

**TOWN OF BOLTON
3 BOARD MEETING
JOINT MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE
FINANCE COMMITTEE & BOARD OF EDUCATION
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2025, 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL & ZOOM
MINUTES**

Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and Board of Education Members Present In-Person:

First Selectman Rodney Fournier, Deputy First Selectman Robert Morra, Amanda Gordon, Gwen Marrior, Tim Sadler, Chairman Ross Lally, Tyler Egner, Rhea Klein, Ashley Phelan, Christopher Davey, Ashley Paggioli

Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and Board of Education Members Present Via Zoom: Chairman Andrew Broneill

Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and Board of Education Members Absent: Pamela Sawyer, Mather Clarke, Christopher Connelly, Benjamin Davies, Christopher Duffy

Staff Present In-Person: Superintendent David Caruso, Town Administrator James Rupert, Chief Financial Officer Jill Collins

Staff Present Via Zoom: Recording Secretary Kacie Cannon

Others Present In-Person: Denay Johnson

Others Present Via Zoom: James Loersch, David Cowles, Monita Hebert, Megan Alubicki Flick, Brett (last name unknown)

1. Call to Order: R. Fournier called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Public Comment

There was no Public Comment.

3. Discussion on Columbia Student Count and Projections:

Superintendent David Caruso provided an overview of his research and efforts to recruit and attract students from Columbia to Bolton High School. He noted that he met with the Superintendent of Columbia over the summer to discuss partnerships, participation challenges, and strategies to increase future enrollment. D. Caruso noted that, although E.O. Smith and RHAM High School also serve Columbia students, Bolton High School remains a viable option.

D. Caruso reported that approximately 57 eighth-grade students are currently enrolled at Columbia. These students were recently invited for a campus tour, which included an overview of academic offerings, a student-led Q & A session, and highlights of the music and culinary programs. D. Caruso noted that the student's families were subsequently invited to the school, and approximately 8 to 10 families participated in the event. Additional follow up will include personally reaching out to families and offering free admission to Bolton High School events. D. Caruso stated that a promotional video is also being created, and he is collaborating with the Superintendent of Columbia to host an information night at Columbia. He also intends to maintain contact with the interested families throughout the year.

A. Phelan expressed appreciation for D. Caruso's outreach efforts. D. Caruso noted that recruitment has become more challenging due to expanded school choice options and declining enrollment. A. Gordon suggested creating a pen pal program to foster friendships between students at Columbia and Bolton High

School and potentially integrating it into the curriculum. D. Caruso highlighted Bolton High School's top ranking in the Next Generation Accountability Index, and noted that it is the only Category 1 school on the list.

4. Discussion on budget and related items for the current fiscal year, next year, and subsequent years, including:

a. Revenues

Jill Collins noted the challenge in getting the budget passed this year and stated that there was a \$618,000.00 surplus for 2027, which is approximately half of the typical surplus amount. A. Gordon stated that the surplus the year before last was \$1.2 million. Finance Committee Chairman Ross Lally agreed that the upcoming year will be difficult and emphasized the need to better inform taxpayers to avoid multiple budget referendums. R. Morra added that expenditures have been significantly reduced, and he expects the surplus will be insignificant next year, given the reduction by half this year.

b. Expenditures

A. Gordon asked for the percentage of unspent revenue. R. Lally stated that the Town's contingency fund is only \$25,000 which is insufficient for unanticipated expenses. R. Fournier noted that the addition of Columbia students would have a positive impact to the budget.

c. Debt Service

R. Klein asked when the 2017 bond will be paid off. J. Collins stated it will be paid off next year, with \$181,000.00 remaining in principal and interest on the \$1.1 million, 10-year bond.

C. Davey explained that he reviewed the past 25 years of budget data and observed that both boards underspend by a significant percentage each year. He reported that the Board of Selectmen (BOS) underspent by approximately 6%, and the Board of Education (BOE) underspent by 4%. He suggested reducing future budgets by 1%-2%. A. Gordon proposed allocating the extra funds to the capital reserve account. R. Morra noted that although there is a pattern, expenses can vary regardless of how the Boards plan.

C. Davey recommended analyzing the past five years to calculate the average underspending percentage and using it to adjust the annual risk allocation. A. Gordon reported that, since FY13, the BOS underspent by 7.43%, and the BOE underspent by 3.01%.

A. Phelan agreed with analyzing historical budgets to determine appropriate contingencies and risk adjustments. A. Gordon suggested a deeper review at the department level to determine specific departments or line items that are more likely to underspend, and noted the current review process only includes the last two to three years.

J. Rupert stated that he looks at more than just the past few years and looks closely at patterns of spending in each of the departments. He added that he prohibits surplus spending at the end of the year and instead retains the funds for employee losses, weather events, and other unexpected expenses. He added that moving funds to and from the BOS account is difficult due to the process involved, including town meetings if the amount is over \$25,000.

R. Fournier emphasized the importance of a larger contingency fund, noting that with \$1-\$2 million in reserves, the fire truck loan could be paid off early to save on interest costs. J. Collins agreed and noted the additional expenses associated with financing. J. Rupert stated that the Town plans to roll the fire truck loan into a bond next year.

R. Fournier stated that a contingency fund would provide more flexibility. A. Gordon asked what happens to contingency at end of year. J. Collins explained that \$25,000 goes to the Rainy Day Fund and the remainder goes to surplus. A. Gordon noted that, under current policy, contingency funds are lost at the end of the year. The board members discussed changing the policy and revising the Rainy Day Fund formula to increase the amount that goes into reserves. The members also discussed Board of Education budget shortfalls that are covered by the Board of Selectmen. R. Fournier recommended continuing the discussion at the next budget meeting. The board members also agreed to provide more transparent budget information to voters, including the impact of budget reductions and town efforts to ensure secure grants and ensure fiscal responsibility.

d. Capital Improvements Discussion – (Both Town and School):

i. Updates on Current Capital Projects

J. Rupert provided the following updates on capital projects:

- The high school garage is complete and being used to store fans and vehicles.
- The Notch Road Municipal Center Road Project, which included the demolition of the old school and improvements to Meeting Rooms A and B at the Senior Center, is going well. ADA-compliance work will be complete by December 1st.
- Plans for the new soccer fields at Herrick Park are ready to be reviewed by the Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC).
- Community septic plans for Town Hall, the Troopers Office, and the Library are also complete and ready for IWC review.
- The 70% design submission for the Heritage Farm Trail has been sent to CTDOT for review.
- \$1.5 million in grant funds have been awarded for the Lyman Road Bridge replacement and matching funds have been set aside in the budget.
- Grant paperwork for the Senior Center renovations to Rooms A and B at the Senior Center is complete.
- Grant paperwork is in progress for an unsolicited \$250,000 Parks and Recreation Grant that was secured by Senator Rahman.
- The Bolton High School control system is being upgraded and is expected to continue into mid-winter.
- The AARPA-funded generators at Town Hall and Bolton Center School are ongoing. The high school supplies water to the Bolton Center School, Senior Center, Community Voice Channel, Town Garage, Town Highway Garage, and Town Hall Annex. The conduit installation is complete and the town is waiting on the generators.
- The Senior Center van project is ongoing.
- An assessment is currently underway to inform future capital needs at the Fire Department, and a facility study is also being conducted to assist the BOE with obtaining grants, to inform future projects for Town Hall, and to help with capital planning.

ii. Upcoming Capital Projects for Next Year

R. Morra recommended continuing to allocate \$100,000.00 annually for grant matches and emphasized the importance of grant funding. J. Rupert added that shared services with other towns are an important cost-saving strategy. A. Gordon suggested hiring or contracting a grant specialist to identify and manage grants, and noted it does not need to be a full-time position and could be done on a trial basis. R. Fournier proposed creating a shared position with other towns.

R. Fournier asked if any capital projects need to be added to the list for next year. J. Rupert stated that this year's funding will focus on existing projects but he has asked department heads to identify future projects for long-term planning. A. Gordon recommended that the departments also include wish list items to support the vision for the town. The board members discussed potential wish list items and associated maintenance needs.

B. Adjournment

R. Morra MOVED to ADJOURN the meeting at 7:53 p.m. T. Sadler SECONDED. All members voted in favor of adjournment.

Respectfully submitted by Kacie Cannon

Kacie Cannon

Please see the minutes of subsequent meetings for the approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.

Town of Bolton

Sign In Sheet

Meeting: 3 BOARD Meeting

Date: 10/14/25

Print Name	Print Address
1. Denay Johnston	11 Velpi Road
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