

**TOWN OF BOLTON
FINANCE COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
7:15 P.M., THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2026
TOWN HALL/ZOOM**

Finance Committee Members Present Via Town Hall/ Zoom: Chair Ross Lally, Member Tyler Egner, Member David Cowles, Member Rodney Fournier, Member Benjamin Davies, Member Denay Johnston, Member Melissa Wielandt

Staff Present Via Zoom/In Person: Board Clerk Mary Johnston, Chief Financial Officer Jill Collins, Board of Education Superintendent David Caruso, Town Administrator Jim Rupert, Interim Finance Director Stephanie Smigala, Registrar Sandra Pierog

Others Present Via Zoom/In Person: Jim Loersch, Bruce Dixon, Amanda Gordon, Bob Morra, Rebecca Gents, Betty Caruso, Monica Hobert, Jen Carvalho, Matthew Perreira, Ashley Perreira, Bernice Dixon, James Perkins, Megan Flick, Mark Freeman, Rhea Klein, Chris Duffy, Rebecca Gent, Elliott Hambrook, Scott Michaud, Tom Gent

1. Call to Order

R. Lally called the Public Hearing to order at 7:21 p.m. and said there will be a second Public Hearing on April 28, 2026, at 7:15 p.m.

R. Lally discussed why he moved to Bolton and the services the residents receive. R. Lally gave a background on the budget process and then reviewed the FY 2027 Budget PowerPoint with those in attendance. R. Lally said last year the Town started out at a 5% overall increase in spending with a 13% tax increase but reduced it to a 1.5% increase in spending and a 5% increase in taxes. R. Lally then discussed how last year, and this year's shortfalls affected the budgets. R. Lally said there is a 4% increase in spending and 10% increase in taxes for next year's budget. R. Lally said all the surplus from last year was spent this year and discussed the proposed expenses for next year. R. Lally said there are cuts in capital expenses. R. Lally reported total capital improvements of \$764,448 proposed, total debt service of \$1,421,514, contingency fund of \$50,000 making the total for the Town Proper of \$7,585,519 and the Board of Education total of \$17,613,666 and the Finance Committee gave back \$30,000 for a grand total budget of \$27,405,147. R. Lally said the overall increase is 4.8% for total expenditures and is in line with inflation. R. Lally said that \$140,000 can be cut from Capital but cannot cut Debt Service. R. Lally reviewed revenues projected for the next fiscal year. R. Lally reported the proposed Real Estate and Personal Property Mil Rate, as of today, would be 35.46, which is a 9.78% increase over last year. R. Lally opened the floor for comments from the attendees. J. Rupert and D. Caruso thanked R. Lally and S. Smigala for the budget presentation.

Bob Morra, 83 Bolton Road, said his comments were limited to the revenue and what is happening in the state legislature regarding revenue towards education. B. Morra said there are additional monies the State should be sending for \$1.7 million. B. Morra felt it was up to the citizens to demand the State legislature send monies owed. R. Lally said it is important to reach out to the Governor, State representatives regarding these funds.

Chris Duffy, 8 Stone Hedge Lane, said there are three things that are frustrating: communication problem, revenue problem, and expenses. C. Felt there was no expense problem but thanked the Committee for great budget communication and has improved over last year. C. Said the Coffee and Conversations sessions were great and the Board of Education budget information was clear and informative. C. Appreciates the education budget is the most significant part of the budget and thanked D. Caruso. C. said the School District is performing and is a return on investment.

Rebecca Gent, 20 Meadow Road, said the PowerPoint slides are fantastic and loved the details. R. Gents asked about the two items for Lyman Bridge in Capital Budget and if that was intentional and asked for clarification between the two-line items. D. Cowles replied one is for the Grant match and the other is for infrastructure engineering. J. Rupert explained how the money is spent for the project and when the Town is reimbursed.

Amanda Gordon, 23 Golf Road, asked about restructuring the firetruck loan, Finance budget and removal the money for personnel costs, health budget being actual or projected, transportation budget increase, revalue of the Capital budget, and reduction of the cost for the modular office. A. Gordon felt the motor vehicle calculation should be included in the total. J. Rupert explained how the short-term loan for the firetruck will be paid down. J. Rupert said they will know more next week regarding the Finance budget. J. Rupert and D. Caruso said budgets have been adjusted for actual health insurance costs. D. Caruso said the school transportation contract ran out and the two bids came in high. D. Caruso is hoping to finalize the negotiations in the next couple of weeks. The contract is for five years. A. Gordon asked about the revaluation amount. R. Lally replied there is a slight increase.

Chris Duffy, 8 Stone Ledge Lane, said he likes the budget communications this year but would like to know the long-term plan for revenue generation. Chris would like to see a five- or ten-year plan. J. Rupert explained the plan for future development for tax revenue but could increase costs for services. B. Morra added information on affordable housing from the state and discussion was held on affect on costs for town services and affordable housing.

Mark Freeman, Lucks Way, thanked the Committee for the budget communications and encouraged residents to contact state representatives on school. M. Freeman asked the Town to provide this information on the Town website and provide sample language. Mr. Freeman stressed the importance of getting residents involved.

R. Lally discussed the issue with the lack of information provided to the Committee during the budget process.

Elliot Hambrook, 58 Notch Road, asked about the withdrawal of \$2.5 million in surplus but the bar chart says \$1.5 million on page 11. S. Smigala clarified that it is \$2.5 million and the slides will be adjusted.

Amanda Gordon, 23 Golf Road, highlighted the major projects for the school system and the Board of Selectmen are working on a potential new town hall concept. A. Gordon stressed the budget shortfall is only going to get worse. J. Rupert pointed out that Town retires significant debt in 2032. R. Lally also discussed recallable bonds.

Rhea Klein, 4 Bayberry Road, asked about receiving the health insurance information later in the budget process. D. Caruso and J. Rupert said the health insurance information was received mid March and explained the process. R. Klein thanked the Committee for the budget materials. R. Klein said the two state bills related to school funding is SB 7 and HB 5,002 and on the ct.gov website to track. R. Klein added information on how to contact state representatives.

R. Fournier and S. Smigala provided additional scenarios based on cuts at 10% and getting down to a 0% increase. S. Smigala explained the scenarios for options to budget cuts and the reductions to the Mil Rate.

Scott Michaud, 29 Green Hills Drive, said his taxes have increased in the last four years and is concerned about people not coming to Bolton. S. Michaud said the Town needs to cut expenditures. S. Michaud said surrounding communities have cut their budgets. S. Michaud discussed last year's referendums and hopes the Committee considers that residents cannot afford the tax increases every year.

Amanda Gordon asked if there were dollar value on the charts for what the cuts equate to. S. Smigala replied yes and is on a different chart. S. Smigala explained the reduction. A. Gordon responded to other towns cutting their budgets. S. Michaud explained he commented on those towns because they were used for comparisons. R. Lally said the Committee can look at their current rates and update the information in the budget presentation.

Tom Gent, 20 Meadow Road, said providing a projection for one or two years out for a budget would be a more palpable sell. J. Rupert replied that the Town can do that.

Eric, Lynch Street, discussed that any substantial increase in taxes make residents vote no for the referendum and using 5% increase would be great. It was suggested to provide name tags for the Committee.

Barbara, Bolton Road, asked about the sample language to use for communications to state representatives. R. Lally replied to reach out to the Democratic or Republican committees for samples.

Scott Michaud asked if there was a system for cutting the budget. R. Lally explained the process for making budget cuts and must make a reduction by charter if the referendum does not pass. R. Lally would like to see an increase in voters for the referendum.

D. Cowles discussed the reduction of hours for the referendum. Sandra Pierog explained the reduction in the hours has to do with the cost of holding the referendums and when the residents vote during the day. D. Cowles pointed out residents can obtain an absentee ballot.

2. Adjournment: There being no further comments, R. Lally closed the Public Hearing at 8:52 p.m

Respectfully submitted by Mary J. Johnston

Mary J. Johnston

Please see the Minutes of subsequent meetings for corrections to these Minutes and any corrections hereto.