

**TOWN OF BOLTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING &
BUDGET WORKSHOP #3
Thursday, January 29, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.
Town Hall & Zoom Meeting
MEETING MINUTES**

	ROSTER	IN-PERSON	ZOOM	ABSENT
FIRST SELECTMAN:	Rodney Fournier	X		
SELECTMEN:	Bryce Aaronson	X		
	Mather Clarke			X
	David Cowles	X		
	Robert DePietro		X	
	Gwen Marrion		X	
	Tim Sadler	X		

STAFF:	James Rupert, Town Administrator
	Elizabeth Waters, Town Clerk
	Carrie Concatelli, Director of Senior Social Services/Public Health
	Ross Lally, Chairman, Finance Committee
	Andrea Vassallo, Recording Secretary

Call to Order:

First Selectman Rodney Fournier called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
 Selectwoman Gwen Marrion attended the meeting via Zoom.
 Selectman Robert DePietro joined the meeting at 6:17 p.m. via Zoom.
 Selectman Tim Sadler left the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

1.0 Town Clerk:

Town Staff Representative: Elizabeth Waters, Town Clerk

Board of Selectman (BOS) & Town Clerk Budget Review & Discussion Summary

The Town Clerk's budget discussion highlights payroll increases and essential contracts for land records management.

Budget Review Discussion Topic Areas:

- Budget and contract increases
- Property Check System
- Record Retention/Storage

Budget Adjustments:

- **Increase**
 - Payroll – 3% (typical)

- Contracts increase – 11% (ex. Dog Program, COT Program – includes management of land records, indexing, fee station, microfilms, e-verification system).
- Record retention – approximately 3,300 records at \$0.98/record

- **Decrease**
 - None.

- **Maintain**
 - Majority of the proposed FY 26 budget.

Department Line Item Review & BOS/Council Questions

At the request of the BOS E. Waters addressed the following questions about specific line items within the budget for the Town Clerk:

- **Record Retention procedures and practices.**
 - Discussion by the Board of Selectman and the Town Clerk, E. Waters, regarding the state mandated procedures and practices of record retention, required by the CT State Librarian, specifically the conversion of land records into microfilms.
 - Microfilming is still required by state standards, even with electronic records.
 - Microfilm provides a permanent backup in case of catastrophic loss of physical or digital records.
 - Selectmen questioned the associated costs, however Town Administrator, James Rupert, and E. Waters clarified that state statute dictates the record processing, retention, and storage of the documents.

- **Property Check System effectiveness.**
 - Selectwoman G. Marrion inquired how many e-notifications were sent last year. E. Waters stated she didn't have the total numbers on hand.
 - Discussion by Selectwoman G. Marrion and E. Waters ensued about the effectiveness of the notification system and if it was worth continuing to subscribe to the program. E. Waters stated the property check system is effective in notifying landowners of changes to their records.
 - Notifications are sent out quickly upon any changes to land records.
 - The system is seen as justifiable due to public concern over property fraud.

- **Department Head Salary Reviews & Negotiations – G. Marrion & J. Rupert, Town Administrator**
 - G. Marrion stated that salary negotiations for department heads and understanding which department heads hold union contracts is crucial for budget understanding.
 - J. Rupert stated that there are currently three (3) union contracts with predetermined payroll increases for the next two (2) years.
 - Most town employees are covered by union contracts with pre-negotiated salary increases.
 - Raises for non-union department heads are typically aligned with union supervisor increases (e.g. Director of Recreation, Building & Grounds Supervisor).
 - G. Marrion stated department heads that are not under union contract the BOS has discretion to consider approvals of any salary increases by examining performance reviews. J. Rupert confirmed G. Marrion is correct and further stated that performance reviews for department heads are pending.

- Non-Union Contract Department Heads (including but not limited to):
 - Recreation Director
 - Fire Marshal
 - Town Clerk
 - Tax Collector
 - Assessor
 - Finance Director
 - Registrar of Voters
 - Fire Chief
 - Town Administrator
- Department Heads Under Union Contracts (including but not limited to):
 - Building Official
 - Librarian
 - Director of Senior/Social Services & Public Health
- Non-Union Department Heads with Supervisory Title Positions (but not limited to):
 - Highway Foreman
 - Building & Grounds Supervisor

2.0 Senior Social Services/Public Health:

Town Staff Representative: Carrie Concatelli, Director, Senior Social Services/Public Health

Board of Selectman (BOS) & Senior Social Services/Public Health Budget Review & Discussion Summary

C. Concatelli stated that the Senior Social Services budget aims to maintain current staffing and service levels while addressing concerns about long-term sustainability without future service cuts. Staffing is the largest expense, followed by transportation (most costly program). Payroll includes contractual union salary increases and longevity for the director; all other staff are part-time and non-union. The budget for Public Health is a separate budget from Senior Social Services but administered by C. Concatelli and her staff.

Budget Review Discussion Topic Areas:

- Budget & Program Sustainability
- Existing Program & Services
- Operational Challenges
- Public Health Services Budget

Budget Adjustments:

- **Increase**
 - Payroll – pre-negotiated union salary and longevity increases (director)
 - Transportation Service Drivers – state mandated minimum wage increase.
- **Decrease**
 - Professional development costs.
- **Maintain**

- Majority of the proposed FY 26 budget.
- Vehicle repair costs.

Department Line Item Review & BOS/Council Questions

At the request of the BOS C. Concatelli addressed the following questions about specific line items within the budget for Senior Social Services/Public Health Department:

Budget & Program Sustainability

Selectman DePietro inquired how Bolton compared to other sister municipalities regarding total budget expenditures and allocation. C. Concatelli stated that she was not certain. J. Rupert, Town Administrator, stated that it could be possible to find other municipalities of a similar size (demographics) and compare however he stated that what is unique about Bolton is that their Senior Social Services Department and Public Health Programs are combined service offerings and occasionally share budget expenses.

C. Concatelli voiced concerns about the sustainability of the Department and the potential of cutting services. She further stated that the program offerings and services are well attended by the local area citizens.

C. Concatelli stated that transportation services have the largest budget expenditure. There is a budget increase for transportation service drivers due to the state minimum wage increase. She further stated that it is often difficult to find drivers with a CDL license. Currently Bolton has two transportation services drivers, one with a CDL license and one without. Currently the Town receives an approximate \$11K grant from the CT Department of Transportation and stated the funds are stable and reliable.

Existing Program & Services

- Consistent across most programs and are well attended,
- Last fall the Department was very busy due to many changes to Medicare,
- Operation Fuel program was able to be administered in-house last year.
- Low-or-no-cost program offerings - Knock Box program.
- Most programs and services are free. Concatelli and J. Rupert confirmed the expenses are paid out of the Miscellaneous Expense budget item in the General Fund.

Operational Challenges

- Need more van drivers, difficult to find CDL drivers. Currently Bolton has two transportation services drivers, one with a CDL license and one without. Scheduling trips that require a licensed CDL driver currently take months in advance to schedule – and if there is an emergency where the CDL driver needs take the day off there is no current back up driver and the program is cancelled. Utilizing commercial bus companies in the past have proven to be expensive.
- Barrier – Operational issues with the food pantry which needs more space.
- Selectman stated that the topic of driver's rates was discussed during last year's budget session and questioned whether finding an additional transportation service driver would increase the payroll budget. C. Concatelli stated that the drivers rates have historically been on the lower end of the pay scale.

Public Health Services Budget

- The public health budget is generated by the Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD) and J. Rupert stated that they are anticipating increases.
- The health district provides essential services, including vaccination clinics, sanitarian, etc.
- The budget includes per capita fees for health services provided by the district.
- Anticipated increases in costs have not yet been finalized; however, the cost is approximately \$6/person for approximately 5000 people town wide.

3.0 Finance Committee:

Town Staff Representative: Ross Lally, Chairman, Finance Committee

Board of Selectman (BOS) & Finance Committee Budget Review & Discussion Summary

The Finance Committee budget remains largely unchanged, with a focus on improved communications with town citizens.

Budget Review Discussion Topic Areas:

- Payroll/Administrative Services
- Communications/Advertising

Budget Adjustments:

- **Increase**
 - Advertising - \$1,800
- **Decrease**
 - None.
- **Maintain**
 - Majority of the proposed FY 26 budget.

Department Line Item Review & BOS/Council Questions

At the request of the BOS Ross Lally, Chairman, addressed the following questions about specific line items within the budget for the Finance Committee:

Budget

There were noted budget reallocation adjustments between Payroll and Administrative Services. These funds cover the expenses incurred of the board clerk, whether a town staff employee or contractor.

Audit

The cost of the Auditor was not reflective in the proposed budget due to an administrative error when assembling the hardcopy paperwork. R. Lally stated that he will resend the document to the BOS and further stated the approximate cost of an Auditor can be upward to \$13K. Audits are a mandatory requirement by the state should a municipality be notified to conduct one.

Advertising

R. Lally stated that a proposed amount of \$1800 has been included in the budget. These funds are intended to improve public communication about the budget process. Communication methods have yet to be determined but examples may include the purchase of physical signs.

4.0 Elections:

Town Staff Representative: Ross Lally, Chairman of Finance Committee

Board of Selectman (BOS) & Elections Budget Review & Discussion Summary

- The discussion highlighted financial implications and logistical challenges of managing multiple elections and referenda as well as addressed the complexities of determining suitable polling locations and ensuring accessibility.
- The discussion included considerations for adjusting the budget based on voting hours for referenda as well as the regulations surrounding early voting and its impact on staffing and budget.
- The need for effective communication regarding voting locations and schedules is emphasized.
- Auditor fees are treated as a fixed cost.

Budget Review Discussion Topic Areas:

- Election Budget & Election Planning Cycles
- Election Costs, Details, & Challenges
- Polling Locations
- Early Voting & Staffing
- Communication & Public Awareness Campaigns

Budget Adjustments:

- **Increase**
 - Referenda (6) - \$30-36K
 - Staff - Proposed 3% increase included for election staff to remain competitive.
- **Decrease**
 - None.
- **Maintain**
 - Attempts at effective budget maintenance (outlier – FY 26 is a state election year).

Department Line Item Review & BOS/Council Questions

At the request of the BOS Ross Lally, Chairman of Finance Committee, addressed the following questions about specific line items within the budget for the Elections Department:

Elections Budget Planning

- Significant increase due to 2026 being a state election year with a potential for multiple primaries.
- Proposed budget to include up to six (6) municipal referenda, like FY 25. Each referenda cost approximately \$5,000 to \$6,000.
- Total election budget includes but not limited to payroll, ballots, poll workers, and potential recounts and/or audits.

- There is uncertainty regarding state funding for early voting, which previously offset costs.
- The budget also accounts for potential state primaries, which could require additional ballots and funding.
- Three (3) referenda anticipated for FY 26 and three (3) referenda for FY 27. The fiscal year begins in July of 2026.

Election Costs and Budgeting Challenges

- It is a state election year, beginning in August 2026. Primaries will require different ballots for each party which cost approximately \$6-8K. Must be staffed separately.
- Staffing for separate Republican and Democratic primaries increases costs.
- Recounts and audits are expensive; a recount can cost approximately \$13,000.
- The need for multiple polling locations due to different ballots in districts raises expenses.

Polling Locations and Accessibility Issues

- Bolton has two different polling districts within town.
- Different districts require separate polling places if ballots differ, as mandated by law.
- If ballots differ by district, separate polling locations and full staffing are required.
- Election staffing and location requirements are dictated by state statute.
- The need for approval from the Secretary of State for emergency location changes.
- Coordination challenges with polling locations due to school schedules, accessibility, and statutory requirements.
- Accessibility criteria must be met for polling locations, including security and air conditioning.
- The high school has potential polling locations, but accessibility and comfort issues need to be addressed.

Early Voting Regulations and Staffing

- Early voting is mandated for every election (number of days vary for different types of elections, i.e. primaries/general elections (municipal or state), including six eight-hour days and one twelve-hour day.
- State funding for early voting covered some costs last year but is not guaranteed going forward.
- Staffing for early voting is crucial, with a minimum of four staff members needed.
- The budget includes a proposed 3% increase to address staffing challenges and attract qualified personnel.

Communication and Public Awareness Strategies

- Frustration from voters about not knowing where to vote highlights the need for better public awareness.
- Anticipated communication and signage improvements prioritized to reduce voter confusion about polling locations. Plans to post schedules and locations on the registrar's site and other platforms to avoid confusion.
- A proposed budget allocation of \$1,800 for advertising.
- Legal notices are required by state law which is an incurred cost. More elections and referenda require more legal notice postings.

Potential Budget Adjustments for Referenda

- The Board of Selectmen can reduce voting hours for referenda, potentially saving \$10,000 to \$15,000.
- A proposal to use regular hours for the first referendum and adjust for future ones based on data.
- The importance of finalizing the budget and schedule by early March to ensure clarity for voters.

****Selectman T. Sadler left at 6:55 PM****

5.0 Adjourn:

Consensus to adjourn at 7:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Andrea Vassallo, Recording Clerk

Andrea Vassallo

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

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