



**TOWN COUNCIL
WATERTOWN, CONNECTICUT**

**MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2026
SPECIAL MEETING – 7:00 P.M.
MINUTES**

**WATERTOWN TOWN HALL
TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS
61 ECHO LAKE RD.
WATERTOWN, CT 06795**

1. Call Meeting to Order.

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay led the pledge of allegiance.

3. Roll Call.

PRESENT: Jonathan Ramsay, Chair
Michele McHugh, Vice Chair
Dan Cocchiola
Ken Demirs
Robert Desena
Carina Noyd
Robert Retallick
Mary Ann Rosa
Rachael Ryan

ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Mark Raimo, Town Manager
Megan Guiliano, Assistant Finance Director
Lisa Fekete, Acting Superintendent

4. New Business.

- a. Discussion and possible action regarding proposed Town Manager/Board of Education Recommended Fiscal Year 2026/2027 budgets.

Mark Raimo, Town Manager and Lisa Fekete, Acting Superintendent presented Town and BOE Budget Scenarios.

Mark Raimo stated the council members had asked to look at other ways to look at our budget, we worked through that process and I would like to thank the Superintendent. Although we look at things differently, I think we came collectively together to better understand one another's budgets.

Lisa Fekete stated it does give a nice side by side because one of the first things we noticed was, we approached differently, so we started to line it up, it was nice to be able to work together.

Document attached

Council questions:

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay asked going back to our option 3 slide the CNA part of the BOE reduction just to clarify do you have currently 2 classes or do we have 1 with the budget?

Lisa Fekete answered we use to have two, I think there was a reduction to have one CNA class. The original intent was to increase the 2 sections but our thought was if we didn't get enough enrollment for the 2 CNA classes, we would make one an EMT class.

Vice Chair Michele McHugh asked the EMT class where would that come from, is that in the budget or not in the budget?

Lisa Fekete answered no, there were 2 CNA classes in the budget if we didn't get enough numbers to fill 2 CNA classes sections in the budget, we would have one CNA section and 1 EMT section.

Vice Chair Michele Hugh asked currently there would be no EMT?

Lisa Fekete answered correct.

Robert Retallick asked can you help me understand this scenario the nurse manager, do you currently have one now?

Lisa Fekete answered we do, we had a nurse manager in the past, Dr. Villanueva has cut a parochial nurse which I know was difficult for the parochial schools we had a Nurse Manager at that time. Right now, the Nurse Manager is primarily stationed out of the parochial schools to help cover those hours and she travels to school if there is subs. One of the things we did this year, the nurse network is very costly, nurses to get subs for. We are better off hiring a floater and using our nurse manager to travel around because she can do some of her managerial tasks from wherever.

Carina Noyd asked can you tell me what some priority the three items mean for option 2 and is in 3 as well?

Lisa Fekete answered there were things like some instructional materials for various departments, there were conference type of things to go for a conference, mostly

materials but people were asked to code to priority 1, 2 and 3. We did review the priorities 3's and that is where we took from. Certainly not the people didn't need it or want it but we did ask our people to prioritize, which they did do.

Carina Noyd commented I planned on saying we are not looking at apples to apples before I looked at this, the same terminology in my head. I am so glad that it truly lines from square one, it is much able to understand and to support.

Dan Cocchiola stated it looks like the work you created these fantastic options. Part of what can decide which one of those we are going to propose forward to the voters. Best as I can tell the big difference on the town side is around the fleet management plan. On the town side if we bought the nine vehicles would that shorten the length of time before we were able to replenish the fleet, would that in the next five years potentially decrease how much the fleet would cost, theoretically.

Mark Raimo answered I don't have that answer 100% we tried to work through that to understand it. The more you stack the vehicles into 1 year and increase the leases out it becomes unsustainable in your 4 or 5 depending on the length of years of the lease. This I feel we could come comfortably get through 3 and probably 4 years. I have some other thoughts whereby applying monies that are already in the towns possession without directly moving it from the General Fund. From there next year we are better suited to give all that information so that we can truly understand to 2040. So that no one else has to redo this work whoever sits in my chair when I leave will have a plan and say this how we are going to stay on track. I think that where we missed the point over the years, we never really thought passed the one or two years this is going to be helpful for us with the budget going up 10, 15 years.

Dan Cocchiola asked on the school side I remember a couple of weeks ago Superintendent Fekete you talked about freshman basketball being the important thing in town. Then I look at the middle school cross country and those kinds of activities. I was having a conversation with someone today whose kid is at Swift Middle School and thinking about the opportunities available. Those are what's next and now 3 tutors supporting our students.

Lisa Fekete answered yes, the most impactful is the freshman basketball because the freshman's sport is what kids tend to gravitate towards and the tutors and the CNA section. Those are the ones that I believe have impact. When you get down beyond that into the other reductions if we were to go outside of 3 those are extremely impactful. We would never have that amount of people leaving it would be very rare

Dan Cochhiola stated the differences between those 2 scenarios is if we look at the daily rate its 15 cents or it is something to consider. That is what you get for those 15 cents?

Lisa Fekete answered right.

Mary Ann Rosa asked the slide you have up now the impact slide, those are very large cuts, additional cuts. Are you indicating if I am reading this correctly that would bring this down to one mil. Would have to make those cuts to get to one mil or below.

Mark Raimo answered scenario 3 which we gave you is at the 1.07, to get to one mil we would have to an additional \$175,000.

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay stated this is just a priority list.

Mark Raimo stated if you told us to cut and go to 0 which is this is we are going to head next.

Mary Ann Rosa stated these two would be to reach the one mil.

Mark Raimo answered no, we would need \$175,000.

Mary Ann Rosa added so you would have to do all these to get to one mil.

Lisa Fekete stated we will get some of those other scenarios. This is the maximum dollars for those other scenarios that we figured on. The worst-case scenario for the BOE would be \$850,000 of those ones at the top. We started with the 1 through 3 we ran all those scenarios between the two of us, we wanted to do our duty.

Rachael Ryan asked Mark, under the option 3 you went over the highway, the public buildings is the HVAC, the employee benefits the health care you described.

Mark Raimo answered that is correct.

Rachael Ryan asked can you say again about the police and patrol detectives the \$33,750?

Mark Raimo answered without discussing it with the Chief I took equipment from the emergency response, it was night goggles, helmets it was safety equipment for the members of the department that need to do that. After I notified the Chief last Friday when we ran through this, he had called me this morning and asked if we could redo those numbers and the conversation was yes, we could. The Chief would like to give up a command staff vehicle and keep the ERT money in there as long as the council approves that number we will work within that department to make sure the Chief and the Police Department get what they need.

Rachael Ryan asked the reserve and wage benefits?

Mark Raimo answered when we put the budget together and presented it to the council for the first time, we were still not settled with the Highway Department so we anticipated money in this year's budget to cover the contract. It was settled and we need to put it in next years budget in case it went over July 1st. They have settled since then so we removed that \$55,000 and there is still money in there for the other union contracts that are still open.

Vice Chair Michele McHugh asked Lisa can you go through us, why there were no savings attributed to employee benefits?

Lisa Fekete answered I don't have the specific numbers on it, Ms. Kashuba is on vacation but I have the explanation of why and I am more than happy to run those numbers and get them to the Town Council. What had occurred when we budgeted for this year our proposal budget, we used the adopted insurance amount then a calculated 14 percent above amount that to get to our proposed amount. When the number came in, we were very happy it came in with 10 ½ percent and we thought perhaps we might achieve some savings. With Marie speaking to the insurance company and looking at what had happened in the fiscal year, it was budgeted for an 8.3 percent and it was actually came in at 8.56 percent. The second thing that happened was when we budgeted for this fiscal year and it wasn't accounted for the fact as the plan was attractive that we might had some increased interest in membership. We had an increase in more people that wanted to take the benefits and we had an increase in some people that may have now had a family. Ultimately when we got the 10.5 number, we ran all the people that are currently are members and then figured out from there, there wasn't really much of a reduction. Then certainly if we reduce any staff members that also maybe reduction until we get to that place. What I got from Maria it's because the increase came in higher when we used the membership it increased and we didn't account for that in this fiscal year.

Robert Retallick asked on this slide again the fire truck replacement for \$150,000, I know we put that away every year to build up to the amounts to be able to buy something, what amount do we have now? That number hasn't changed in the 30 years and I know the cost of a fire truck is 2 million.

Mark Raimo stated the Deputy Chief and I just had this discussion is that we do have to look at fleet management, we have to understand the impact of how much we are putting aside to purchase a truck and when do we purchase these trucks and how long do we keep our trucks. This is a bigger conversation we are going to have and bring it back to the council to say these are our recommendations.

Megan Guiliano answered including the Fiscal Year 25/26 we have \$340,000 in that account.

Robert Retallick asked what is the next thing that needs to be replaced?

James Demarest, Deputy Fire Chief answered Resue 10.

Robert Retallick asked the next thing is paving we just took a bond out for 10 million dollars for paving what is the \$100,000 for?

Mark Raimo answered in the operations budget we do put money for paving, potholes, the Highway Department would do specific work. I would have to go back to my computer I think Jerry budgeted around \$300,000; by pulling \$100,000 it would reduce that. To be honest with you, the rationale I had and discussion with

Jerry is we do have the money that we just bonded and we are going to be committed to paving all these other streets. That is an easy place for us to pull back \$100,000 without technically effecting our paving program, it is just a balancing act.

Lisa Fekete added going back to Mary Ann's question, your question about budgeting moving into this fiscal year. I do think there were times and spaces with the budget where things were not necessarily trued up. As I indicated when I presented to the Town Council and to the board, Ms. Kashua and I went through all thirteen hundred lines and looked at three years past expenses and trued up the lines. That is why there was so many adjustments and notes in the margin. Full disclosure I do think there were times and spaces where the number was too low or too high and we did our due diligence this year to budget accurately.

Dan Chocchiola asked the idea of leveling up and giving the town foundation that we need is a conversation that I have been engaging in for the last couple of months and it seems like the difference between option 2 and 3 is really narrow. One is the foundation gives us at a deeper level than the other and I just want to engage that conversation with you. If the gap between were really wide that certainly would be meaningful on one hand. As we look at these numbers it is relatively narrow, we could something for a relatively narrow investment on one versus the other and a credit to all the work, the leaders did this past week to show us these numbers.

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay added the difference between those two numbers is \$600,000 between both sides.

Mary Ann Rosa stated we have an opportunity after the public hearing to vote on the actual amount that will go to referendum. The figure that we send tonight is not necessarily the one that goes to referendum. Personally, I don't support the higher number, the impact of the additional \$319.00 over the tax increase we gave people last year is too much. If the majority of the people that come to the hearing don't agree me then we change it when we send it to referendum. I feel the responsibility to send to hearing what I think is a reasonable number it would be option 3 or less, it would not be option 2.

Ken Demirs asked we had the auditor come in at the last meeting, we had a list of accounts that could be closed out, is there any way of capturing those amounts before budget season is over?

Mark Raimo answered there is a couple of things, I am very thankful of the auditor we have and all he has given to the town but I don't agree with his assessment of that usage of the funds. There is a general statute that directs us to take any proceeds from a bond and then put it back into the bonding payment. I did send out a week ago, to our bonding agent to say would we be breaking the law by accumulating the interest that is on bonds and putting it into an account that we can use through council approval. I don't see where it says that in the law, I think it's very well established that we cannot do that. There is a lot of work for us to do, there are files left, saved the process we went through. We have to accumulate those files and rebuild them and

then for next year we are going to be in a position to say we are moving these items either back off to pay something of our bonds or there are some funds in there we have to bring together. One of the funds that come to mind is the Munson house there is a couple hundred dollars in there, the old Town Hall there is money where we took donations I don't think we can go and just use that money. We have to put that back in something that the Town Council directed us to do that. No, I would love to use it and say yes, it's there but I think we would be going into areas where we would could get ourselves in trouble.

Ken Demirs asked that was our auditor that suggested closing those accounts out?

Mark Raimo answered but he is not an attorney, from an accounting perspective it makes a lot of sense. I did find a statute and I am getting clarification on it.

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay added my opinion on those funds is once we identify which ones we could which ones had bonds and didn't have bonds, our debt services somewhere close to 7 million dollars a year, all those funds we are closing out go to pay off part of the part of the debt, which would reduce our debt service for the year. With the account saying and what the bond attorney will most likely say will both apply because we are using to pay down the debt we have in place.

Carina Noyd commented on option 3, I would hate to see over \$300,00 lost from the Highway Department I think it is very necessary and the potential loss of the either a CNA or an EMT I also think is a significant loss.

b. Vote on Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budgets to be sent to Budget Public Hearing.

Motion: Michele McHugh seconded by Robert Desena: I move that the following budgets be approved to be sent to Budget Public Hearing

A. Town General Fund	40,071,355
B. School General Fund	60,011,962
General Fund Total	100,083,317
C. Water Extension	0
D. Sewer Extension	0
E. Sewer Operations	6,748,016
F. Sewer Capital	0
G. Water Operations	3,560,586
H. Water Capital	0
I. Water and Sewer Debt	2,537,566
J. Crestbrook Golf Operations	1,120,765
K. Town Road Aid	471,772
L. Local Capital Improvement	240,055
M. Debt Service Fund	0

The amounts represent the following:

Reduction in the Town General Fund Budget by \$2,400,000
Reduction in the School General Fund Budget by \$200,000

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay stated this would be the mirror image of Option #3 that was presented.

Rachael Ryan stated I would be in support of Option #2 not Option 3 because I don't want to see any cuts to the BOE budget considering they already cut a considerable amount from the beginning and this would harm the experience of our students.

Carina Noyd asked for clarification, Michele would read the first two-line items.

Vice Chair Michele McHugh read again the first two-line items.

Chairman Jonathan Ramsay the future motion would be setting the public hearing and the meeting after the public hearing would be our final vote to send the numbers to referendum.

Aye: 6 Ramsay, McHugh, Demirs, Desena, Retallick, Rosa
Nay: 3 Cocchiola, Noyd, Ryan
Abstain: 0

Motion passes

- c. Consider setting the Public Hearing date to hear comments on the proposed Fiscal Year 2026/2027 budgets.

Motion: Michele McHugh seconded by Ken Demirs: I move to set the Budget Public Hearing to be held on Wednesday, April 22, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. in the Watertown High School Auditorium to hear public comments on the proposed Fiscal Year 2026/2027 budgets.

Discussion: none.

Motion passed unanimously

5. Adjournment.

Motion: Ken Demirs seconded by Michele McHugh: to adjourn the Special Meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Motion passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Ramsay, Chair
Watertown Town Council

Approved: _____
Susan King, Clerk

Town & BOE Budget Scenarios

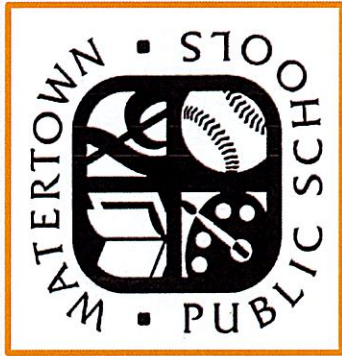
Mr. Mark A. Raimo, Town Manager

Ms. Lisa Fekete, Acting Superintendent

April 13, 2026



**Thank you for the opportunity for
dialogue and collaboration!**



Task at Hand

- Work collaboratively - Town and BOE
- Revisit Respective & Collective Proposed Budgets
- Present Various Scenarios and the Impact on the Town, Schools and Taxpayers
- Specifically, the Implications of a Capped 1 Mil Increase

Process

Individually Revisited Our Respective Budgets
 Met for a Side by Side - Found Process Differences in Arriving at Individual Proposed Budgets

Town Budget	BOE Budget
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Figured in Contractual Increases, Fixed costs and Department Needs 2. Applied Grants and Revenue 3. PROPOSED BUDGET 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Figured in Contractual Increases, Fixed Costs and Prioritized Department and School Requests Which Represented True Needs (With Excess Costs But Without Anticipated Grants & Revenue) 2. Applied Grants & Revenue 3. Applied Cost Cuts & Reductions 4. PROPOSED BUDGET



Potential Ideas for the Future:

*Calibrated process for development - talking applies to applies
 Connect to a more long range vision or plan with prioritized initiatives
 More communication and planning outside of the official budget window*

True Starting Point for Town & BOE (Before Proposed)

	Town	BOE	Total
2025-2026	38,321,413	57,599,765	95,921,178
All In Budget 2026-2027	42,471,355	66,645,891	109,117,246
% Increase	10.83%	11.62%	11.30%
Dollar Increase	4,149,942	6,691,934	10,841,876

This represents the true "All In" budget amounts for both the Town and BOE. These figures include:

- Contractual Increases, Estimates of Fixed Costs and Department Requests
- Anticipated Grant Funding and Revenue (ECS goes directly to the Town)

The Town brought this full number forward as their proposed budget. The BOE made additional reductions to this number before bringing forward a proposed amount. No one approached this process "right" or "wrong" — rather, each group used a different method. It seemed important to present an apples-to-apples comparison as a starting point for additional context and discussion.

From There, We Put Together Various Scenarios - Each Includes:

1. For the Town, BOE & Then Combined...

- *Proposed Budget*
- *Dollar Increase*
- *Percentage Increase*
- *Reductions/Implications*

2. Implications for Taxpayers...

Average Home Value \$351,429/ 70% Assessed Value \$246,000

Option #1: Originally Proposed Budgets

All In for Town;
Includes Initial Reductions for BOE

	Town	BOE	Total
2025-2026	38,321,413	57,599,765	95,921,178
Reductions	0	(6,433,929)	(6,433,929)
2026-2027 Proposed	42,471,355	60,211,962	102,683,317
% Increase	10.83%	4.54%	7.05%
Dollar Increase	4,149,942	2,612,197	6,762,139

Estimated Increases			
Average Home Value \$351,429/ 70% Assessed Value \$246,000			
Mill Rate	Annual \$	Monthly \$	Daily \$
2.08	\$510.77	\$42.56	\$1.40

BOE Reductions Included in Proposed Budget of 4.54%		
Blue = Staff Reductions		
Reduction	Amount	
1 District AP		\$154,682
4 Teachers		\$400,000
2 Tutors		\$44,000
7 Paras (2 Gen Ed; 5 SPED)		\$273,000
1 Custodian Floater		\$54,727
1 Strength & Conditioning Coach		\$15,100
Freshman Sports Coaches (Less Basketball)		\$10,025
Some Priority 3 Items		\$39,163
Additional Athletics Fees		\$27,716
Technology		\$159,060
Special Education Misc.		\$221,200
Contracted Services		\$1,596,000
Facilities Construction & Leases		\$1,084,524
Total		\$4,079,197
Grants & Revenue		\$2,354,732

Option #2: 4.96% Total Increase

Includes Initial Reductions for Both BOE & Town

New Baseline

	Town	BOE	Total
2025-2026	38,321,413	57,599,765	95,921,178
2026-2027 Proposed	42,471,355	60,211,962	102,683,317
Reduction	(2,000,000)	0	(2,000,000)
2026-2027 Adjusted Proposed	40,471,355	60,211,962	100,683,317
% Increase	5.61%	4.54%	4.96%
Dollar Increase	2,149,942	2,612,197	4,762,139

Estimated Increases			
Mill Rate	Annual \$	Monthly \$	Daily \$
1.30	\$319.57	\$26.63	\$0.88

IMPACT

	BOE		Town	
	Reduction	Amount	Reduction	Amount
District AP		\$154,682	Public Buildings	\$1,311,250
4 Teachers		\$400,000	Employee Benefits	\$600,000
2 Tutors		\$44,000	Police Patrol/Detectives	\$33,750
7 Paras		\$273,000	Reserve Wage/Benefits	\$55,000
1 Custodian Floater		\$54,727	-	-
Strength/Condition.. Coach		\$15,100	-	-
Freshman Sports Coaches		\$10,025		
Some Priority 3 Items		\$39,163		
Additional Athletics Fees		\$27,716		
Technology		\$159,060		
Special Education Misc.		\$221,200		
Contracted Services		\$1,596,000		
Facilities Construct/Leases		\$1,084,524		
Total	Total	\$4,079,197	Total	\$2,000,000.00
Grants & Revenue		\$2,354,732		

Option #3:

4.34% Total Increase

Includes Additional BOE Reductions

	Town	BOE	Total
2025-2026	38,321,413	57,599,765	95,921,178
2026-2027 Proposed	42,471,355	60,211,962	102,683,317
Additional Reduction	(2,400,000)	(200,000)	(2,600,000)
2026-2027 Adjusted Proposed	40,071,355	60,011,962	100,083,317
% Increase	4.57%	4.19%	4.34%
Dollar Increase	1,749,942	2,412,197	4,162,139

Estimated Increases			
Mill Rate	Annual \$	Monthly \$	Daily \$
1.07	\$262.21	\$21.85	\$0.72

IMPACT

BOE		Town	
Reduction	Amount	Reduction	Amount
District AP	\$154,682	Public Buildings	\$1,300,000
4 Teachers	\$400,000	Employee Benefits	\$600,000
2 Tutors	\$44,000	Police Patrol/Detectives	\$33,750
7 Paras	\$273,000	Reserve Wage/Benefits	\$55,000
1 Custodian Floater	\$54,727	Highway	\$333,250
Strength/Condition. Coach	\$15,100	Parks	\$78,000
Freshman Sports Coaches	\$10,025		
Some Priority 3 Items	\$39,163		
Additional Athletics Fees	\$27,716		
Technology	\$159,060		
Special Education Misc.	\$221,200		
Contracted Services	\$1,596,000		
Facilities Construct/Leases	\$1,084,524		
Total	\$4,079,197	Total	\$2,400,000.00
Grants & Revenue	\$2,354,732		
1 Football Coach	\$5,112		
Freshman Basketball	\$3,684		
1 Swift Cross Country	\$2,041		
1 WHS Cross Country	\$3,409		
1 Girls Tennis	\$3,254		
3 Tutors	\$160,000		
CNA Section	\$22,500		
Additional Total	\$200,000		

Additional Scenarios Reviewed

- 3.08% Increase for Both BOE/Town
- 3.00% Increase for Both BOE/Town
- Same % Increase for 1 Mill
- Same \$ Increase for 1 Mill
- 60/40 Split Increase for 1 Mill

These scenarios would result in progressively significant reductions that would impact both the community and the overall student experience.

IMPACT

BOE		
Nurse Manager	\$106,390	
6 Paras or 1 Teacher	\$177,000	
ISS Swift; ISS WHS	\$66,000	
SPED Teacher	\$100,000	
Up to 4 Additional Teachers	\$400,000	
Total	\$849,390	

TOWN		
Fire Truck Replacement	\$150,000	
Paving	\$100,000	
Training Various Dept.	\$20,000	
Facade Improvement	\$15,000	
Highway Vehicle	\$50,000	
Police Vehicle	\$23,000	
Total	\$358,000	

Recommendations:

Short-Term

- The Acting Superintendent and Town Manager's mutual short-term recommendation is that Option 2 or Option 3 is chosen to move to referendum.
- The Acting Superintendent and Town Manager respectfully ask that decision-makers consider the impact of any reductions alongside the actual savings to taxpayers, in order to determine the merit of those trade-offs.

Long-Term

- Continue productive, community-facing dialogue and collaboration between the BOE and the Town.
- Meet at least quarterly, outside of budget season, to review the current fiscal year and plan proactively for future budget priorities.
- Shift from year-to-year budgeting to a longer-range planning approach.
- Work together to stabilize budgets and avoid sharp dips and spikes in appropriations.
- Educate ourselves and taxpayers on the long-term cost-benefit of budgeting, including the risks of delaying decisions and the value of proactive planning.
- Use comparisons with other communities' Town and school amenities to show what helps retain property owners and support the local tax base.
- Continue advocating for stronger state support for Excess Cost and ECS funding.