Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Budget Workshop Minutes
Wednesday, October 19, 2026, 9:00 am
Belmont Mill, Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Ruth P. Mooney, Selectman Travis O'Hara, Selectman Mark Lewandoski, TA Alicia Jipson, Executive Assistant/Assessing Administrator Colleen Akerman, Finance Director Steve Forster, Fire Chief Donald Pickowicz, Assistant Fire Chief Matt Famolare, Police Chief Steve Akerstrom, and Town Planner Karen Santoro, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman.

Absent: Selectman Jon Pike.

Via Zoom were Selectman Sharon Ciampi, Budget Committee Member Susan Roache and GA Director Donna Cilley.

The Chairman opened the public meeting at 9:00 am.

Fire (20):

Fire Chief Donald Pickowicz and Assistant Fire Chief Matt Famolare presented the 2027 Fire Department proposed budget. They reported the year went quickly and there has been lots of change with a young department, promotions and a new Assistant Chief.

Maintenance has been better this year but there are unforeseen expenses. The roof system has some issues, but they are having problems with contractors to complete the work. One part of the truss system was not tied in, but it is not in danger of collapse.

Chairman Mooney thanked the Fire Department for participating in the Fall Festival at the Fairgrounds, which was well attended. The Highway Department, State Police, Sheriff's Department, and Marine Patrol were also there.

The Board discussed plans for ambulance replacements. Chief Pickowicz explained the plan for equipment is to outfit two ambulances with new medical equipment for $112,000 each, and to get a new chassis for one ambulance box/patient carrier at a cost of $305,000. This is a significant savings over purchasing a full brand-new ambulance, and it takes 3 years for a new one, versus 6-8 months for the retrofit onto a new chassis. Finance Director Steve Forster worked with TA Alicia Jipson and Chief Pickowicz to develop a few different funding options for the Board to review. The Board discussed the different options with Chief Pickowicz and Finance Director Forster and they will take some time to think about them before making any decisions. Ambulance replacements will be discussed at a future meeting.

TA Jipson noted the top part of the budget sheet is for salaries. This is Chief Pickowicz's first full year, and the prior line was for a portion of the prior chief's rates. Chief Pickowicz asked the Board to consider another full-time employee because the goal is 4 shifts of 4 and they consistently have second calls. Shifts of 4 manage without callbacks, which saves on overtime costs. Mutual Aid increased $9,000 from last year and we use them about as much as we show up for other towns. The rate is based on the valuation of the towns. Chairman Mooney was not in favor of adding another employee at this time due to concerns about the budget passing. Selectman Lewandoski was concerned about a plan for the department if we have a default budget. Chief Pickowicz said things keep getting cut every year and there is not any "fluff" in the budget. Selectman O'Hara agreed we need shifts of 4 but not in this budget, although it would help address the overtime costs. There are concerns about aging equipment, but they are working on grants. The overtime number was increased to better reflect actual costs. Selectman Lewandoski also agreed with the need for shifts of 4, but the timing is bad.

The remaining lines with changes were reviewed, including overtime, telephones, uniforms, electricity, service contracts, training expenses, physicals, fuel, and operating equipment. Hoses from 1983 need to be replaced. Overall, there is a 3.5% increase which is slightly less than the inflation rate.

We don't have the health insurance elections from all employees yet so we can't finalize those numbers.

Selectman O'Hara moved to approve the 2027 Fire Department budget request as presented; seconded by Selectman Lewandoski. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Emergency Management (21):

Fire Chief Donald Pickowicz presented the 2027 Emergency Management proposed budget of $5,000.00. There were no changes. TA Jipson noted the Emergency Operations Plan needs to be updated in 2027 and there are grant funds that can be applied with a manpower match. They may also use some of the funds for tire replacements.

Selectman O'Hara moved to approve the 2027 Emergency Management budget request of $5,000 as presented; seconded by Selectman Pike. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Police Department (22):

Police Chief Steve Akerstrom presented the 2027 Police Department proposed budget.

Chairman Mooney asked about the new e-bikes, and they are being used in Town and used regularly over on the trail. They were also used on Old Home Day. Chief Akerstrom also mentioned that the department was unaware of the Fall Festival event this past weekend.

This past year they were down 6 positions, and they have hired 5 new employees. They are still down one sergeant position. They have one officer finishing training and another going to the academy in January. There was a higher number of arrests and accidents this year even though reported crimes were down. Overall, the department is steady and the goal once the K-9

team is finished training is to resume 24-hour coverage in December. Wages are dictated by union contracts. There are proposed rate increases of 8-12% for non-union employees to more closely align with other local departments and provide more separation in the pay scale because union officers are close to or exceeding wages for non-union officers and supervisors. There is no incentive to apply for the sergeant position due to the increased duties and responsibilities for less wages. The Board was firm on sticking with the 4% recommended increase but agreed that the scales need to be reviewed. Chief Akerstrom is worried about burnout from not having the sergeant position filled.

Selectman O'Hara moved to reduce 6 wage lines to a 4% increase; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

The Board agreed the wage schedule and sergeant issue need to be reviewed before the next budget season.

TA Jipson initially calculated an $84,040 difference between the requested amounts and the 4% recommended but corrected that number to $46,043 because the first number included the health insurance amounts.

The detail line was left at $1 because there is a new revolving fund. Other line items with changes were reviewed including the part-time line which includes the grant position that may not be approved again. They will cut back hours but try to maintain. There were increases for telephone, electricity, animal control, service contracts, training software, vests and fuel. Postage, printing and forms and cruisers were reduced. They are working on grants to help offset the vests and radios and some computers. All officers are required to complete some training every year. The new training program will save on overtime and travel costs, but expenses still increase because they have more officers. The department applies for scholarships whenever they can and will host classes here to get free training. We only need one cruiser this year, but we should purchase instead of lease to avoid the interest costs. They try to manage the fleet and spread out the use for mileage and replacements. There have been some tire issues which are a known Ford problem.

The Board will wait to vote on this budget until the updates have been made.

Land Use (23):

Town Planner Karen Santoro presented the 2027 Land Use Department proposed budget. There is a 4% wage increase as recommended. Many lines remained unchanged but there are some increases in postage, computers, notices/ads, Lakes Region Planning Commission dues, printing and tax map updates. The move to the Mill will require a large printer that will print color and large copies like the one at Town Hall. The Master Plan line was reduced because this past year was the big expense for the contract.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the 2027 Land Use budget request as presented; seconded by Selectman Lewandoski. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Building Inspection/Code Enforcement (24):

Town Planner Karen Santoro presented the 2027 Building Inspection/Code Enforcement Department proposed budget. There is a 4% wage increase as recommended. There were decreases in the training and mileage, and the printer line but most lines remained unchanged. They are conservative with fuel so that number was not increased. Their vehicle is a 2017 and it is scheduled for undercoating, a transmission flush and an alignment. Overall, there is a 2% increase to the budget.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the 2027 Building Inspection budget request as presented; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Conservation Commission (25):

Town Planner Karen Santoro presented the 2027 Conservation Commission proposed budget.

The budget includes portions of salaries for the Town Planner and Land Use Technician, professional services such as surveying and invasive species management. The last two lines were reversed last year but corrected for this year. Overall, there is a 5% increase but with such a small budget it is only $957.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the 2027 Conservation Commission budget request of $20,201 as presented; seconded by Selectman Lewandoski. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Executive (26):

TA Alicia Jipson presented the 2027 Executive proposed budget. This budget includes phones, postage, service contracts, computers, the Annual Report, stationery and envelopes, advertisements, conferences and dues, software, training and mileage. It also includes insurance costs for Town Hall departments including Town Clerks, Finance, General Assistance, Town Administrator, Assessing and Parks & Recreation; and insurance buyouts for multiple departments. There were increases of 4.8% for medical, 1.8% for dental, a small decrease for short term disability and no change to life insurance.

A request was made to add a new budget line for the Joint Loss Safety Committee for $1,000. This line will help make Town operations safer based on committee recommendations. This helps reduce our insurance costs. The Committee takes charge of safety inspections at all facilities as well as recommending safety equipment such as glasses, spit hoods, first aid kits, eye flush kits and more. Primex comes once a year to review claims and discuss how to reduce the claims. The Committee is required by law to provide reports to the State of New Hampshire.

Health insurance elections are not yet completed.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the 2027 Executive budget request as presented; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Insurance Not Allocated (18):

This budget covers our Primex premium for workmen's comp, property and liability as well as insurance deductibles. Our cost for 2027 has decreased by 8%, which is $31,678.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the 2027 Insurance Not Allocated proposed budget of $357,879; seconded by Selectman Lewandoski. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Capital Outlay (27):

This item was tabled to a future meeting.

Estimated Revenues (28):

We are waiting for NH Department of Revenue to complete their final review. This item was tabled to a future meeting.

Next Meeting 10/27/2026:

The final budget meeting for the Board will be 10/27/2026. Updated numbers will be provided that include insurance elections and the updated Police Department budget numbers. Warrant articles and capital requests can be discussed as well.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Review:

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman asked to review the wage increase request for her department. It was discussed at the last meeting and she was not present. State RSA requires deputies and we can't increase responsibilities without compensation. There have been no deputies since the default budget years, but it is the right thing to do.

The Board discussed the promotions which would have one Deputy Town Clerk and one Deputy Tax Collector. The Deputy Town Clerk must reside in Belmont. TC/TC Cashman is reviewing some alternative compensation options to develop a plan for the promotions.

TC/TC Cashman presented her case to the Board with statistics and concrete numbers showing the value of her position and department. The requested amount is 6% rather than 4%.

Chairman Mooney thanked TC/TC Cashman for explaining why they are important instead of comparing themselves to other towns. The measurable accomplishments are appreciated. Selectman O'Hara stated the deputy issue needs to be addressed, and he would like to see merit raises in the future instead of flat rates, but for this year he wants to stay at 4%.

There was some discussion about the timing of making changes to positions and where we are at in the budget process. TC/TC Cashman explained that the changes will need to be funded by the budget, so she thought this was the right time to make this request. TA Jipson and TC/TC Cashman spoke about the structure of the department. Previously the plan was to have 4 employees in the office, but even though that additional position was approved in a previous budget cycle, they opted not to add another position. Everyone in the department is

cross-trained and they all share duties. The deputy discussion will be brought forward at a future meeting.

Adjournment:

Selectman O'Hara moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:26am seconded by Chairman Mooney. Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Respectfully Submitted By:

Colleen Akerman

Colleen Akerman, Executive Assistant

Approved by the Board 10 / 21 / 2026:

Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman

Travis O'Hara, Vice Chairman

Jon Pike, Selectman

Sharon Ciampi, Selectman

Mark Lewandoski, Selectman