



Town of Bridgewater Budget & Finance Committee

February 9, 2026

6:00 PM

66 Central Square

Academy Building

Conference Room 201A/2nd Floor

and via Zoom:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84339327555>

Meeting ID: 843 3932 7555

MEETING MINUTES

A Quorum of the Town Council May Be In Attendance

A. Call to Order

Councilor Murphy called the Budget & Finance Committee to order at 6:00pm. The meeting took place in Conference Room 201A, 2nd Floor of the Academy Building and via Zoom.

Committee members present: Councilor McGrath, Councilor Loreti (via Zoom) and Councilor Murphy.

Also in attendance was Town Manager Justin Casanova-Davis, Finance Director Laurie Guerrini and Comptroller Ashley Pires.

Councilor Linde was also in attendance.

B. Public Comment – None

Councilor McGrath made a motion to take D. Legislation Referred out of order. This was duly seconded by Councilor Murphy.

A voice vote was taken with the results as follows: Loreti: Yea; McGrath – Yea; Murphy – Yea. Motion passed 3-0

C. Discussion

a) Discussion of FY27 Budget

Ms. Guerrini noted that there is not a lot to update, trying to nail down the budget calendar. Goals determined from the budget resolution, conversations with Town Council, Finance Committee and subcommittees. Revenue comes from property taxes, State Aid, local receipts and other funding sources (debt payments, ambulance receipts). Looking at trends, taking a

good stab at realistic estimates. Scheduled budget meetings with the Department Heads, meetings start tomorrow. Will hear their needs and how they are spending now, they understand it is a lean budget.

Councilor McGrath asked what the projected total budget was, what is the revenue? Ms. Guerrini noted \$82,032,471 for the operating budget.

Councilor McGrath noted that Desi says we only have to give the school a certain amount but different on Mr. Powers. They are going to have to cut theirs and we are going to have to cut ours.

Councilor McGrath asked what the reserve fund had and Ms. Guerrini noted about \$9M.

Councilor Murphy noted that an item on Justin's proposal was a larger increase in ambulance reserves. What is the difference and what was increased? Ms. Guerrini noted that we have been using a 2.5% increase each year. 24-25 was flat, people were not paying their bills. Prison made key payments. Billing depends on what service they are receiving; just transport, treatment, etc. Will provide an ambulance dashboard which provides per run. We are constantly meeting with the billing company to make sure payments are being received.

Councilor Murphy asked if the town is limited to how much we can increase ambulance costs? Ms. Guerrini noted that there was a resolution by the council. Actual billing is done by New England Medical. They know the industry better than us, continue to have conversations with them. They have the industry rates and advise us.

Councilor Murphy noted that we have not changed as a council and Ms. Guerrini noted that we have kept it as 30% of what the ambulance budget is. The Town wants to make sure enough in the fund to sustain the ambulance/fire. We are leasing 2 ambulances. Will probably put an order in next year because it takes two years to receive.

Councilor McGrath asked about page 18 State County Assessments – and is that stuff we are paying for (mosquito control, etc.). Ms. Guerrini noted that it comes out of our local aid payments.

Councilor Loreti asked about the Excise taxes – did the January report come out as mentioned. Ms. Guerrini noted that the commitment did come out, up a little so good

LG: will get that excise commitment, it is not updating at the moment. JL: last year was \$3.9m, 2027 we are projecting just over \$4m. Just want to see if we outperform those projections.

Councilor McGrath asked what happens if the Town Council does not use one of their lines items and Ms. Guerrini noted that the money would go into free cash.

Councilor Loreti noted that this coming years budget, one increase is to employee benefits, goes up \$1M from last year and asked what was driving that? Ms. Guerrini noted that estimated health insurance to be 15%, pension assessment is 7.26%, workers compensation and medicare, life insurance, unemployment is 3%. Averages to a 10% increase. All those little buckets.

Councilor Loreti asked what was driving the 15% in health insurance and Ms. Guerrini noted that we will be reaching out to Mayflower to see if there are any other options, may offer lower plans to the communities. Waiting for the Steering Committee to do their work. Any changes to the health insurance have to have a public employee committee and discuss with our bargaining units.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that the town has been on the conservative end of these increases; schools saw a larger increase last year. This is not out of the norm, the average is higher than what we are at. Hoping the number comes down, starts out higher and then comes down.

Councilor Murphy noted that it looks like growth is down from last year but fees are up.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that we will let the Principal Assessor take a look at what the growth is; not allowing water tie-ins will affect growth. Growth has been going down for the last 5 years.

Councilor McGrath noted that we cannot do taxes in Massachusetts anymore, not keeping up, too expensive. Cumberland Farms on Jasmine Way, not sure what is going on back there, need to look at companies and DIFs to encourage people to come.

Councilor Murphy noted that every year we look at this and pinching pennies, eventually something has to give or make drastic cuts or close something. No one is advocating to cut employees or stop services but until we take a drastic measure we need to do something. We have to make decisions to give ourselves more flexibility because it is not sustainable for what we are offering. I want to see us have flexibility to build us back up but we just can't do it at this rate.

Ms. Guerrini noted that we are a town, there is only so much revenue. Schools are the biggest expense on the budget. We work with the Department leaders to cut but it is not enough.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that just closing the gap that we have. Last budget did not add flexibility, reduced staff, departmental changes. The gap is wider from last year. Without more revenue we will have to continue to trim.

Councilor Murphy noted that we are providing a certain number of services but we are spreading it thin.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that probably cutting a service to maintain a service, that is the reality where we are at. Schools want to add 10 staff which would add \$2.1M to our deficit, which is not possible without cuts on the town side.

Councilor McGrath noted that it has to be both, cuts on the school side and cuts on the town side. Everyone is struggling. Has to be on both.

Councilor Loreti asked Ms. Guerrini to speak a little on the process to increase in spending over last year.

MS. Guerrini noted that we are meeting with the departments, we know what the salaries look like and the forecast plus the reduction of the COLA, we think we can bring the number down a little. Dig into each department to see where it gets us. These numbers are not the final number. We are going to tighten them up and find a little bit of savings.

Councilor Loreti asked if the number includes the same FTEs from last year and Ms. Guerrini noted that this forecast was based on last years, we did do some eliminating of some positions, will look at that as well.

Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that some of those positions do get incorporated as part of the forecast and we will have to decide whether we can keep them or not.

Councilor Loreti asked where are we with the Collins Center and Town Manager Casanova-Davis noted that doing well, draft report, there were some departments they had to go back to. Should have a report by end of February/early March. Will ask them to present their information to the council. They look at trends, performance trends, look at other communities.

Councilor Loreti closed with saying that we have a lot of ground to make up from what the school is asking and what we can afford. Big gap to close.

D. Legislation Referred

- a) General Ordinance D-FY25-020: Adoption of Clause 22J of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 59, Section 5 (“HERO Act”)

Councilor Loreti noted that we need to continue this on the agenda so that budget discussions can be done to see if this can be part of the budget for next year.

Councilor McGrath made a motion continue Ordinance D-FY25-020 to the next meeting. This was duly seconded by Councilor Loreti.

A voice vote was taken with the results as follows: Loreti: Yea; McGrath – Yea; Murphy – Yea. Motion passed 3-0

- b) Order O-FY26-049: Acceptance of Donation – High Pond Residents Association
Councilor McGrath made a motion recommend Order O-FY26-049, which was duly seconded by Councilor Loreti.

A voice vote was taken with the results as follows: Loreti: Yea; McGrath – Yea; Murphy – Yea. Motion passed 3-0

E. Public Comment - None

F. Adjournment of Meeting

Councilor McGrath made a motion to adjourn, which was duly seconded by Councilor Loreti.

A voice vote was taken with the results as follows: Loreti: Yea; McGrath – Yea; Murphy – Yea. Motion passed 3-0

Meeting adjourned at 6:50pm.

In accordance with the applicable provisions of the Town of Bridgewater Home Rule Charter and Town Council Rules and Procedures, the Budget & Finance Committee assembled voted, at their meeting on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, to approve the aforementioned minutes, as submitted.