

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
BLACKSTONE MUNICIPAL CENTER
15 ST. PAUL STREET
BOARD OF SELECTMEN CHAMBERS**

FEBRUARY 17, 2026 (5:00 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 5:00 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, Selectman Edward Castonguay, and Selectwoman Bulso. Selectman Gino Olaes was absent. Also present were Town Administrator Chad Lovett, Assistant Town Administrator/Town Accountant Lauren Taylor, Shared Town Planner Bruce Webb, and Building Commissioner Vincenzo Tirone, and Finance Committee Chairman/Resident Jeff Silverstein.

3. Old Business

• **a) Vote to Approve Deficit Spending for Snow and Ice**

Ms. Taylor reported that, as of that date, the Snow and Ice account reflected a deficit of \$106,204.50. Additional minor expenses may still be incurred for sanding, salting, and outstanding invoices. The FY26 Snow and Ice budget was originally appropriated at \$110,000.

- Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to authorize deficit spending in the Snow and Ice account; seconded by Vice Chairman Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

Discussion followed regarding the practice of increasing the Snow and Ice line item by \$1 annually rather than reducing it to match prior-year expenditures.

Ms. Taylor explained that if the Snow and Ice budget is reduced and later incurs a deficit, the Town cannot raise it on the tax recap. Increasing by \$1 preserves flexibility and protects the Town. Deficits are traditionally covered by Free Cash at Spring Town Meeting.

Board members also discussed material costs and regional salt shortages.

• **b) FY27 Budget and Town Warrant Articles**

The Board began reviewing proposed Town Meeting warrant articles compiled by the Administration. Articles were organized by department, requested funding amount, and draft language (subject to legal review).

Article for Semi-Quincentennial (250th Celebration) Police & Fire Coverage

An article was presented to fund public safety expenses associated with 250th celebration events. Discussion included the anticipated revenue from carnival and race activities and whether revenue would offset Free Cash after the fact. Funding would initially come from Free Cash.

No objections were raised to moving this article forward.

Article to Establish Conservation Fund

The Conservation Commission requested establishment of a Conservation Fund that would allow the Commission to expend funds without further Town Meeting authorization. Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor noted

that a Wetlands Receipts Reserved account already exists. Current practice requires Town Meeting appropriation for expenditures. The proposed article would allow expenditures without Town Meeting approval.

Board members expressed concern regarding lack of oversight and bypassing existing checks and balances.

- o **Motion:** Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to eliminate the article establishing the Conservation Fund and the related funding article (\$5,000 initial funding request); seconded by Selectman Castonguay. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

Article for Conservation Fee Schedule Update

The Conservation Commission submitted a proposal to revise its fee schedule, including comparison data from neighboring communities. They would like to separate fee schedules from the bylaw to allow easier adjustments. Legal review is underway to determine appropriate structure. The goal is to avoid full bylaw amendments each time fees are updated.

The Board agreed to move the fee update forward pending legal review and final language.

Fire Department Capital Item Articles

- **Cardiac Monitor:** \$66,000 in funding for a new cardiac monitor. The trade-in value is approximately \$3,000. There are potential grant opportunities but most grant awards often require full appropriation first. The Board reviewed existing Fire/EMS warrant article balances that may potentially be repurposed such as EMS Equipment (2023) that has approximately \$29,000 to \$32,000 remaining; Ambulance Article (2021 with approximately \$18,000 remaining; SCBA Article with approximately \$44,000 remaining (status pending confirmation); and additional smaller balances from prior equipment articles. The Fire Chief is reviewing outstanding balances to determine what may be reallocated. No final action was taken on this article pending clarification of available balances.
- **Station 2 Per Diem Staffing:** \$150,000 in funding requested to support per diem staffing for an ambulance operating from Station 2. Funding would cover staffing and associated Comstar billing fees. The goal is to operate a second ambulance during weekday daytime hours. This is considered a pilot year to collect operational and revenue data. There is potential for future integration into the operating budget. Public safety benefits were emphasized over revenue generation. The article will be drafted to include both staffing and associated billing service costs.
- **Air Compressor Replacement:** \$44,000 requested in funding to replace the air compressor used to fill SCBA bottles. The current compressor dates to 1985 and was originally donated. The fill station system was partially upgraded previously; the compressor was deferred due to funding limits. The compressor is nearing end-of-life and replacement parts may no longer be available. This request represents the final component of the full fill station modernization. The Board discussed procurement compliance and ensuring proper purchasing procedures.

Public Safety Radio System Upgrade Article

The Board discussed the proposed full replacement of the Town's public safety radio system, with an estimated cost of approximately \$1.8 million. The proposed system would include replacement of dispatch center infrastructure, upgrades to repeaters, duplexers, and microwave links, improvements at multiple tower locations throughout Town, integration for Police, Fire, and DPW vehicle radios, and infrastructure at multiple sites including Lincoln Street, Bellingham Road, Blackstone Street, and other locations. It was noted that the most significant cost component is infrastructure, not portable or vehicle radios. ARPA funds were previously used to purchase new portable radios; those units are expected to remain compliant. Concerns were raised regarding timing if potential Town Hall renovations or public safety facility upgrades are forthcoming.

Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor indicated that borrowing would be required regardless, and that the matter could be incorporated into long-term capital borrowing planning. A Unibank representative is scheduled to provide a debt presentation at a future meeting.

Board members emphasized that any installation should align with future building plans to avoid duplicative infrastructure costs. No formal vote was taken. The matter remains under consideration pending further financial planning discussion.

Library Articles

- Revolving Fund (Standard Article): A standard annual revolving fund article for the Library was presented. No discussion or objections were noted.
- Library Server Replacement: \$32,000 requested in funding for server replacement. The proposal includes \$20,000 repurposed from a prior HVAC-related software warrant article and \$11,530 from Free Cash to reach the full \$32,000. The server cannot be migrated to Town Hall infrastructure due to CWMARS/network licensing requirements. The long-term goal is to migrate Town systems to cloud-based infrastructure, pending grant opportunities. Clarification was requested regarding technical necessity and compatibility requirements. Mr. Lovett will obtain additional background information regarding system requirements. No formal vote was taken.
- Library Staff Computers: \$32,000 requested in funding to replace approximately 13 staff computers, many of which are running Windows 10 (no longer supported). They would be purchasing Dell Vostro tower specifications (Windows 11 Pro, 16GB RAM, 1TB SSD) at an estimated cost of approximately \$600 to \$720 per unit plus monitors. There were questions regarding the age of current computers, justification for storage capacity, whether all units are required simultaneously, and if there was a detailed breakdown of pricing. Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor will provide additional documentation, including full quotes and justification details. No formal vote was taken.

Parks & Recreation ADA Improvements Article

Parks & Recreation requested authorization to repurpose approximately \$53,927 from five older warrant articles to begin addressing ADA items identified in the Town's ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. The ADA report is publicly available on the Town website. There is no immediate legal obligation to complete all identified improvements unless related work is initiated in specific areas. The request represents a proactive start to addressing identified compliance issues. No objections were raised to moving this article forward.

Planning Board Zoning Articles

Two zoning articles were presented, one for amendments to intensity of use regulations and another for updates to the use schedule related to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). There are State requirements mandating ADU compliance. The proposed amendments limit ADUs to 900 square feet or 50% of the primary dwelling (consistent with state law) and ensure Town compliance to avoid default state control. There was a request to review redlined versions of proposed changes. The articles will be forwarded to Town Counsel for formal drafting and review before final action. No vote was taken at this stage.

DPW Capital Item Articles

- Loader Replacement: \$225,000 (net after trade-in) requested in funds for the replacement of a 2005 John Deere loader with approximately 7,000 operating hours. The current loader has a trade-in value estimated at \$28,000. Discussion included equipment age and exposure to salt storage environment, maintenance history, procurement process (state contract or multiple quotes), and lifecycle considerations. Mr. Lovett confirmed that procurement laws will be followed. No formal vote was taken at this time.
- F-350 Utility Truck Replacement: \$100,000 requested for the replacement of a 2015 Ford F-350 utility body truck with approximately 170,653 miles. The cost breakdown was discussed as well as vehicle condition, mileage, and outfitting costs. The vehicle is used for plowing, water and sewer inspections, daily operational tasks, and chemical transport to wells. There was consensus that the

\$100,000 replacement would be paid from Water/Sewer retained earnings, not through borrowing or taxation. The Board expressed general support for proceeding. Procurement will comply with state contract or competitive bidding requirements. No formal vote was taken at this time.

Bridge Repair and Engineering Article

The Board discussed a previously proposed \$4.5 million bridge funding concept and agreed that a comprehensive plan should precede any large-scale appropriation. Several bridges have ongoing structural deficiencies noted in state inspection reports. Some bridges now require annual inspections due to their condition. Prior Town Meeting articles (May 2018 and 2019) provided funding for bridge repairs and engineering and approximately \$28,000 remains in the May 2018 Article 19 bridge article. The Board emphasized the need for a qualified bridge engineering firm, a prioritized five-year repair plan, cost estimates, and the identification of potential grant opportunities (e.g., Small Bridge Program).

- o Motion: Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to amend the proposed bridge article to \$500,000, utilize and mirror the language of the May 2018 Article 19, and replenish and expand funding to allow for engineering, repairs, and prioritization planning for bridges and culverts; seconded by Selectman Castonguay. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

Mr. Lovett will coordinate with Town Counsel to formalize article language consistent with prior approved articles.

Dyke Levy / Lake Hiawatha

The Board discussed a proposed \$60,000 article related to the Dyke Levy and Lake Hiawatha. Approximately \$102,828 remains in an existing levy repair article. Prior Lake Hiawatha work appropriated last year was fully expended. The current levy article language does not explicitly include Lake Hiawatha. Ownership and easement questions regarding Lake Hiawatha were discussed. Legal review previously determined ownership issues are unclear. Rather than adding \$60,000 in new funding, the Board agreed to amend the existing levy article language to include Lake Hiawatha, utilize remaining available funds (approx. \$102,828), and eliminate the proposed new \$60,000 article. No formal vote recorded in this section but direction was provided to the administration.

Sewer Department Pump Standardization Article

The DPW Superintendent proposed \$100,000 to begin standardizing sewer pump equipment across pump stations. Approximately 12 to 14 pump stations exist with multiple different pump types. There currently is a lack of standardization that requires maintaining multiple backup pump types. The proposal aims to standardize pump models, reduce inventory requirements, improve response times, address lead time delays for overseas-manufactured pumps, and upgrade electrical configurations (including three-phase conversions where needed). The \$100,000 represents an initial phase and will not complete full system standardization. It will be funded by water/sewer retained earnings so no taxation or borrowing is required. The Board expressed support.

Upper Main Street Water Tank SCADA / Limit Switch Upgrades Articles

The Board reviewed required upgrades identified in a recent DEP sanitary survey. Findings included one high-priority item requiring completion by December 31, 2026, the installation of high and low limit/level switches at the Upper Main Street tank, and additional electronics and SCADA-related compliance items. Weston & Sampson are currently assisting with water system operational and emergency response planning. The Board acknowledged the regulatory urgency of the high-priority item.

Woonsocket Sewer Flow Bill CPI Adjustment Dispute Article

The Board discussed invoices received from the City of Woonsocket including CPI adjustments. CPI adjustments are permitted on the host fee under the contract. CPI adjustments do not appear to be permitted on the flow bill. The host fee is approximately \$40,000 and the flow bill is approximately \$240,000. Legal counsel has been consulted but the question remains regarding prior-year billing adjustments and contractual interpretation. The Board expressed reluctance to authorize payment without contractual justification. Further review and communication with Woonsocket and legal counsel will occur.

Closing Old Warrant Articles

Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor proposed identifying completed or dormant warrant articles across departments and bringing forward a consolidated vote to formally close them. They will work with legal counsel to ensure proper accounting procedures. It cleans up long-standing capital accounts (some over 10 years old) to improve year-end financial management. Board members acknowledged the need to close out inactive articles and unused balances. A list and formal action to follow at a future meeting.

Police Cruiser Leases

The Board discussed authorization requirements for police cruiser leases. The Town is considering entering into three-year lease agreements for cruisers. Leases are funded annually through the operating budget. Under changes resulting from the Municipal Modernization Act (2019), multi-year lease obligations require Town Meeting authorization (two-thirds vote). It was noted that prior leases may not have been authorized via warrant article. Legal counsel advised placing an article before Town Meeting to authorize the lease. Questions were raised about potential consequences if authorization failed mid-lease. Discussion included whether future cruisers should instead be funded through free cash via warrant article rather than through the operating budget. The Board agreed to seek additional clarification from Town Counsel before finalizing this article.

Article for Semi-Quincentennial (250th Celebration) Police & Fire Coverage

The Board revisited the proposed \$40,000 appropriation for 250th Anniversary events. Concerns were raised regarding police and fire details, overtime and public safety staffing, transportation, logistics, and fireworks costs. The Board requested estimated detail staffing projections from both chiefs before determining whether the appropriation amount is sufficient.

Summary Motion on Warrant Articles

The Chair summarized the Board's decisions on proposed articles.

- **Motion:** Selectwoman Bulso made a motion to approve the above determinations for warrant preparation; seconded by Selectman Castonguay. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

FY27 Operating Budget Review

The Board began a line-by-line review of the proposed FY27 operating budget. The Town Administrator read each department total and noted year-over-year changes. Board members asked questions as appropriate.

General Government

- Moderator: \$900; Level funded.
- Board of Selectmen: \$104,680; Increase of \$452.
- Town Administrator: \$262,961; Increase of \$9,301.
- Finance Committee: \$1,987; Decrease of \$263.

Discussion included the elimination of printed binders for budget review, resulting in savings on office supplies. Dues and subscriptions reflect membership in the Association of Town Finance Committees, including access to handbook materials and training. Professional/technical line includes constable fees for posting Town Meeting warrants. No changes proposed.

- Reserve Fund: \$100,000; No change.
- Capital Outlay Committee: \$850; Level funded.
- Town Accountant: \$222,147; Increase of \$6,537.

- Assessors: \$182,520; Decrease of \$35,295. The reduction reflects the decision not to fill a position for continued use of RRG (consultant services). The 8% increase reflects contractual obligations for the median position. Apparent 4% increase reflects a 3% wage increase plus adjustments based on actual scheduled workdays rather than rounding to 52 weeks. For Town Hall employees working 33.5 hours/week, hours between 33.5 and 40 are paid at regular rate, not time-and-a-half. The travel and seminar line was originally increased in anticipation of hiring an assistant assessor but Administration will revisit this line due to staffing changes.
- Collector/Treasurer – \$213,925; Increase of \$18,837.

Discussion focused on the proposed 14% salary increase for the Treasurer/Collector. Board members requested an updated budget submission from the department head, justification and comparative data from similarly sized municipalities, clarification regarding staffing levels in the office, and an updated operational and workload data before making recommendations. Mr. Lovett indicated a meeting with the Treasurer/Collector is forthcoming and revised numbers are expected. No action taken.

- Town Counsel: \$205,000
- Data Processing (IT): \$256,180; Increase of \$9,680.

IT encompasses all municipal technology systems. The Unused \$1,000 repair/maintenance line was removed. Munis software increased approximately 10% due to additional modules, including utility billing updates related to water meter replacement. Access GIS costs decreased following the transition from MapGeo to Access GIS platform. MySeniorCenter software increased due to added transportation module and grant reporting needs. Professional/technical line includes website services, Adobe licenses, Canva, and related software. The system administration line reflects the IT vendor (Worldband). Training & development line supports Munis training and periodic operational assessments. Administration noted potential additional website ADA compliance costs due to updated DOJ standards (including PDF accessibility requirements) with compliance deadlines anticipated by end of 2026.

The copier lease renewal is under review. There was a reduction in the number of copiers. The default setting was changed to black-and-white to reduce color printing costs. Senior Center newsletter printing was discussed as efforts underway to increase digital subscriptions and reduce print volume. Board members requested certain year-to-date expenditure reports for follow-up review.

- Bonds & Insurance : \$305,200; Increase of \$52,200 is currently estimated and final numbers are pending.
- Town Clerk: \$179,910; Increase of \$6,990. The Board noted a 9% salary increase reflected in the budget but no updated justification has been received to date.
- Elections: \$39,900; Increase of \$25,700. Increase reflects anticipated number of elections in FY26. Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor clarified that election costs fluctuate significantly depending on the election cycle.
- Board of Registrars: \$9,450; Increase of \$5,000. Increase attributed to census work being completed in-house rather than outsourced and continued use of the tax work-off program.
- Conservation Commission: \$20,840; Level funded.
- Planning Board: \$71,640; Level funded.
- Zoning Board of Appeals: \$4,790; Level funded.
- Economic Development: \$2,500; Level funded pending meeting.
- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning: \$3,058; Increase of \$73 that is assessment-based.
- General Postage: \$197,000; Increase of \$5,280.

Postage is currently at approximately \$16,000 year-to-date with a major motor vehicle commitment mailing pending. There is an anticipated increase due to in-house census mailing. Office supplies include paper (tabloid and legal), barcode labels for Munis scanning, and related department-wide materials.

- Gasoline & Diesel: Level Funded. This covers fuel for all Town vehicles. It was cautioned against reducing this line due to volatility in winter fuel usage.
- Public Building Maintenance: \$608,230; Increase of \$21,702.

Discussion included salary line adjustments, an increase in heating costs based on current utility rates as the January bill noted as significantly higher than anticipated, and repair and maintenance costs.

- Town Report: \$1,500; Decreased by \$500.

Board discussion focused on annual report printing costs. 100 copies were printed last year and supply was exhausted. Consensus was not to reduce below 100 copies. Staples quoted approximately \$6,000 for printing and was deemed not cost-effective. Prior vendor cost was approximately \$1,285 last year. Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor anticipate approximately \$1,200 to \$1,300 for the upcoming year using prior vendor. No further reductions recommended

- Conservation Agent:

It was noted that the agent contract has not yet been finalized. Discussion noted: No formal response received from the Commission regarding the proposed budget. The Conservation Agent indicated general satisfaction with current funding but has not met with Administration. He currently bills periodically and his performance was described as satisfactory. No adjustments made at this time pending further discussion.

- Police Department: \$2,377,806; Increase of \$145,609.

Key components discussed included step increases (2%, 3%, 7%, etc.) that are contractual. A 12% increase was confirmed as contractual for a specific position. New full-time patrol officer position added (Line 51160) in the amount of \$69,275. Sick leave buyback reflects contractual provisions for eligible senior officers; budgeted based on eligible personnel. Uniform allowance increases tied to 3% of base salary (percentage-based, not flat rate). A clarification was made for the record: No current positions are being cut; the increase reflects an added new position.

- Police Dispatch: \$372,367; Increase of \$34,630.

The increase is primarily due to retirement-related contractual obligations, including vacation buyback and sick leave buyback.

- Fire Department: \$1,715,708; Increase of \$77,118.

The discussion included step increases for employees based on contract. The Fire Union has three steps; once employees reach the top step, only COLA adjustments apply. The Clerical Union has five steps. An additional \$1,000 telephone line increase was attributed to tablets added to ambulances for reporting and billing documentation. Discussion also included Fire Department overtime. The department is currently down one firefighter, with one in the academy. Backfilling academy personnel is contractual. Recall overtime expenditures were noted at approximately \$104,000. Year-to-date overtime is approximately \$329,000. Concern was expressed that vacation season has not yet begun. Training overtime is calculated based on two sessions per month at three hours each. It was questioned whether adding a second ambulance (Station 2) would reduce recall overtime. Some members expressed belief it may reduce recall needs while others expressed concern it would not reduce overtime and could create labor grievances due to minimum manning and contractual provisions. Police overtime comparison was noted and there was clarification that service models differ significantly. No formal action taken and the discussion will continue separately from the current budget review.

- Ambulance Service: \$85,400; Increase of \$60,000 primarily driven by the special/technical line increase related to Palm Star billing services. Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor noted this billing service is financially beneficial to the Town.
- Municipal Inspector: \$198,565; Increase of \$16,900.

Mr. Tirone provided revised recommendations. He proposed a revised rate for plumbing and electrical inspectors in the amount of \$16,238, reflecting a 3% increase. The original proposed increase was reduced, generating approximately \$4,976 in combined savings. The electrical inspector generates approximately 40,000 in annual permit fees, exceeding salary cost. Further review is scheduled between Administration and the Building Department. He also proposed a gas stipend for plumbing and electrical inspectors in the amount of \$2,400, or approximately \$100/month each. The Town mileage reimbursement policy requires reimbursement at IRS rate (currently 72.5 cents/mile). The lump sum stipend is inconsistent with current policy. The Town anticipates providing access to a municipal vehicle in the future. One inspector regularly submits mileage while the other does not. The Board requested further review and the matter will return after the administrative meeting.

- Alternate Building Commissioner: \$4,000

This line item was included to fund overtime coverage during the Building Commissioner's anticipated three-month unpaid military leave (June to August). An MOU exists with an alternate from another municipality (Oxford and Millville noted). It was questioned whether the line could also cover emergency inspection calls by stipend inspectors. Currently, inspectors are paid twice per year but will be transitioning to quarterly payments next fiscal year. No changes made at this time. Administration and the Building Commissioner will refine the proposal and return to the Board.

- Weights & Measures: \$2,800; Level funded (state assessment based).
- Emergency Management : \$21,350; Level funded.
- Animal Control: \$50,000; level funded.
- Forestry: \$38,800; Increase of \$2,000.
- Vocational Tuition: \$675,000; Currently level funded.

This amount may be adjusted once enrollment numbers are confirmed. Norfolk Aggie is currently the primary placement. No current students at Tri-County this year but approximately 14 students entered into the Tri-County lottery. Administration will contact schools directly for updated enrollment projections.

- Blackstone Valley Technical High School: BVT remains level funded but a public hearing is scheduled for March 12, with updated figures expected thereafter.
- Blackstone Millville Regional High School: Assessment currently estimated at approximately 4.06% increase; Administration continues to review and refine projected impact.
- Engineering: \$15,000; Level funded.

The Board inquired whether full allocation was being utilized. Ms. Taylor and Mr. Lovett confirmed that approximately \$12,500 has been expended year-to-date. Funds are actively used and necessary.

- Public Works Superintendent: \$135,300; Decrease of \$10,075.
- Highway Department Labor: \$708,430; Increase of \$10,800.
- Highway Operational: \$44,250; Decrease of \$900.
- Snow & Ice: \$110,68; Nominal increase of \$1.
- Street Lighting: Level funded; potential reduction may be possible pending review.

- Speed Sign / Mechanical Repair: \$100,000; Level funded.
- Construction & Maintenance: \$330,000; Level funded.
- Street Cleaning: \$3,500; Level funded.
- Waste Collection: \$960,294; Increase of \$38,582 (contractual).
- Recycling: \$224,120; Increase of \$3,815.

Recycling sustainability was questioned. It was confirmed that the Town recently invested in new equipment, replacing equipment approximately 30 years old. Administration will provide an updated recycling revenue report.

- Board of Health: \$161,744; Increase of \$3,045.
- Council on Aging: \$297,417; Increase of \$13,855.

Discussion included clarification of certain line items. Recreational is for programming supplies, monthly birthday lunches, and various senior programs. Other supplies are primarily used for kitchen-related supplies. General supplies are used for items not categorized as office or recreational supplies. The increase was characterized as moderate relative to overall operations.

- Veterans' Services: \$129,801; Increase of \$326.
- Library: \$783,935; Increase of \$93,109.

Extensive discussion occurred regarding the Library budget. Mr. Lovett and Ms. Taylor confirmed that the Library Board of Trustees submitted the current request. A program expense breakdown was distributed to the Board. Additional written explanation regarding staffing will be forthcoming from the Library Director. There is significant year-over-year growth in budget and there are concerns regarding sustainability of those increases. There was a comparison to prior years when the budget was approximately \$500,000 with average annual increases of approximately \$11,000. Two part-time positions previously added now contribute substantially to the current increase. Approximately \$24,000 of part-time salaries previously funded by grant (Lakeview/State grant) now shown within the operating budget to reflect true operating costs, with grant revenue reflected on the revenue side. There are a total of approximately 22 employees currently associated with library operations.

The Board also discussed the impact of the Class and Compensation Study. The current proposal reflects the maximum recommended salary adjustments ("Scenario C" as previously presented). Some members expressed preference for a more moderate approach ("Scenario B" or less). There was concern expressed regarding affordability and long-term sustainability. Board consensus indicated reluctance to support increases beyond approximately 3% across departments. It was acknowledged that implementation of full salary study recommendations is not currently financially feasible.

The Board questioned significant reduction in building repair and maintenance. Administration indicated the Library has remaining warrant article funds that may offset maintenance costs. Concern was expressed that reducing the operating line while using one-time funds may create future structural budget issues. The Board indicated the need for further review and recommendation prior to Town Meeting.

- Parks & Recreation: \$229,845; Increase of \$12,075.

Mr. Lovett said that the summer help increase is to allow one employee to begin work in March (prior to school-year employees becoming available). Repair & Maintenance is for field, playground, and equipment repairs. The recreational line is for program supplies. The other supplies line funds non-program materials. It was mentioned that the Chair of Parks and Recreation and other Commissioners previously donated supplies personally. The Board noted Parks and Senior Center budgets combined remain significantly below Library total budget.

- Historical Commission: \$3,000; Level funded.

- Memorial Day: \$11,800; Level funded.
- Retirement of Debt: \$429,665; Increase of \$4,615.
- Long-Term Debt Interest: \$174,520; Decrease of \$13,080.
- Short-Term Debt Interest: \$280,085; Decrease of \$175,370.
- Cherry Sheet Assessments: \$56,310; Increase of \$7,863.

Cherry Sheet charges are state assessments deducted from state aid. It includes items such as mosquito control and other mandated assessments. The Board requested clarification regarding the "Non-Renewal Excise" component and Administration will follow up with an explanation. The Non-Renewal Excise line was also discussed. When a motor vehicle excise tax remains unpaid, it is transferred to the Deputy Collector. The account is then marked as "non-renewal" with the Registry of Motor Vehicles and the Registry prevents license renewal until payment is made. The State charges a processing fee for this enforcement action. The Cherry Sheet "Non-Renewal Excise" line reflects reimbursement to the State for that administrative cost. Ms. Taylor noted pending state-level discussions regarding potential changes to excise enforcement procedures.

- Worcester County Retirement: \$1,449,416; Increase of \$126,250.

This is the Town's annual assessment from Worcester County Retirement. The assessment is based on current retirees, active employees, and actuarial obligations. The payment is made July 1. The Town receives a discount for paying in full on July 1. The assessment documentation was previously distributed to the Board for review.

- Unemployment Compensation: \$30,000; Increase of \$5,000 based on anticipated exposure and historical trends.
- Health Insurance: \$1,103,200; Increase of \$22,000.

The Town recently received notification of an approximately 11% premium increase. A meeting has been scheduled with the insurance representative. It was noted that prior industry discussions attributed rising costs to GLP-1 medications. However, increases remain comparable to prior year despite announced changes to coverage.

- Life Insurance: \$4,500; Increase of \$500.
- Medicare Match: \$91,930; Increase of \$2,680.
- Compensated Absences: \$15,000; Increase of \$5,000.

This line item is used for legally required payouts such as vacation upon separation. It covers contractual sick leave buybacks or other contractual obligations not fully budgeted in departmental lines. The increase reflects anticipation of potential retirements or separations. If an unexpected retirement occurs (example discussed hypothetically), this line would fund required payouts.

- Capital Transfer: \$3,209,420; Increase of \$497,260.

The increase represents transfer of growth revenue (formerly A&P / cannabis impact fees). There is approximately 90% to be transferred to Capital Stabilization/Capital Trust. Funds must be appropriated within the operating budget before transfer. Ms. Taylor will reconcile final numbers now that bills are finalized.

- Sewer Enterprise Bond: \$1,309,610; Decrease of \$23,182.

Indirect costs are still under review. Administration will meet with the Chair of the Water and Sewer Commission and the DPW Superintendent for final reconciliation.

- Water Enterprise Bond: \$1,371,672; Decrease of \$463 (indirect costs to be updated following review).

Proposed Warrant Articles / Capital Placeholders

- Water Line Replacement on Lakeview & Valley Streets: preliminary estimate is approximately \$1.5 million total. The DPW Superintendent currently has approximately \$400,000 available. The project is likely to be subcontracted, including engineering costs. Work includes replacement of aging/transite pipe. Final article expected to be written with a "not to exceed" amount. Placeholder was added pending refined estimates.
- JFK / Maloney Complex Municipal Retrofit: approximately \$1.5 million (subject to refinement). The School District is awaiting MSBA determination regarding potential reimbursement clawback on the roof project. MSBA repayment may be prorated and payable over time. The concept includes retrofitting for municipal use (e.g., police, fire, senior center). Long-term design and space planning is anticipated. Potential revenue-generating uses were discussed such as a daycare and before/after school programs. Any unused funds could be reallocated following final planning. Placeholder to remain while additional assessments and MSBA feedback are obtained.
- Sidewalk Machine: there is a grant available up to \$50,000. It is intended to address winter pedestrian safety in high-traffic business district areas. There is a policy decision required regarding coverage priorities. The Board requested a placeholder article be added.
- Earth Removal Fees: to consider updating the earth removal fee schedule. It was proposed to remove the fee structure from the bylaw and establish an adjustable fee schedule. Research will be conducted on comparable municipalities and the matter will return with a recommendation.
- Social Consumption (Cannabis): proposal to limit to one establishment via bylaw amendment. CCC regulations allow social consumption only adjacent to existing marijuana establishments. A previous attempt was denied by the Board of Health under separate regulatory authority. No formal vote taken and the matter was tabled for future policy discussion.
- Sewer Expansion of the Millerville Area Feasibility Study: update a feasibility study conducted in the late 1990s by BSC Group and Bill Talley. There is potential for sewer extension down Central Street/Whipple to the existing trunk line. Administration will locate historical study documents (archival/digital search underway). A placeholder was suggested pending document retrieval and updated analysis.

The Board had no objections to the discussed placeholders. Budget and warrant articles will continue to be refined prior to Town Meeting. A summary will be prepared and circulated. Additional workshop(s) to follow.

4. New Business

None.

5. Adjournment

- Motion: Mary Bulso made a motion to adjourn at 8:41 PM; seconded by Michael Sweeney. Vote unanimous; motion passed.

Time: 8:41 PM

Meeting Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Sara Peters