, Selectman Edward Castonguay, Selectwoman Mary Bulso, and Selectman Gino Olaes. Also present were Town Administrator Chad Lovett, Town Accountant/Assistant Town Administrator Lauren Taylor, Department of Public Works Superintendent James Sullivan, Chief of Police Gregory Gilmore, Fire Chief Kevin Roy, Town Clerk Tara Sullivan, Council on Aging Director Tiziana Milano, Collector/Treasurer Matt Ryan, and Library Director Lisa Cheever.

3. BOS Budget Hearing-

• **a) James Sullivan- Department of Public Works**

Mr. Sullivan, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW), presented the DPW's preliminary FY27 budget, noting that the figures are subject to adjustment pending further administrative review.

Chairman Keefe emphasized at the outset that this is the first round of public discussion, and the budget has not yet been vetted or finalized.

Key budget line items and notes:

- Professional & Technical Services: \$15,000; 0% change; Covers engineering services, dam inspections, and bidding assistance. Spending varies by year depending on dam reporting needs. Lake Hiawatha, Saranac, and Rollingbrook dams inspected as needed.
- DPW Superintendent Salary: \$135,300; -7%, Decrease due to changes in Sick Leave Buy Back.
- Highway Department Labor: \$708,430; - 2%; Reflects retirements, reduced longevity/sick time, and new hires starting at lower step levels.
- Highway Operational: \$44,250; -2%; Basically level-funded, but future review expected based on line-by-line volatility (e.g., supplies, phone expenses).
- Snow & Ice Removal: \$110,600; 0%; Annual symbolic increase to maintain legal authority to deficit spend under Mass. law. Final actuals vary depending on winter severity.
- Street Lighting: \$109,375; 0%; Budgeted high due to uncertainty in solar credits. Although the budget holds steady at \$109,375, actuals have been significantly lower due to solar credits. It is reviewed annually with accounting/administration. Amount retained to cover variability in credit values.
- Repair & Maintenance: \$100,000; 0%; Funds ongoing infrastructure needs.
- Construction & Maintenance: \$630,000; 100%; Includes road paving, sidewalks, drainage. Will be reduced to \$300,000 once corresponding \$300,000 Warrant Article is created. Other funding includes free cash and Chapter 90.

- Street Sweeping: \$3,500; 0%; Level-funded.

The Construction & Maintenance line item will be reduced from \$630,000 to \$300,000. Additional \$300,000 to be included via warrant article. Chapter 90 reimbursement varies annually (~\$130K to \$160K).

Pickering Road was identified as the worst road in town. It requires major drainage work due to elevation errors in prior development. Concerns discussed about paving roads near ongoing development (i.e., heavy equipment damage). Crestwood Drive and Residential Lane cost over \$300,000 combined last year. Sidewalk repairs (e.g., Canal Street) cost over \$330,000 due to prevailing wage and demo work.

The Board questioned whether smaller equipment (chainsaws, pumps, hoses, nozzles, etc.) should be grouped in a warrant article rather than in operational line items. The consensus was that small, unexpected items should remain in the operational budget to allow flexibility. Warrant articles are typically reserved for capital items only.

Chairman Keefe and Ms. Taylor emphasized that underspending returns to free cash, whereas underbudgeting results in emergency requests or reserve fund usage.

Board members and Mr. Lovett praised Superintendent Sullivan for keeping equipment running long past its expected life. They also expressed appreciation for his fiscal responsibility and maintenance work.

Selectman Castonguay requested that future discussions include clearer itemization of known vs. unknown equipment needs. It was noted that Mr. has historically submitted well-justified warrant articles for large capital needs.

Water and sewer budgets will be presented at a future session. A new hydrant was installed on Menden/Main with no major complaints about water discoloration reported.

Chairman Keefe reminded the group that despite mild snow totals, salt/sanding operations have been frequent and costly. expressed appreciation for Jimmy's fiscal responsibility and maintenance work.

- **b) Chief Kevin Roy- Fire Department, Ambulance, Emergency Management**

Chief Roy and Deputy Chief Brian Gartland presented preliminary FY27 budgets for the Fire Department, Ambulance Service, and Emergency Management. The initial budget figure of \$1,924,075 was noted, with multiple line items and structural issues discussed in detail. A duplicate firefighter line will be removed, reducing the total budget by \$70,138 resulting in an adjusted department budget of approximately \$1,854,000.

Key budget line items and notes:

- Salaries: Chief Roy's salary includes a 3% contractual increase, but he clarified that his contract is up in June, and changes are possible based on negotiations with the Town Administrator and the Board. All other staff salaries (including Deputy Chief and line firefighters) are contractual. Chief Roy noted an erroneous extra full-time firefighter line item that will be removed, resulting in an anticipated \$70,138 savings. One full-time firefighter position remains unfilled, contributing to overtime usage.
- Overtime & Longevity: Overtime was increased by 2%, to better reflect contractual requirements and recent usage trends. Challenges in filling shifts, injuries, and contractual mandates continue to drive high overtime costs. Longevity pay increases are due to staff reaching step milestones.
- Telephone/Technology: Chief Roy proposed a modest increase in telephone/technology costs to support tablet-based EMS reporting, enhancing real-time hospital notifications (ePCR), enabling faster billing processes, and improving operational efficiency for crews in the field.

- On-Call/Part-time Staff: A \$135,000 increase in the on-call/part-time staff line reflects a pilot program to staff a second ambulance 12 hours/day, 7 days/week using per diem paramedics. This program is intended to improve response times, particularly in the Millerville/Rathbun Street area, increase ambulance availability and reduce missed billing opportunities, and minimize impact to taxpayers by funding it through ambulance receipts via a warrant article, rather than operating budget. Ms Taylor explained the financial structure. Since the program is not yet running, the prudent approach is to pilot it for one year using ambulance receipts, evaluate cost data, and potentially integrate into the operating budget later. Chief Roy emphasized that Blackstone residents do not receive copays for ambulance service, unlike when mutual aid is used from surrounding towns. The pilot program could reduce mutual aid reliance, keep revenue in town, and improve service equity. Selectwoman Mary Bulso and Vice Chair Sweeney both highlighted that improved local ambulance coverage benefits taxpayers directly, both financially and in terms of safety. During the discussion, Selectman Gino Olaes referenced information and figures previously discussed in a private meeting with Chief Roy. This prompted a strong response from Chairman Keefe, who emphasized the need for transparent, equal access to information among Board members. Chairman Keefe stated that any request from any member of the Board of Selectmen going to department heads must go through the Town Administrator and the response must then be shared with the entire Board. He stressed that this protocol is necessary so all Selectmen operate with the same information and that such unilateral meetings undermine board cohesion. He also reaffirmed that a full Board meeting with the Chief, Deputy Chief, and Town Administrator would be scheduled to further develop the Station 2 plan, but not before appropriate budget structure and funding mechanisms are in place.
- Captain Position: Chief Roy requested reinstatement of a Fire Captain position, which historically existed but has been vacant for some time. The role would provide command structure between lieutenants and administration, manage departmental training programs, serve as Safety Officer on incidents, and add supervision to growing staff (~30 members total). The position is not a new headcount, but rather a reclassification of an existing officer-level role.
- Ambulance Professional/Technical Services: Billing-related increases were noted as higher EMS call volume results in higher processing fees (a sign of increased revenue).
- Emergency Management: This remained level-funded, with concerns raised about potential future grant shortfalls. This budget also covers Code Red, generator maintenance, and emergency radio infrastructure.
- Additional Equipment: Increase from ~\$12,000 to \$25,000 to ensure flexibility for immediate gear or equipment replacement, especially following damage during incidents. Chief Roy emphasized the Town's reliance on grants for major purchases, but noted uncertainty in future grant availability (especially via MEMA or FEMA).

- **c) Chief Gregory Gilmore- Police Department, Dispatch, & Animal Control**

Chief Gilmore presented preliminary FY27 budgets for the Police Department, Dispatch, and Animal Control.

For the Police Department:

- FY2026 Total Budget Request: \$2,379,156. Majority: The majority of the increase is contractual. Two corrections were noted. "Officer in Charge" line item shows a 13% increase but should be level-funded. A 12% increase for a specific officer reflects a step increase and educational incentive (bachelor's degree).
- Sick Leave Buyback: Increased due to several veteran officers reaching eligibility for buyback. Line item is contractually obligated.
- New Police Officer Request: A new patrol officer is requested and is the only non-contractual increase. Two current patrol officers were moved to specialized roles (one Full-time Detective and one Full-time School Resource Officer (SRO). These

positions were never backfilled, resulting in understaffing. 8 understaffed shifts in a 10-week rotation are currently being filled with overtime. The addition of the new officer will reduce overtime and improve coverage. Blackstone fully funds its SRO as that is mandated by the state. Millville's SRO is a shared officer, whereas Blackstone's is dedicated due to school location. The school district also hires additional details (coverage during day), which are managed by Blackstone PD.

- Overtime: 2% increase for FY26 (contractual). Overtime is expected to decrease once the department is fully staffed. Some recent overtime spikes were caused by retirements and resignations.
- Expenses: Level-funded across all expense lines, except for a \$500 increase for vehicle supplies (due to increased tire costs) and a small increase in "Other Supplies" for miscellaneous needs.
- Uniforms: Uniform allowances (5%, 7%, 7%) are all contractual.
- Hazard Pay: Contractually tied to officers carrying AEDs and Narcan as they considered duties outside their standard role.

For Dispatch:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$372,367; 10% decrease in one salary line due to hiring a new dispatcher at a lower rate.
- Part-time Dispatcher: increased slightly as there are now 3 trained part-time dispatchers and the department is seeking a 4th. One part-timer has expressed interest in moving to full-time to replace Al Dugas, who plans to retire in October.
- Vacation and Sick Leave Buyback: Lines increased due to expected payout for the retiring dispatcher (hired in 2002). The dispatcher has accumulated significant time due to low use of vacation and sick leave.
- Expenses: Fully level-funded.

For Animal Control:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$50,000; level-funded. The service is provided through regional agreement with Uxbridge and other towns. Uxbridge operates the regional ACO program, while Blackstone manages the shelter. No expected MOU changes this year. Future funding adjustments are anticipated due to rising costs (vehicles, equipment) and wear on vehicles (two in use, not yet in disrepair) but are not required this year. A portion of ACO costs is offset by revenue (e.g., fees for housing animals).

• **d) Tara Sullivan- Town Clerk, Elections, Board of Registrars**

Ms. Sullivan presented preliminary FY27 budgets for the Town Clerk's Office, Elections, and the Board of Registrars.

For Town Clerk's Office:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$179,910; a 4% increase (mostly contractual). Nearly all line items are level-funded. Cost-saving efforts have been implemented over the last 7 years where possible. Vital records costs vary depending on birth and record volumes each year.
- Elected Official: \$75,000; a 9% increase. This line is not contractual and represents a proposed increase to bring the position more in line with the Town's salary study and the Massachusetts Town Clerks Association compensation data. Ms. Sullivan

said that this proposal is intended as a starting point for discussion with the Board and Administration.

- Staff Salaries (Office Assistant, Assistant Clerk): Line increases are contractual.
- Certification: This line item was removed this year (\$1,000 savings) as Ms. Sullivan does not plan to take the certification test this cycle.

Board members asked whether the Town Clerk participated in the official salary study.

Ms. Taylor clarified that the clerk's office did not directly participate, but data about the Town Clerk position was included in the final report (median and averages from comparable towns).

Ms. Sullivan mentioned the Town Clerks Association survey is more comprehensive and regularly updated, offering better comparisons by population and workload. She believes that compensation should consider population and registered voter volume, which directly affect clerk duties. She is open to continued discussion and negotiation to align compensation over time.

The Board recognized the need to address non-contractual compensation through phased adjustments but emphasized that the budget is still preliminary, and final recommendations will follow Finance Committee vetting.

For Elections:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$39,900; a 181% increase due to it being a major election year (State Primary in September 2026, Gubernatorial Election in November 2026, and Annual Town Election in April 2027. FY26 saw four elections and FY27 has three, but costs are up due to inflation (ballots, materials, etc.). The Senior work-off program is used extensively (estimated at \$20,000 to \$30,000 savings over five years).

For Board of Registrars:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$9,450; a 112% increase largely due to printing and part-time wages. Printing costs are up \$4,500,
- Printing: \$4,500; a 150% increase attributed to general cost increases. Notably, the Town now prints the census and street listings in-house, saving money versus outsourcing.
- Part-time Wages: Increased by \$500 to fill scheduling gaps when senior work-off volunteers are unavailable. One vacancy remains on the 4-member board. Must maintain bipartisan representation so no more than 2 members from the same political party. The Board certified thousands of initiative petition signatures during the past fall, highlighting its importance.

- **e) Robert Kluchevitz- Assessor's Office**

Mr. Kluchevitz was absent (in Tampa) but communicated his recommendations in advance. Chairman Keefe conveyed budget recommendations and rationale after conversations with him. The total original proposed budget was \$226,840 but according to Mr. Kluchevitz, it has been reduced to \$191,840.

Key budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$191,840
- Assistant Assessor Salary: \$90,000 line item reduced to \$10,000. The role is not currently staffed, and the remaining amount acts as a placeholder for unforeseen tasks.

- Regional Resource Group (RRG) Contract: Increased from \$69,500 to \$75,000. RRG will continue supporting the office for two more years to complete ongoing valuation work. The result is a net savings and allows for continuity and expertise from RRG while delaying the return of a full-time in-house assessor. Chairman Keefe emphasized the importance of RRG completing current revaluation projects and acknowledged the long-term goal of restoring a full-time in-house assessor working 4 days/week. Positive feedback was given to both Marcus (RRG assessor) and Nicole (admin assistant), citing responsiveness and excellent work. The Board agreed this change reflects fiscal prudence but recognized it is a temporary solution.
- Part-Time Data Collector: At-will employee, not under contract; compensation based on annual hours × rate of pay.
- Administrative Assistant: \$50,425; an 8% contractual increase.

Board members proposed a future workshop with RRG's Marcus to review FY25 and FY26 tax assessments, compare tax rate trends, and understand fluctuations in property assessments (some rose, others fell unexpectedly). The goal would be to provide transparency and enable Selectmen to field resident questions more confidently. The target date of this meeting is early February with the exact date to be determined.

- **f) Tiziana Milano- Council on Aging**

Ms. Milano presented the Council on Aging's (COA) preliminary FY27 budget, her first, to the Board. She was welcomed and guided through the format of providing summary figures followed by line-by-line explanation.

Key budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$297,417; a 5% overall increase or \$13,855.
- Director's Salary: 3% increase; a contractual increase.
- Outreach Coordinator: 2% increase; a contractual increase.
- Transportation Coordinator: 3% increase; a contractual increase.
- Activities Coordinator: 10% increase; a contractual increase that includes step)
- Part-time Drivers: 6% increase; not a contractual increase but based on increased hours being worked to meet service demand. Historical actuals support this adjustment (\$57K in prior year, \$83K in the most recent year). Ms Taylor clarified that the increase for part-time drivers is not a wage increase per se, but a budget adjustment to align with actual hours worked and increased ridership. Vacancies in other areas had previously offset costs.
- Overtime: Level funded; used for occasional weekend events.
- Longevity: Contractual; one eligible employee.
- Telephone: 3% increase; supports driver communication, important due to 7 vehicles in use.
- Recreation: 10% increase; instructor/program costs rising.
- Office Supplies: Level funded.
- Other Supplies: 11% increase; kitchen items.
- Travel & Seminar: 5% increase.

- Dues & Subscriptions: 5% increase.

Ms. Milano provided a handout to the Board with statistics and service offerings. The COA serves approximately 410 residents, or 1,200 households. Nearly 6,000 total rides/trips were provided in 2025, a notable increase. Core services include meal and nutrition programs, transportation, activities & social programs, outreach/support, and special events and trips. They have recently partnered with Best of Times Travel. Upcoming trips include the Andy Clooney Irish Celebration (Danvers, MA) in March, Pennsylvania Dutch Country (3-day trip) in May, and Boston Tall Ships trip in July.

Chairman Keefe thanked Ms. Milano and her team for the value and breadth of services provided. He noted the COA's entire budget remains under \$300,000.

- **g) Matthew Ryan- Collector/Treasurer's Office, Debt**

Mr. Ryan presented the Collector/Treasurer's Office preliminary FY27 budget.

Key budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$213,925; a 10% increase. The primary increase is driven by the elected official salary line (Collector-Treasurer himself), which was described as a starting point for discussion, similar to the Town Clerk's salary line.
- Elected Official Salary: \$80,000; a 14% increase. Mr. Ryan clarified that this line is not tied to a contract. He used the Town's salary study and intentionally set it below the study's average, and lower than what he had proposed the prior year. He emphasized a more conservative, phased approach this year compared to his prior request, which he acknowledged had met resistance. He also noted the MCTA (Massachusetts Collectors & Treasurers Association) provides a salary survey including data on elected vs. appointed positions, years of service, certifications, and staffing levels. Board members inquired whether the salary data was apples-to-apples, and Mr. Ryan confirmed it includes appropriate comparisons. Selectwoman Bulso raised concern that the town's salary study did not evaluate staffing numbers, only salaries. She also questioned whether the office needed two, three, or four positions.
- Assistant Collector / Assistant Treasurer Salaries: Contractual increases.
- Certification Line: 100% increase; Anticipated certifications for both Mr. Ryan and the Assistant Treasurer in August at the annual MCTA school. Must accumulate 50 points over multiple years (classes, experience, education) to be eligible.
- Longevity: 100% increase; both Mr. Ryan and the Assistant Treasurer will enter their 5th year of service, qualifying them for longevity pay.
- Professional Technical Services: 40% increase; increase reflects a \$2,000 annual continuing disclosure cost through Unibank, short-term debt BAN renewals, and Unipay processing fees (expected to decrease in future years).
- Professional Lockbox: Level funded; Eastern Bank handles mailed payments and transmits records to Town.
- Advertising: Level funded.
- Office Supplies & Printing: Level funded

- Tax Title Redemption: 50% decrease; fewer foreclosed properties requiring action, and costs now limited to land (not buildings).
- Travel & Seminar: 15% increase; Assistant Collector attending MCTA training toward certification.
- Dues & Subscriptions: 67% increase; covers memberships for both Ryan and Assistant Collector.
- Foreclosure Expenses: 50% decrease; down from \$2,000 to \$1,000 due to reduction in property issues.

Mr. Ryan and the Board discussed seven properties slated for auction. The parcels are landlocked with only paper roads, raising questions on marketability. The Board debated whether parcels should be sold individually or in bulk or offered via RFP for cluster housing, senior housing, or other development. Mr. Ryan requested a future workshop to decide how best to return these parcels to the tax rolls.

Chairman Keefe reaffirmed that Ryan's salary line is open to discussion with administration. He noted that the Town's salary study, while informative, is not affordable for Blackstone to implement all at once. Longer-term phased adjustments for non-union personnel may be possible over time.

The Board thanked Mr. Ryan for the presentation and encouraged collaboration and further discussion on both compensation and land auctions.

- o Motion: Selectman Olaes made a motion to take a five minute recess; seconded by Selectwoman Bulso. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

- **h) Lisa Cheever- Library Director**

Ms. Cheever and Mary Lou Blanchard, Chair of Library Board of Trustees, presented the Library's preliminary FY27 budget. Ms. Cheever distributed a custom worksheet showing real expense figures (excluding grant-funded salaries), a summary of grant-funded positions and major donations/scholarships, and a spreadsheet tailored for Selectman Olaes's prior inquiries. She clarified that the printed budget differs from the one in ClearGov, as her version deducts grant-funded salaries to show more accurate expense figures. There are 20 total staff members, including Ms. Cheever. Four positions are funded by grants (outreach librarian and several custodial aides) and there is only one union employee (Head of Circulation & Technical Services).

Key budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$783,935; a 13% increase. The budget reflects 3% cost-of-living adjustments for all staff. Additional increases bring staff to the average salary range based on the Town's salary survey. Ms. Cheever used averages between minimum and maximum salary figures, provided by the Town Administrator.
- Professional and Technical: \$0 requested; 100% decrease; will seek grants to cover.
- Professional Development: \$0 requested; 100% decrease; will be covered by scholarships.
- Programming Supplies: \$200; 90% decrease; relying more on donations and Friends of the Library.
- Office Supplies: \$2,600; 7% decrease.
- Building Maintenance: \$18,000; 31% decrease; relying more on existing capital funds. Chairman Keefe expressed strong concerns about the steep cut to building maintenance, given that the library has historically spent or exceeded that line

each year. Ms. Cheever responded that the library is relying more on an existing capital warrant (established around 2020). She acknowledged that as the building continues to age, maintenance needs may increase again.

- Telephone: \$250; 79% decrease; the library was the last major department to migrate to the VoIP system under a previous warrant article. As a result most telephone costs were removed from the library's budget. Remaining expenses (e.g., fax line) are minimal. All VoIP costs now appear under Public Building Maintenance.
- Wages & Salary Increases: All non-union staff received a 3% COLA plus an increase to reach the average from the Town's salary study. Board members asked clarifying questions about the method of calculation and whether 3% was added before or after adjusting to average. Ms. Cheever confirmed the 3% was added first, followed by adjustment. Selectman Olaes requested the original spreadsheet with formulas for review and Ms. Cheever agreed to send it via the Town Administrator. She noted that the Library Director's Salary reflects a 4% increase (3% COLA plus a small adjustment based on market comparison).

Selectman Castonguay and Selectman Olaes both raised concerns about the sustainability of the library budget, given a 35% increase over three years (~\$207,000). They compared this to the Fire Department (noted six-figure increase) and Trash Collection (~23% over three years). Selectman Olaes emphasized the need to consider the "true cost" of departments, factoring in health insurance (~\$20K per family plan) and utilities.

Ms. Cheever and Ms. Blanchard clarified that utility costs were only recently removed from the department budget. Two full-time positions were added in recent years, contributing to growth. Ms. Cheever also emphasized the department's efforts to minimize taxpayer cost. Many events and supplies are funded through Friends of the Library, grants, and donations. Staff often donate time for after-hours events like paint nights. Notable donations to the library included \$6,000 from Friends of the Library, \$3,000 from the Cookie Walk, \$1,000 from Dean Bank, and scholarships from the Mass Library System to cover professional development. A prior comparison had been made between Blackstone Library and libraries in larger towns. Ms. Blanchard pointed out that those libraries do not always include building maintenance or utility costs in their operating budgets, making it a poor apples-to-apples comparison.

Selectman Olaes stated that even when controlling for population, Blackstone's budget and staffing levels are high compared to libraries in towns 2 to 3x its size.

Chairman Keefe and Board members praised the quality of the library's services and programming. He stated that while scrutiny of the budget is necessary, it's not a reflection of dissatisfaction with library operations. He commended the building as likely the best maintained in Blackstone, due to effective leadership.

- **i) Lauren Taylor- Town Accountant**

Ms. Taylor presented her department's preliminary FY27 budget.

Key budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$222,147; 3% overall increase.
- Town Accountant / Asst. Town Administrator salary: 3% contractual increase.
- Assistant Town Accountant salary: 3% contractual increase.
- Part-Time Secretary Wages: 3% increase (standard COLA applied to all employees)
- Overtime: \$500; line item reinstated. It was previously removed when the assistant accountant became salaried. It has been re-added due to the new part-time position in the office. It covers high-demand periods like budget season and

Monday holidays affecting payroll. Ms. Taylor clarified that "Overtime" does not mean time-and-a-half pay, just pay for hours beyond the regular schedule. This part-time position is shared between the Town Accountant's Office, the Town Administrator, and the Board of Selectmen.

- Certification Stipend: Level funded.
- Longevity: \$3,200; level funded.
- Professional and Technical: Level funded.
- Education: Level funded.
- Office Supplies: Level funded.
- Travel & Seminars: Level funded.
- Dues and Subscriptions: Level funded.

• **j) Chad Lovett- Town Administrator, General Government**

Mr. Lovett presented the Town Administrator and General Government preliminary FY27 budgets, going through various categories and departments.

Key Selectmen's budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request:
- Part-Time Secretary Wages: 3% increase.
- Dues and Subscriptions: 20% decrease; due to cancellation of print subscription for municipal law books now accessed electronically. Ms. Taylor clarified that the subscription was ~\$6,000 annually and canceled in August 2025.
- Net Impact: \$452 increase; rounded to 0% total departmental change

Key Town Administrator's Department budget line items and notes:

- FY27 Total Budget Request: \$262,961; 4% increase.
- Town Administrator Salary: 3% contractual increase.
- Executive Assistant Salary: 3% contractual increase.
- Longevity Added for eligible employee
- All Other Lines: Level funded

Chairman Keefe questioned why previous year (FY25) had no raise. It was clarified that although Town Meeting approved a 3% increase (from \$148,000 to \$151,710), Mr. Lovett declined to take the raise. FY27 salary budget now reflects a full 3% increase from Town Meeting-approved level. FY27 Salary Cap (for negotiation) is \$156,261. This was now up to the Board for contract negotiation.

Town Counsel's Professional & Technical (Legal) & Tax Title lines are level funded at \$205,000.

Key Data Processing budget line items and notes:

- Tyler Technologies / Munis: Increased to \$55,000 for new modules.
- Access GIS: Down 42% to \$3,500.

- OpenGov: 12% increase for permits and licensing
- My Senior Center: 39% increase (\$700) for new trip routing module and tablets for real-time tracking of senior van trips. Grant may offset cost.
- System Admin (IT Services): +5% (contractual)
- Adobe Licenses: Added for key departments
- Professional Technical (Website/IT Tools): \$2,000
- Copier: \$33,420; 8% decrease. Ms. Taylor explained that the Town is working with Toshiba to reduce/replace machines. Currently there are 12 outdated units being replaced under state contract.

Other key General Government department budget line items and notes:

- Bonds & Insurance: 21% increase; insurance premium line increased by \$50,000. Increase driven by anticipated hikes in property, flood, and liability coverage. Will adjust down if final pricing is lower.
- Central Mass Planning: Level funded at \$0 (pending February assessment).
- General Postage and Supplies: Postage increased by 9% due to increased volume and USPS rate hike; Office Supplies increased 40%, or \$2,000 due to labels/barcoding for invoice scanning.
- Public Building Maintenance: Total increase of \$21,702 (4%); Heating Fuel and Repairs and Maintenance both increased \$10,000 each. The JFK/AFM School Reserve Line is maintained at \$40,000 for emergency repairs exceeding \$25,000 (per ownership agreement). It was previously used for roof/septic issues.
- Town Report: 25% decrease to reflect shift to digital and fewer printed copies. Over copies were left over from prior year.
- Telephone Services: Decreased from \$30,000 to \$24,000. Library merged into central VOIP. Remaining savings expected due to project completion
- Weights and Measures: Level funded at \$2,800.
- Forestry: Repair and Maintenance increased 5% for contracted tree removal and trimming. Tree Warden oversees, but the Town manages the budget. It is for tree work only, not equipment repair.
- Recycling: 2% increase (\$3,815), new total \$224,120. Foreman Salary increased by 3%, Laborer Salary increased by 1% as there is already enough in the line item for 3%. Longevity was increased by 24% due to step eligibility. The new baler machine is going live this week and staff is excited about safety improvement and operational upgrades
- Veterans Services: Veterans Agent stipend was increased 2%, all other lines are level funded. 75% of Veterans Benefits are reimbursed by the state. Mr. Ryan reported most direct deposit forms have been returned.
- Cherry Sheet Assessments: Held at \$0 pending February data; includes county retirement and regional costs.
- Unemployment Compensation: 20% increase due to rising claims

- Health Insurance: 2% increase; although rates rising 15 to 20%, Town has budgeted a buffer from prior years attempting to avoid a steep increase in FY27.
- Life Insurance: 13% increase of \$500 due to rising rates.
- Compensated Balances & Absences: Balances line has a 50% increase of \$5,000 to cover payouts for unused vacation/sick time upon retirement. The Absences line has been level funded.
- Capital Trust Transfer: \$3,209,420; 18% increase. It is based on FY25 actuals, not FY26 vote. 90% of AMP tax revenue (real + personal property) goes into Capital Trust and the remaining 10% offsets tax levy.

The BMR School District presented early numbers to their committee. The current projection is \$2M over FY26, but anticipated true increase will be closer to 3 to 5%. The Board is awaiting detailed revision before Town-side inclusion.

The Board thanked department heads, Mr. Lovett, Ms. Taylor, Finance Committee members, and residents for attending. Chairman Keefe reminded everyone that the Annual Town Meeting is on the last Tuesday in May.

4. Matters that the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen did not reasonably anticipate discussing forty-eight hours prior to the meeting

None.

5. Adjournment

- Motion: A motion was made by Michael Sweeney to adjourn the meeting at 12:47 PM; seconded by Edward Castonguay. Vote unanimous; motion passes. Meeting adjourned.

Time: 12:47 PM

Next Meeting: January 13, 2025

Meeting Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Sara Peters