Office of Board of Selectmen

143 Main Street, P.O. Box 310, Belmont, New Hampshire 03220-0310
Telephone: (603) 267-8300 Fax: (603) 267-8327

Selectmen's & Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Mid-Year Joint Meeting
Thursday, July 23, 2026, 6:00 pm
Belmont Mill, Tioga Meeting Room

Present were:

Board of Selectmen: Chairman Ruth P. Mooney, Vice Chair Travis O'Hara, Selectmen Jon Pike, Sharon Ciampi and Mark Lewandoski.

Budget Committee: Chairman Tracey LeClair, Members Ron Mitchell, Mark Roberts (6:10), Marsha Campbell, Don House, Lee Cheshire, Paul Maggioli, Susan Roache and Doug Trottier.

Absent: Budget Committee Members Jessi Fleck, Don Hurd and Scott Bell.

Staff: TA Alicia Jipson, Executive Assistant Colleen Akerman, Finance Director Steve Forster, Police Chief Steve Akerstrom, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman and General Assistance Director Donna Cilley.

Selectboard Chair Ruth P. Mooney opened the meeting at 6:00 pm, all members stood for the Pledge of Allegiance and introductions were made for all meeting participants and Staff. Attendees were asked to be quiet and not whisper during the meeting so that everyone including the minute taker can hear all of the meeting discussion.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Town's budget situation and upcoming challenges for the 2027 budget year. Last year's budget passed by a small margin and there has been some interest from residents in trying to understand how the Town's budget works.

The school declined to attend this meeting because it is too early and they are not ready. Budget Committee Chairman Tracey LeClair shared that the school is in contract negotiations this year so there are no fixed wage values. The Town's budget committee meets on Thursdays so that anyone who wishes can attend the school budget advisory committee meetings on Tuesday evenings. Members and the public were encouraged to reach out and volunteer for the school's budget advisory committee if they are interested.

A meeting calendar was provided for Budget Committee Members. The public hearing dates have not been set yet. Executive Assistant Colleen Akerman will reach out to members when budget books are ready to be picked up at Town Hall. Chairman Leclair encouraged members to read it and make notes. The agendas will show which departments will be reviewed

at each meeting and everyone should make notes of their questions. The first budget meeting will include an overview of the budget process and how the Budget Committee operates. The Board of Selectmen will review the budgets submitted by Town departments and then the Budget Committee reviews everything before it goes to the voters. The first Budget Committee meeting will be held on Thursday November 5th, and a quorum is required at every meeting. Colleen will check the rules for virtual attendance. Everyone should attend every meeting they possibly can. If a member is unable to attend, they should email Colleen ahead of time.

Budget Committee Member Mark Roberts entered the meeting at 6:10 pm.

If anyone has questions about anything included in the budget books, please reach out to Town Administrator Alicia Jipson at Town Hall. It was recommended that members should not interact with the online Belmont community page as elected officials. Residents can reach out to the Town Administrator, or the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen or the Budget Committee Chair with questions.

Chairman Mooney stated the most important upcoming concern is the Route 140 forcemain. She discussed the significant budget for the project, which has increased from an initial $6 million to $10 million dollars. The state's proposed design approach and phased implementation plan were not fully accepted by the Town, and our engineers have sent a formal letter to the state regarding concerns about limited design access. Chairman Mooney also highlighted a recent water main break in Belmont that required emergency repairs, emphasizing the importance of funding the Town's capital reserve accounts and the high costs associated with infrastructure issues. The Town has tried to save money on infrastructure in the past and it is hurting now because we don't have the property valves and shutoffs. This will be a very expensive emergency.

The Board is also planning to move forward with moving the Land Use Department to the third floor of the Mill building. The capital reserve funding failed for the municipal buildings and the Mill project, so we are going to scrimp and save and do it the cheapest way that we can.

There was discussion about this year's failed warrant articles including municipal buildings, the Mill fund, IT infrastructure upgrades, and the contingency fund. Staff explained the need to reassess property values by 2029, with options to either set aside money gradually in a reserve account, or face a larger tax impact in one year. We are required by law to complete the revaluation. Voters wanted to keep the Mill building but do not want to put any money into it. We are going backward more than forward.

Board members reviewed additional information about water and sewer infrastructure and how the installation work was completed on previous projects.

Selectman O'Hara is concerned about the General Assistance budget. General Assistance Director Donna Cilley reported on changes to the state laws that were meant to help, but don't really benefit us. The department is seeing more residents and seniors who are being challenged

and need assistance, rather than primarily the homeless population. Expenses are high and people are in trouble. There are some new landlord rules that could cause more evictions and higher rents. Donna recommended that the Board do another review of the elderly and disabled exemption amounts because everyone is struggling to survive on social security.

There are concerns about the budget with the new union contracts there were passed, and the potential for layoffs and decreased services if the budget does not pass.

Budget Committee Member Ron Mitchell asked to highlight the amount of money that we have saved on grants. There will be banners on our new grant vehicles for Old Home Day. The Board expressed appreciation for employees who go to the extra effort and work of writing grants. We received almost $1 million in grants for vehicles this year. Selectman Pike was concerned about the negativity in Belmont about the budget and urged for more publicity of our grant programs.

There are concerns about the amount of taxes we collect through the State such as for boat registrations, gravel and rooms and meals and the amount of state aid for education.

It is difficult for the Town to attract more commercial businesses because we don't have the water infrastructure. Prior officials in Town turned down an opportunity to get water on Route 106. There is a commercial exemption for new commercial buildings or improvements.

This year the Town has hired 18 new employees and there are only two vacancies in the Police Department and one in the Fire Department. There have been a lot of overtime expenses for life safety services due to vacancies, and staffing level requirements in our union contract agreements. Callbacks are really hurting the Fire Department. We all want an ambulance with qualified personnel. Police Chief Steve Akerstrom said the new contracts have helped them fill vacancies.

The first issue tax bill is at 94% collected, leaving only a $750,000 shortfall which is very good. There will be a tax cap question on the ballot this fall that is relative to schools and the administration/central office spending. 60% of voters will need to approve to enact the cap, which would be effective until 2032. Everyone was reminded that the Selectmen have no authority over the school budget and we are only in charge of the Town portion.

Budget Committee Member Lee Cheshire asked about the fund balance but we do not have that number from the auditors yet. It should be a little more this year because we had lots of vacancies. The auditors are backed up.

Department heads were praised for the good work they have been doing with budgets the last few years and they were encouraged to continue with creating a budget based on needs, but to let the boards know about wants to be considered as well. There were no directives to keep to a certain percentage increase because department heads know our budget situation and

have been respectful of needs and safety of our staff. Costs are increasing and we can't control pricing on many things. The fuel oil contract doubled from last year.

Chairman LeClair suggested moving the December 10th meeting to December 17th and leaving just one cleanup date. TA Jipson will update the calendar and we will email it.

Everyone was encouraged to attend upcoming community events such as National Night Out, Old Home Day and the Belknap County Fair to increase community engagement.

There was some discussion about the confusion and aggravation of how warrant articles are worded on the ballot, but the Town is limited because the wording is dictated by State RSAs and must be approved by NHDRA. We should focus on breaking the articles down into laymen's terms for the voters' guide.

Members were reminded that they all vote on the different budgets and it is discouraging to hear some members speak negatively about the budget after an affirmative vote at meetings. In order to represent citizens, it is important that everyone vote no if they do not agree on a budget, but to also support the decisions of the committee majority with regards to the budget. The budget on the ballot is the Budget Committee's budget and everyone should support it.

There were also concerns about starting the process to order another ambulance because it takes two years to get one, and there are not enough funds in the Ambulance Special Revenue Fund to cover the cost.

Clarifications were made about the budget process and the relationship between the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee regarding budget decisions. The Budget Committee has the authority to modify numbers set by the Board of Selectmen, though this happens infrequently and primarily with Health Agency-related items. Any changes from the Budget Committee are brought back to the Selectmen for review and they may decide to agree with the Budget Committee. The discussion emphasized the importance of Budget Committee Members supporting the final budget once it goes to voters, even if they disagree with certain parts of the process.

Adjournment:

Budget Committee Chairman Tracey LeClair moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 pm; seconded by Selectboard Chairman Mooney. Motion passed unanimously (14-0).

Respectfully Submitted by:

Colleen Akerman

Colleen Akerman, Executive Assistant

Approved by the Board 08/05/2026:

Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman

Sharon Ciampi, Selectman

Travis O'Hara , Vice Chairman

Mark Lewandoski, Selectman

Jon Pike, Selectman