

## Minutes of the Budget Hearing February 10, 2026

Members Present: Lynn Sweet, Chair; R. Stephen Leighton; Brian Monahan

Others Present: Ellen White, Town Administrator; Sonja Smith, Minutes Keeper

In Attendance: JoAnn Brown, Liz Evans, Police Chief Randy Young, Fire Chief Steve Johnson, Erik Aucella Ben Bickford, Larisa Molloy, Teri Shakal, Road Agent Matt Messenger, Asst Road Agent Greg Messenger, Ed and Linda Pape, Sharon Omand, Jay and Betsy Schaeffer, Terri Marsh, Betsy Cozine, Kurt and Bethene Wuelper

The 2026 Budget Hearing was called to order at 6:00PM.

Lynn Sweet opened the budget hearing stating that the notice of the public hearing was posted at the Strafford Post Office, Town Office, the Strafford Community Calendar, and on the Town website.

The purpose of the public hearing is to review the proposed budget and certain warrant articles to be voted on at the March 14, 2026 Town Meeting. Town Meeting will commence at 8:30AM at the Strafford School.

It was noted that Articles 1-4 will be voted on by ballot on Election Day, March 10, 2026. Article 1 is to vote for Town officers; articles 2-4 are amendments proposed by the Planning Board.

Chairperson Sweet then read each article on the warrant.

5. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$460,000. for Capital Improvements (Drainage work, culverts, gravel and paving) of roads within the Town boundaries at the discretion of the Road Agent, as funding permits.

Road Agent, Matt Messenger, summarized the scope of work for 2026. There were no questions or comments.

6. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,136,233. for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Police Department.

Chief Young stated the increase to his budget was due to health insurance increases. There were no questions or comments.

7. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. to be placed in the Police Vehicle and Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article. Fund balance read

There were no questions or comments.

8. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,123,053. for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department.

Chief Johnson stated his increase was due to higher insurance costs. There were no questions or comments.

9. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$154,161. for the fifth year's payment of the lease agreement for the new Fire Engine Tanker approved at the 2022 Town Meeting and to authorize the withdrawal of \$54,161. from the Fire Engine Capital Reserve Fund to be used for this purpose. The balance of \$100,000. to come from general taxation. This lease/purchase agreement contains an escape clause. The Selectmen recommend this article. Currently, the balance of the capital reserve fund is \$57,344. There were no questions or comments.

10. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. for the purpose of purchasing equipment and supplies for the ambulances, and to authorize the withdrawal of \$25,000. from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Special Revenue Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article. There were no questions or comments.

11. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$225,000. to be placed in the Fire Station Expansion/Improvement and/or Relocation Fund to be used for the purposes of funding expansion, improvement, and/or relocation. The Selectmen recommend this article. A question was asked of where the Town was in the purchase of land. The Selectmen answered optimistically and the Town is moving in the proper direction. There were no additional questions or comments.

12. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$204,840. for the operation and maintenance of the Hill Library. There were no questions.

13. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$100,000. to be placed in the Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation Capital Reserve Fund for the purposes of Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation. The Selectmen recommend this article. Currently, the fund balance is \$91,485. There were no questions or comments.

14. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Town Hall Building Maintenance, Improvements and/or Expansion Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article. Currently, the fund balance is \$21,100. There were no additional comments or questions.

15. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Highway Department Vehicle and/or Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article. Currently, the fund balance is \$44,490. There were no questions or comments.

16. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Reflective Road Signage Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article. Currently, the fund balance is \$3,840. There were no questions or comments.

17. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Repair/Replace Recycling Center Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Currently, the fund balance is \$56,225. There were no questions or comments.

18. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,079,091. for general Town operations.

Executive.....	\$ 103,408.
Election & Registration.....	36,530.
Financial Administration.....	118,323.
Appraisal of Property & Tax Maps.....	125,087.
Legal Expenses.....	60,000.
Employee Benefits, FICA, Medi & Unemp. Comp.....	46,661.
Planning and Zoning.....	53,150.
General Government Building.....	60,300.
Auto Permits/Town Clerk Fees.....	42,350.
Insurance.....	92,687.
Advertising and Regional Association.....	4,870.
Strafford Regional Planning Comm. Dues.....	5,949.
Contingency Fund.....	15,000.
Annual CPA Audit.....	13,000.
Emergency Management.....	5,000.
Building Inspection.....	36,621.
General Highway Expenses and Town Maintenance.....	759,590.
Street Lighting.....	5,800.
Solid Waste Disposal.....	438,207.
Animal Control.....	1,800.
Cemeteries.....	11,000.
Cornerstone VNA.....	3,991.
General Assistance and Welfare.....	10,000.
Community Action.....	2,000.
Haven Sexual Assault Support Services.....	992.
My Friend's Place.....	1,000.
The Homemakers Health Services.....	3,200.
Catamount Womenaid.....	1,000.
Ready Rides.....	1,500.
CASA.....	500.
Strafford Nutrition & Meals on Wheels.....	1,500.
Parks and Recreation.....	6,350.
Patriotic Purposes and Fireworks.....	6,900.
Conservation Commission.....	2,825.
Interest Expense & Tax Anticipation Notes.....	2,000.
TOTAL.....	<u>\$2,079,091.</u>

(The intent of this article is to raise the sum of \$2,079,091. exclusive of all other Articles addressed.)

A question was asked of what the percentage of increase over last year was on Article 18. The Town Administrator answered it was 8% over all, however 4% of that increase was due to 2026 being a revaluation year.

A question on the welfare line was raised. Lynn Sweet answered that although the department has seen an increase in calls, the budget should be ok.

19. Shall the Town vote to MODIFY the OPTIONAL VETERANS' TAX CREDIT for SERVICE-CONNECTED TOTAL DISABILITY in accordance with RSA 72:35, for an annual tax credit on residential property of \$1,500.? (Majority vote required)

An explanation was given of this article. The Town currently allows the Veteran credit of \$500 plus, if qualified, a \$1,000 credit for service related disability. The State of NH no longer allows towns to give both. With this article, the Town would be keeping the service related disabled Veterans whole-giving the same \$1,500 credit they currently receive.

20. "To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$70,000. to open, improve, and maintain the dirt portion of Old Whig Hill Road; to preserve it as a dirt road; to repair and widen areas where two vehicles cannot currently pass safely; and to install proper drainage where standing water and mud often make the road impassable." By petition. The Selectmen do not recommend this article.

The petitioner was not in attendance. This is currently a Class VI road; if the Town spends money on it, it would have to be brought up to Class V standards. Linda Pape added the Town would have to maintain it as well. Betsy Cozine noted that it would be another way in and out, adding that many people actually living in that area are opposed to this article.

21. To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.  
There was a brief discussion concerning the increase in the school's budget and the impact that may have on the tax rate.

With no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Steve Leighton to adjourn, which was seconded by Brian Monahan. After a unanimous vote, the Public Hearing for the 2026 Budget adjourned at 6:18PM.