

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

JANUARY 27, 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 and Assistant Town Administrator/Town Accountant Lauren Taylor.

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

- a) **Workshop Session:** **November 15, 2025 (SemiQuincentennial)**
- b) **Regular Session:**
 - Motion: Vice Chairman Sweeney made a motion to approve the November 15, 2025 workshop session meeting minutes; seconded by Selectman Castonguay. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

4. Citizens Forum: Good & Welfare - Public

None.

5. Public Hearings-

None.

6. Correspondence

None.

7. Town Announcements & Events

Chairman Keefe apologized for forgetting his notes but highlighted a robust calendar of children's and adult programming at the Blackstone Public Library throughout February. He thanked Library Director Tressie for providing timely and detailed updates, which he will present more fully at the next meeting. Residents were encouraged to visit both the Library's website and the Town of Blackstone News section for information on upcoming events. In response to a public question, Chairman Keefe said he would follow up on a rumor that the library may extend weekend hours when school is not in session.

8. Liaison Reports/Boards & Commissions

Selectwoman Bulso announced that the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) Executive Committee meeting would take place Thursday night, with a focus on regionalization and long-term planning efforts for the area. She also highlighted the upcoming "Love Your Legislators" Breakfast at Galliford's Restaurant in February, calling it a popular and well-attended event each year.

Selectman Castonguay reported that the CMRPC Legislative Meeting is expected next week, with a scheduling poll currently underway. He shared his enthusiasm for the first meeting of the Economic Development Committee, which is set for Monday, February 9th. He welcomed John Partlow as a new member of the committee. He emphasized the committee's excitement and intention to begin work that will positively impact Blackstone's economic growth.

Chairman Keefe noted that during a recent School Committee meeting, a community member advocated for the return of cursive writing instruction in schools. The Committee is considering the formation of a student club to support cursive writing. He noted the Blackstone Public Library also offers related programming and emphasized the importance of being able to read and write cursive, especially since many founding documents are written in it.

9. Town Administrator Report

Mr. Lovett provided the following updates to the Board.

A draft of the electrical assessment for the Roosevelt Park property has been received. Final edits are being made before the report is finalized.

Revised engineering drawings are expected the week of February 6, 2026 for the Bellingham Road Easement Project. These will support the continuation of the easement process related to the project.

The Town of Blackstone has been awarded the *KnowBe4* cybersecurity grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This program will provide anti-phishing and security training and services to all town employees.

The Ford Escape previously used by the Senior Center was successfully auctioned and sold for \$1,450. The Town is awaiting receipt of payment. Multiple bids were submitted.

The bid package for water meter replacement is being finalized. It is currently under review by legal counsel and the Water Department to finalize specifications.

The easement granted by the Board of Selectmen to SNETT has been fully executed and recorded with the Registry of Deeds.

The current three-year paving contract is in its final year. DPW Superintendent Jim Sullivan is working with consultants to prepare bid documents for a new three-year contract, with the goal of awarding before the 2026 paving season begins.

The Town is moving forward with preparing an Invitation for Bid (IFB) for improvements on Valley Street. Engineering consultants are finalizing specifications and bid drawings.

Mr. Lovett provided a detailed account of recent public works activity:

- **Water Main Breaks on Lakeview:** On Friday, a water main break occurred on Lakeview Street, requiring a full-day response from the DPW crew. After restoring water, a second break was discovered further up the street, necessitating a second dig and repair. On Sunday, January 26, a third break occurred. Due to DPW staff already having worked extended hours, the town hired Boyle & Fogarty, an outside contractor, to perform the emergency repair on Monday.
- **Public Notification of Water Shutoff:** The Blackstone Police Department, at Mr. Lovett's request, conducted door-to-door notifications for impacted residents to inform them of the water shutoff, avoiding reliance on the website or email alerts given the late hour. Special thanks were extended to Sergeant Hurwitz and the BPD for their assistance.
- **Snowstorm Operations:** DPW operations began Friday with water main repairs, followed by snow prep and response on Sunday, January 26. Crews began sanding at 10:00 AM Sunday, commenced plowing at 12:00 PM, and called in contractors at 3:00 PM. Plowing and cleanup continued into the early hours of Monday morning, with some personnel returning at 8:00 PM Sunday night for a second storm. All DPW staff resumed normal duties Monday during daytime hours without additional rest, continuing salt, sand, and snow removal operations.

Chairman Keefe and Selectwoman Bulso acknowledged and praised the DPW staff, school custodial staff, and snow removal contractors for their work over the extended storm period.

Mr. Lovett also noted that additional snow removal efforts to push back snowbanks and clean up corners would continue the next day, based on resident feedback.

Selectwoman Bulso asked about the status of the pavilion behind Town Hall.

Mr. Lovett said that the concrete footings for the new outdoor pavilion were installed late last year to comply with funding deadlines. The prefabricated structure is onsite, and construction will resume once warmer weather arrives.

Footings were constructed to exceed code requirements, with some reaching depths of four feet. The Building Commissioner enforced strict adherence to standards, which included seismic considerations.

Mr. Lovett closed his report by again thanking DPW and Public Safety personnel for their extraordinary work during the recent challenges with weather and water infrastructure.

10. Old Business

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

Mr. Lovett provided the Board with an update on the ongoing development of the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget and related warrant articles for the upcoming Annual Town Meeting. He stated that the administration has been working closely with department heads to compile and refine departmental budget requests. He noted that while some preliminary figures had been submitted, more detailed reviews would take place in the coming weeks, particularly after school district numbers are finalized. Mr. Lovett acknowledged cost increases in areas such as health insurance, utilities, and personnel-related expenses.

The Board briefly discussed major capital needs, including upgrades to public safety communication infrastructure, possible funding to continue work from the Town Hall/Public Safety Feasibility Study, and roadway and DPW-related capital items

Mr. Lovett said that departments have begun submitting proposed warrant articles, with an internal deadline for final submission approaching.

Chairman Keefe emphasized the importance of early public communication regarding major articles, especially those involving large expenditures or long-term debt.

Vice Chairman Sweeney reiterated the need for clarity and supporting documentation for any capital projects or system upgrades (for example the public safety radio system), so that the Board is not "going into Town Meeting blind."

Ms. Taylor confirmed that preliminary numbers for both revenue projections and departmental expenses would be available for review at the next Board meeting. She also reminded the Board that the FY24 audit had been received and would help inform the town's financial strategy going into FY27.

The Board agreed to revisit the budget and warrant articles at its next regular meeting.

11. New Business

- **a) Pinning Ceremony of Police Officer Nicolas Green and Police Officer Corey Giguere**

Blackstone Police Department held a pinning ceremony for Officers Nicolas Green and Corey Giguere, recently hired and serving the Blackstone Police Department and they were also officially sworn in as Blackstone Police Officers. Police Chief Gregory Gilmore provided a brief background for each officer. Officer Giguere was born and raised in Blackstone, graduated from BMRHS, is pursuing a criminal justice degree, and is certified in various law enforcement areas. Officer Green has prior experience in law enforcement and Massachusetts Department of Correction and a decorated service record. Each officer was pinned by family members.

- **b) Commendation - Officer Eric Lawler, Blackstone Police Department**

Blackstone Police Officers Eric Lawler and Brendan Fitzpatrick were recognized for their response on January 4, 2025, involving a mental health crisis in the Main Street area. The officers de-escalated a potentially deadly situation with professionalism and compassion. The subject was safely transported to the hospital.

The Board commended the officers' bravery.

- **c) Commendation - Officer Brendan Fitzpatrick, Blackstone Police Department**

See description under the agenda item above.

- Motion: Vice Chairman Sweeney made a motion to take a 5-minute recess; seconded by Selectwoman Bulso. Vote unanimous; motion passed.
- **d) Appointment of John Partlow to the Economic Development Committee for a 3-year term to expire June 30, 2028**
 - Motion: Vice Chairman Sweeney made a motion to appoint John Partlow to the Economic Development Committee for a 3-year term to expire June 30, 2028; seconded by Selectwoman Bulso. Vote unanimous; motion passed.
- **e) Town Hall Feasibility Study**

The Board received an in-depth presentation from representatives of Kaestle Boos Associates (KBA), the firm engaged to conduct the Town Hall and Public Safety Feasibility Study. Presenters included Kevin Witzel, architect and project manager at KBA; Michael McKeon, principal at KBA and public safety programming expert; and Allison Tyver of Tarowski2 Architecture, who collaborated on the Town Hall and Council on Aging (COA) design components. The feasibility study evaluated the current condition of the existing municipal building, assessed department needs, and proposed design and programming solutions to address the Town's long-term public safety and administrative space requirements. The presentation covered:

- Programming methodology based on interviews with department staff and alignment with national and state building standards for public safety
- Identification of current and future space needs for Police, Fire, Town Hall, and COA departments
- Preliminary architectural designs and site planning
- Structural and code deficiencies in the existing facility
- Sustainability strategies
- Probable cost estimates and project phasing
- Public engagement strategies to support future funding efforts

KBA identified a need for approximately 12,255 square feet for the Police Department and 20,495 square feet for the Fire Department, resulting in a combined 32,750-square-foot new facility. The design concept separates public and secure zones and includes a secure sally port, detention areas, processing space, and interview rooms for police, dedicated decontamination zones, bunk rooms, and gear storage for fire, and a centralized, climate-controlled MDF (head-end) room to support communications infrastructure, including body cams, drones, and dispatch. It also includes firefighter health protections including negative air pressure systems and clean/dirty zone separation to reduce carcinogen exposure in addition to shared public meeting and training rooms. The space planning anticipates a potential shift to full-time firefighters in the future. KBA emphasized the importance of designing for resiliency, redundancy, and mission-critical systems, including backup mechanical and electrical systems to ensure 24/7 operability.

A detailed assessment of the current building found that while structurally sound, the existing facility:

- Does not meet current seismic code requirements for public safety buildings
- Lacks necessary fire separations and sprinkler/fire protection systems
- Fails to provide ADA-compliant accessibility throughout the building
- Cannot accommodate the square footage or code requirements of modern public safety operations
- Would require extensive and cost-prohibitive upgrades if major renovations are pursued due to building code thresholds triggered when renovation exceeds 30% of building value

Additionally, KBA noted that although the existing building is not itself located within a FEMA-designated floodplain, it is at risk of being cut off by surrounding flood-prone areas, posing an operational risk to emergency response services.

Allison Tyver presented the proposed reconfiguration of the existing building to house Town Hall administrative offices on the second floor and the Council on Aging (COA) on the first floor. The design leverages the existing structure while maximizing functionality and accessibility. Design highlights include:

- COA Program (~6,600 sq ft) fully occupying the first floor with reception area, outreach and director offices, shared-use rooms for services, multipurpose event hall divisible into dining, games, and exercise spaces, and use of existing bathrooms and vault to reduce construction costs.
- Town Hall Offices relocated to the second floor with offices for Town Clerk, Finance, Inspectional Services, Planning, and Administration, preservation and reuse of existing vault, new elevator and ground-level entrance for full ADA accessibility, and future use options for the existing garage bay.

KBA evaluated all town-owned parcels of two acres or more and determined that the new Public Safety facility would require approximately 2.5 acres. The current site was deemed suboptimal due to access concerns during flood events and limited expansion potential. Several alternative sites, including some available for purchase at reasonable cost, were identified for future consideration.

KBA provided preliminary cost estimates based on professional estimators and schematic-level design assumptions:

- Public Safety Facility: Construction Cost is approximately \$28 million with a Total Project Cost (with soft costs, fees, furnishings, etc.) of \$38.2 million.
- Town Hall/COA Renovation: Construction Cost is \$17 million with a Total Project Cost of \$23.5 million.
- Combined total for both projects: approximately \$61.7 million.

Cost estimates include design and owner's contingencies, escalation for inflation, and market risk factors. Architects' fees were estimated at approximately 10%, with Owner's Project Manager (OPM) services, including clerk-of-the-works, budgeted at 7.5%.

To build public support, KBA outlined a multi-pronged community outreach plan, including:

- Public forums and information sessions
- Project website with real-time updates, FAQs, and a Q&A portal
- Use of Town events and social media for engagement
- Emphasis on transparency and accurate information to avoid misinformation

If pursued, the overall project timeline for both buildings, from design through construction, was estimated to take approximately three years, assuming phased implementation starting with the new Public Safety facility, followed by relocation and renovation of the current Town Hall.

Following the presentation, Selectman Castonguay inquired about the origin and cost of the feasibility study.

Chairman Keefe confirmed that the study cost \$100,000 and was funded via a warrant article approved at either the 2022 or 2023 Annual Town Meeting. The article had been submitted by the Board of Selectmen. The current effort followed a previous feasibility study approved in 2013 and completed in 2017, which had ultimately been shelved without implementation.

Selectman Olaes followed up by asking about the motivation behind the most recent warrant article.

The catalyst for restarting the process included facility assessments identifying critical deficiencies in the Fire Department's living quarters, particularly after transitioning to 24/7 staffing. Broader concerns about inadequate space across departments, including dispatch congestion, lack of public meeting areas, and document storage overflow. Former Town Administrator Dori Vecchio and staff noted that these concerns led to renewed discussion about whether the current site could be expanded or improved, or whether alternative locations, such as the Kennedy-Maloney complex, should be considered for future municipal or public safety use.

The Board reviewed challenges involved with renovating the current municipal complex. The building is structurally sound, but any renovation project exceeding 30% of the assessed value would trigger full code compliance under the Massachusetts State Building Code. This includes costly upgrades such as sprinkler systems, ADA accessibility, and potential seismic retrofits. Selectwoman Bulso and Chairman Keefe, both holding contractor licenses, explained that the 30% threshold is calculated based on dollar value, not square

footage, and excludes attic or non-functional space. The Building Commissioner and Fire Chief retain discretion in enforcing these thresholds, but code compliance would be difficult to avoid in any substantial project. Questions were raised about the feasibility of adding an additional floor, but it was noted this would likely be cost-prohibitive due to structural and site constraints.

Chairman Keefe updated the Board on a recent meeting with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) regarding the Kennedy-Maloney School complex, which may be vacated due to consolidation. A school closure bulletin has been submitted by the school district to the MSBA. The roof loan on the Maloney side of the building totals approximately \$120,000, with 58% reimbursed by the state. The MSBA has shown support for potential municipal reuse, which could include relocating the Senior Center or Town offices. Members noted this new opportunity did not exist during the 2017 study and may significantly alter the Town's options moving forward.

Vice Chairman Sweeney, who was involved in earlier facility planning efforts, provided some historical context. Discussions date back to 2012 to 2013, driven by the Fire Department's shift to 24-hour staffing and lack of proper sleeping quarters. At one point, firefighters were forced to sleep in a storage closet, then later moved to the ready room. The dispatch area was described as essentially a hallway, and the lack of secure storage led to reliance on outdoor containers. The 2017 feasibility study recommended addressing these issues, but no action was taken at the time.

The Board emphasized the need for long-term planning and public communication about the real conditions of current facilities and the options available. The discussion also touched on potential phased renovations to avoid triggering code thresholds, the importance of incorporating public feedback and education, and the possibility of combining use of the current site with alternative locations like the Kennedy-Maloney building.

- **f) Call for Special and Annual Town Meeting - Tuesday, May 26, 2026**

Chairman Keefe introduced the item by explaining that the Board was being asked to formally call both a Special and Annual Town Meeting for Tuesday, May 26, 2026. He noted that while a Special Town Meeting was included in the call, it may not ultimately be necessary. The Special Town Meeting is typically posted to address any unpaid bills from prior fiscal years, which require a 9/10ths majority vote for approval. However, if such items are instead included in the Annual Town Meeting, they only require a 4/5ths vote, making them easier to pass procedurally.

Chairman Keefe then read the proposed calendar of events for the Special and Annual Town Meetings:

- Tuesday, January 27, 2026: Board of Selectmen call for Special and Annual Town Meetings
- Thursday, January 29, 2026: Last day to submit articles for Special and Annual Town Meetings
- Tuesday, March 10, 2026: Board of Selectmen sign warrant for Special and Annual Town Meetings
- Wednesday, March 11, 2026: Constable to post warrant for Special and Annual Town Meetings
- Friday, March 13, 2026: Warrant availability and public notice published
- Tuesday, May 12, 2026: Finance Committee public hearing deadline
- Friday, May 15, 2026: Voter registration deadline (by 5:00 PM)
- Monday, May 18, 2026: Finance Committee recommendations due
- Tuesday, May 26, 2026: Special Town Meeting at 7:00 PM; Annual Town Meeting at 7:30 PM

During the discussion, Chairman Keefe noted a typographical error in the draft calendar provided, where the year for the May 15th deadline was mistakenly listed as "20206." He requested that staff update the document accordingly.

- Motion: Selectman Castonguay made a motion to call the Special and Annual Town Meetings for Tuesday, May 26, 2026, with the schedule of events as read; seconded by Selectwoman Bulso. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

- **g) Municipal Pledge to Support Veteran Housing**

Chairman Keefe requested Mr. Lovett to coordinate having the Veterans Agent at the next meeting to present this agenda item.

- **h) Memorial Day Discussion**

Chairman Keefe led a discussion regarding Memorial Day 2026 and the Town's plans in light of the upcoming Semi-Quincentennial (250th anniversary). He proposed that this year's Memorial Day events return to a more traditional and solemn format, emphasizing remembrance rather than festivities. Instead of the usual parade, carnival, and fireworks, the Town will focus on honoring veterans and fallen service members. He suggested holding the primary ceremony at the Civil War Monument at Monument Square on Sunday, with the possibility of holding smaller ceremonies at other memorials on Saturday morning.

Selectwoman Bulso expressed support, noting that the group could walk between the memorials as part of the event.

It was noted that a Memorial Day Committee had previously been appointed but has not met recently. Chairman Keefe stated his intent to reconvene the committee and emphasized the importance of including long-time participants such as Tanya Polak, who has been instrumental in past years.

The Board discussed the possibility of using Memorial Day funds to support Semi-Quincentennial activities. However, it was clarified that such expenditures would require a Town Meeting vote and would need to come from next fiscal year's budget, as the Semi-Quincentennial itself falls in the next fiscal cycle.

Chairman Keefe asked that outreach be made to Memorial Day Committee members to attend either a future Board of Selectmen meeting, a workshop, or a meeting of the Semi-Quincentennial Committee to coordinate plans. He noted that there may have been confusion during the committee appointment process, with some residents possibly signing up for the Memorial Day Committee thinking it was the Semi-Quincentennial Committee.

There was no vote taken, but the Board reached consensus to move forward with planning a scaled-down, traditional Memorial Day observance, led in coordination with the Memorial Day Committee and the Semi-Quincentennial subcommittee.

- **i) Request for Disposal of Town Property - COA**

Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor presented a request from COA Director Tiziana for the disposal of surplus property at the Senior Center. As part of an ongoing inventory and cleanup process, the following items were identified for disposal:

- Miscellaneous kitchen pots, pans, and small appliances (approximately three to four large boxes of unused equipment no longer needed for kitchen operations)
- One stationary exercise bicycle (noted to be outdated)
- Two electric wheelchairs – (both determined to be outdated and no longer in usable condition)
- One large bookcase with glass doors (no longer needed at the COA)

During discussion, Selectwoman Bulso suggested that the bookcase might be of interest to the Historical Commission, as it could potentially serve as a display case.

The Board agreed that all items should be offered first to other Town departments and boards before being discarded or otherwise disposed of. This includes clarification that the items would be offered to departments, not to individual employees for personal use.

- Motion: Vice Chairman Sweeney made a motion to approve the disposal of the identified Council on Aging property, with the caveat that all items be offered to other town departments and boards, including the Historical Commission, prior to final disposal; seconded by Selectwoman Bulso. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

- **j) Amazon Donation - December 2025**

Mr. Lovett presented a donation from Amazon to the Blackstone Animal Control Department. The donation, detailed on pages 18 through 27 of the meeting packet, includes a wide variety of supplies received by Animal Control as part of an ongoing partnership with Amazon.

Chairman Keefe noted there was no need to read each item into the record due to the volume and the duplicative nature of some entries. The Board expressed appreciation for the generosity and consistent support that Amazon has provided.

- Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to accept the Amazon donation as presented; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

- **k) US Bicycle Route 1 though Blackstone**

This agenda was passed over as the presenter could not attend the meeting.

- **l) Approval of Proposed Renovations of 6 Mill Street - Polish Hall**

President Jeff Fontaine and member Eric presented plans to move restrooms and open interior space at the Polish Hall located at 6 Mill Street. This property is owned by the Town and leased to the Polish American Citizens Club. No increase in occupancy (remains at 87), and no changes to exterior is being proposed. Licensed contractors will perform all work.

Building Commissioner Vincenzo Tirone and the Board discussed code compliance, particularly bathroom fixture count and ADA access.

Mr. Lovett and Mr. Tirone confirmed final compliance review will occur during permitting.

- Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve the Polish Hall to proceed with the permitting process for proposed renovations; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney.

- **m) Approve Federal Sidewalk Improvements Letter Agreement for Professional Engineering Services**

Mr. Lovett presented a request for Board approval to execute a contract related to the Federal Street Sidewalk Improvements project. The proposal, totaling \$126,500, outlines professional engineering services necessary to advance the project. Mr. Lovett noted that this figure has been known from the beginning and is aligned with the original planning for the sidewalk upgrades. He emphasized the importance of moving the project forward at this stage.

During discussion, Selectwoman Bulso confirmed that the Town has reapplied for grant funding under the Complete Streets and Shared Streets programs. The Town is currently awaiting word on the status of those applications.

Chairman Keefe humorously reminded everyone to ensure sidewalk heights meet safety standards, while referencing resident concerns and engineering guidelines.

Mr. Lovett further explained that while the Town had previously received a \$500,000 grant, the original \$126,500 in funding could not be spent without Town Meeting approval due to changes in the grant amount. However, by leveraging the newly received \$247,000 grant along with the original Town funding, the total project funding may now approach \$750,000, significantly enhancing the scope and impact of the sidewalk improvement project. He concluded by noting that ongoing meetings with MassDOT have been productive and that the new Complete Streets grant process is far improved.

- Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to grant the Town Administrator authority to enter into contract negotiations with the selected engineering firm for the project; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

- **n) Matters that the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen did not Reasonably Anticipate Discussing Forty-Eight Hours Prior to the Meeting**

None.

- o) **Approval of Payroll Warrant #26EWA18, #26PW18**
 - Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve payroll warrants #26EWA18 and #26PW18; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.
- p) **Approval of Vendor Warrant #26EW18A, #26EW18B**
 - Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve vendor warrant #26EW18A and #26EW18B; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

12. Future Board Agenda Items

The Board discussed several topics for inclusion on upcoming agendas and workshops:

- Workshop with the Assessor and Treasurer/Collector: A future workshop session will include presentations from the Assessor and Treasurer/Collector to review the status of town-owned properties, tax title lands, and how they are classified on the tax rolls. This will help clarify which parcels might be available for disposition or reuse.
- Town Administrator Goals: The Town Administrator may present updates or a revised draft of his goals at an upcoming meeting.
- U.S. Bicycle Route 1: A representative will be invited to present on the proposed U.S. Bicycle Route 1 through Blackstone. This was previously listed as a discussion item but the presenter could not attend.
- Municipal Pledge to Support Veteran Housing: A presentation will be scheduled at a future meeting regarding the town's potential endorsement of a municipal pledge supporting housing efforts for veterans.
- Sidewalk Snow Removal Equipment Grant: Selectwoman Bulso suggested exploring the possibility of applying for a MassDOT grant to fund a sidewalk plow for the town, especially given recent concerns about winter pedestrian safety. She noted that the St. Paul Street Bridge and the Main Street commercial corridor are areas of highest concern due to heavy foot traffic and narrow sidewalks. The Board discussed the challenge of staffing such equipment during storms, but agreed it was worth exploring. Vice Chairman Sweeney noted that while some residents do an excellent job clearing their sidewalks, others, particularly elderly or physically limited residents, are unable to do so. He emphasized safety concerns, especially in key walking areas. The Board agreed that the bridge had already been cleared earlier in the week by Town staff, with thanks extended to Joe from Town Hall. Mr. Lovett confirmed he would work with Superintendent Sullivan to research equipment types, costs, and grant eligibility, including contacting Peter Sutton from MassDOT. The Board expressed general support for the initiative, with a focus on defining specific sidewalk coverage areas if such a machine were procured. The Board acknowledged the need to balance municipal responsibility and resident obligations, and will continue discussion at a later date once more information is gathered.

13. Good & Welfare - Selectmen

Selectman Castonguay introduced a new lighthearted segment: *"Birthdays with Willard Scott"*, humorously referencing the former *Today Show* weatherman's tradition of celebrating viewer birthdays. He recognized the following community members: Sue Clark, Billy "Blackstone" Cappen (also known as Billy Cappen, a friend from King's Campground), Tracy White, and Mark Valley. He wished all a happy birthday. He also extended congratulations and appreciation to Officers Nicolas Green and Corey Giguere on their pinning ceremony and official appointment to the Blackstone Police Department along with Officers Eric Lawler and Brendan Fitzpatrick from Blackstone PD for receiving commendations earlier in the meeting, acknowledging their professionalism and efforts during a recent critical incident. He welcomed John Partlow to the Economic Development Committee and praised the spirit of volunteerism in Town. He also reflected on the weekend's snowstorm, offering thanks to the Police Department, particularly for going door-to-door during water main breaks to check on residents, the Department of Public Works and Fire Department for snow removal and ensuring access to fire hydrants, and all public safety departments for their responsiveness and service during emergencies. He commented on the discolored water issue, stating that while water may test "safe," he personally would not drink brown water, adding that it's a matter of choice, not safety. He discouraged sharing outdated or misleading images online (such as a 2019 image from Seekonk) and encouraged more productive dialogue. On a broader note, he urged the community to remain focused on facts and context, especially regarding aging infrastructure and winter-related main breaks. He closed by recognizing acts of kindness during the storm, citing residents and companies who offered to help clear snow for neighbors in need.

Selectman Olaes echoed appreciation for Officers Lawler and Fitzpatrick, commending their actions as an example of the Town's high standard for public safety. He acknowledged that small towns like Blackstone are still expected to provide "big city" services, and credited the departments for performing exceptionally with limited staff and resources. He also praised the DPW for working in freezing temperatures during snow removal and responding to water main breaks. He emphasized the importance of acknowledging their sacrifice and resilience. He expressed support for understanding the complexity of water infrastructure and clarified that the town must communicate the full story beyond just "old pipes" when discussing issues like water main breaks. He encouraged proactive discussion about sidewalks. He noted recent debates on sidewalk safety and plowing responsibilities, stating his belief that more sidewalks are still better for public access and safety, despite some concerns. He closed by emphasizing the positive contributions of residents, neighbors helping neighbors, and companies stepping up during recent storms.

Selectwoman Bulso joined in commending Officers Lawler and Fitzpatrick for their professionalism and praised the DPW and Public Safety personnel for their tireless efforts throughout recent snowstorms and water main incidents. She gave a special thank-you to residents who voluntarily helped shovel fire hydrants and clear sidewalks. One resident was seen using a Kubota to cut back corners in their neighborhood, an example of civic spirit that she encouraged others to follow.

Vice Chairman Sweeney offered his congratulations to the Police Department, emphasizing that Blackstone's boards, past and present, have always set high expectations for public safety, and that the departments consistently meet those expectations. He extended thanks to DPW Superintendent Jimmy Sullivan and the public works crew for their dedication during the snowstorm. He expressed concern about the department's future capacity after the upcoming retirements of key personnel. On a personal note, he shared that after 47 years of working in emergency services, this storm marked the first time he was able to sit in his recliner for eight hours and simply watch the snow fall without having to respond or plow. He found it to be a moment of peace and reflection. He also shared appreciation for the Glenside neighborhood, noting they consistently shovel sidewalks. He mentioned he runs that route each morning and enjoys seeing the community take care of its space.

Chairman Keefe also congratulated Officers Green, Giguere, Lawler, and Fitzpatrick. He shared an image (sent to him before the meeting) of five Blackstone firefighters shoveling a path to a resident's house so a stretcher could be brought in, an example of the dedication and professionalism of the Town's public safety staff. He thanked and recognized DPW Superintendent Jimmy Sullivan, Donald Patterson, and the entire DPW crew (including Bo, Dominic, Randy, and Johnny) for their hard work during a 22-hour plowing stretch and their attention to detail during difficult weather conditions. He commended their leadership, professionalism, and communication with the schools and the public. He concluded with a reminder that the next meeting would be held on February 10, 2026, and noted that the Town was now entering "water main break and ice damming season." He encouraged residents to be vigilant and supportive.

14. Adjournment

- Motion: Mary Bulso made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 PM; seconded by Michael Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

Time: 8:54 PM

Next Meeting: February 10, 2026

Meeting Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Sara Peters