

## 2026 STRAFFORD TOWN MEETING

The Town Meeting was called to order at 8:00 AM on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at Strafford Town Hall, in the Town of Strafford, by Town Moderator Ralph Wegner to act on Articles 1 through 4 by ballot vote. The ballots were cast, and the meeting recessed at 7:00 PM for the purpose of tallying the votes.

The 206<sup>th</sup> Town Meeting was called to order again at 8:35 AM on Saturday, March 14, 2026, at the Strafford School by Moderator Ralph Wegner to act on Articles 5 through 21.

Present:

Moderator: Ralph Wegner

Board of Selectmen: Lynn Sweet, Chair; Stephen Leighton; Brian Monahan.

Town Administrator: Ellen White

Department Heads: Randy Young, Police Chief; Steve Johnson, Fire Chief; Matt Messenger, Road Agent; Larisa Molloy, Library Director

Supervisors of the Checklist: Carol Cooper; Martha English; Judith Dupre

Town Clerk: Terri Marsh

Voters Checked In: 147

Bob Fletcher led the Pledge of Allegiance. Greg Messenger offered an opening prayer. Moderator Ralph Wegner welcomed attendees, made introductions, and reviewed the rules of proper conduct for the meeting.

Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair, thanked Town departments, officials, and voters.

Moderator Ralph Wegner read the results of the March 10, 2026 Town Election.

### ARTICLE 1

To choose all necessary Town Officers for the year ensuing.

Voters on the Checklist 3420

Votes Cast 665 (634 Election Day Voters and 31 Absentee Voters)

Selectman (Three Year Term)

R. Stephen Leighton            557

Moderator (Two Year Term)

Ralph Wegner                    457

Supervisor of the Checklist (Six Year Term)

Judith Dupre                    561

Planning Board Member (Three Year Term)

Terry Hyland Sr.                447

Charlie Moreno                 490

Zoning Board of Adjustment Member (Three Year Term)

Aaron Leff 327  
Ashley Rowe 394

Trustee of the Trust Funds (Three Year Term)  
Elizabeth Evans 530

Library Trustee (Three Year Term)  
Betsy Schaefer 544

Moderator Ralph Wegner read the results of the zoning questions voted on by ballot at the March 10, 2026 Election.

## **ARTICLE 2**

Are you in favor of the adoption of the following amendment to the Town of Strafford Zoning and Land Use Ordinances as proposed by the Planning Board:

To amend Article 1.4.1K Accessory Dwelling Unit by repealing the existing article and replacing it with updated language conforming to the 2025 changes to NH RSA 674:71-73 and to add three new definitions: Article 1.14.25 Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), Article 1.14.26, Accessory Dwelling Unit, Attached, and Article 1.14.27, Accessory Dwelling Unit, Detached. Under the new statute, either attached or detached ADUs are allowed by right in association with single family residences, and ADUs may be constructed by converting existing non-conforming structures. Building permits and all ordinances and regulations applicable to residential construction shall apply. The proposed ordinance would allow up to 750 square foot 2-bedroom ADUs on a non-conforming single family residential lot and up to 950 square foot 2-bedroom ADUs on a single-family conforming lot. Owner occupancy of one of the units is still required. Approved septic systems must be installed prior to occupancy.

**Vote:** By Ballot (Yes 485 - No 141)

**Result: Article #2 Passes**

## **ARTICLE 3**

Are you in favor of the adoption of the following amendment to the Town of Strafford Zoning and Land Use Ordinances as proposed by the Planning Board:

To add a new Article 1.4.2 F (2) regarding a new requirement for securing a Conditional Use Permit for Home Based Child Care programs established as an accessory use to any residential property and outlining the criteria for issuance of the permit, and to add a new definition Article 1.14.28 Home Based Child Care. Home Based Child Care programs shall not require completion of a Non-Residential Site Plan.

**Vote:** By Ballot (Yes 396 - No 227)

**Result: Article #3 Passes**

## **ARTICLE 4**

4. Are you in favor of the adoption of the following amendment to the Town of Strafford Zoning and Land Use Ordinances as proposed by the Planning Board:

To amend Article 1.7.1 Non-Conforming Use to clarify when Special Exceptions or Variances are required and the procedure for applying to the Zoning Board of Adjustment, and to amend and clarify

definitions by adding “and Non-Conforming Lot” to Article 1.14.6 Non-Conforming Structure and by updating the language of Article 1.14.7 Non-Conforming Use. Non-Conforming structures destroyed by fire or by an act of nature may be repaired, rebuilt, or replaced with the same dimensions in the same location, provided that repairs commence within one year of the event.

**Vote:** By Ballot (Yes 476 - No 140)

**Result: Article #4 Passes**

Moderator Ralph Wegner read the results of the March 10, 2026 School District Election.

School Board Member (Three Year Term)

Michelle Wangerin                      385

School District Moderator (Three Year Term)

Kurt Wuelper                              289

School District Clerk (Three Year Term)

Kaisha Morse                              525

School District Treasurer (Three Year Term)

Sharon Huckins                          553

Moderator Ralph Wegner began the remaining warrant articles.

#### **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Brian Monahan

**Second:** Stephen Leighton

**Discussion:**

*Matt Messenger, Road Agent*, summarized planned road maintenance for 2026.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #5 Passes by visual majority**

#### **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Brian Monahan

**Second:** Stephen Leighton

**Discussion:**

*Randy Young, Chief of Police*, thanked voters for approving body cameras last year and noted they have proved helpful. He summarized department activity, reporting just under 6,000 calls for service and that burglaries and accidents have decreased due to proactive patrol and visibility. He reported a surplus from a grant and payroll that was returned to the Town. He stated that due to an insurance increase, he froze his operating budget this year except for a small percent increase for raises.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #6 Passes by visual majority**

## **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Randy Young, Chief of Police*, stated that no cruiser was purchased last year and one is planned for this year.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported the fund balance is \$28,976.12.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #7 Passes by visual majority**

## **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Brian Monahan

**Second:** Stephen Leighton

**Discussion:**

*Steve Johnson, Fire Chief*, summarized department activity and reported an 11% increase in call volume with new personnel and paramedics added per-diem this year. He stated that the minimal budget increase is due mostly to benefits and insurance.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #8 Passes by visual majority**

## **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported the fund balance is \$57,505.25.

*Steve Johnson, Fire Chief*, explained the lease-purchase agreement will result in Town ownership once payments are complete.

*Mike Harrington* asked for the percentage increase in the operating budget.

*Steve Johnson, Fire Chief*, estimated the increase at approximately 3.6%.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #9 Passes by visual majority**

## **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Steve Johnson, Fire Chief*, explained the fund is used for recurring equipment and supply replacement.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #10 Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Stephen Leighton, Selectman*, reported the Town is negotiating the purchase of property for a potential fire station site and the funds would allow the Town to complete the land purchase.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported the fund balance is \$205,000.

*Mike Harrington* asked for an estimate of total project cost for land and new building.

*Stephen Leighton, Selectman*, stated that only land acquisition is currently under discussion and construction would likely occur in several years.

*Steve Johnson, Fire Chief*, noted that an estimate of approximately \$7.5 million was mentioned last year.

*Heath Howard* asked about property location.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, stated that the location will be disclosed once negotiations are finalized.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #11 Passes by visual majority

*Randy Young, Chief of Police*, spoke about fraud and cautioned residents to beware of fraud.

*Joann Brown* cautioned residents about fraud.

*Ralph Wegner, Moderator*, suggested fraud awareness training.

*Mike Harrington* stated that the DMV and IRS will only use the U.S. Postal Service to contact people.

**MOTION: Restrict reconsideration of Article #11.**

**Motion:** Heath Howard

**Second:** Kurt Wuelper

**Discussion:** None

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Motion Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, described the article as a standard operating budget.

*Mike Harrington* asked for the percent increase.

*Betsy Cozine, Library Trustee*, reported the increase is approximately 4% largely due to insurance.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #12 Passes by visual majority**

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported the fund balance is \$91,743.17.

*Jeff Tilton* spoke several times about this article, asking about funding, planning, and project costs. He shared concerns that the library did not need so many extra community programs.

*Betsy Cozine, Library Trustee*, reported that the Library Committee has been meeting for two years and is currently looking to expand on the existing lot.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported that this has been a discussion for many years. She stated that a capital reserve fund is for future preparation and allows the Town to save gradually instead of requesting a large amount all at once.

*Bob Watson* spoke several times about this article, asking about funding and amounts added to this fund from previous years.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported from page 30 of the Annual Town Report that the amount added to this fund last year was \$10,000.

*Betsy Cozine, Library Trustee*, reported that the year before it was also \$10,000.

*Robyn Ficek* spoke several times about this article, noting that the Police and Fire operating budget increases were less than the library's.

*Larisa Molloy, Library Director*, spoke several times to answer questions from the floor. She explained insurance increases affecting the library budget. She reported that they were looking at land but are now looking at other options.

*Heath Howard* spoke several times about this article, stating that the Town of Barrington recently built a new library and received a series of grants. He stated that insurance increases can be seen in every budget.

*Pat Wakenell, Library Committee Member*, stated that the building and parking lot are too small for the many services and events that the library offers.

*Kurt Wuelper* questioned why the increase from \$10,000 to \$100,000.

*Tahja Fulwider* spoke several times about this article, stating that the Bow Lake Community Center operates without taxpayer funding and suggested collaboration with the library for community events.

*Mike Harrington* stated that many residents do not use the library and suggested charging a fee for additional programs.

*Sharon Omand, Alternate Library Trustee*, spoke several times about this article, stating that they are looking at grants but must first develop a clear plan. She explained that the community library systems are intended to be free institutions, and they cannot charge for facility use and programs.

*Marilyn Rivera* suggested using the Bow Lake Grange for community events and expressed concern about seniors in Town struggling to pay taxes.

**MOTION: Amend Article #13**

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. to be placed in the Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation Capital Reserve Fund for the purposes of Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation.

**Motion:** Bob Fletcher

**Second:** Robyn Ficek

**Discussion:**

*Melinda Bubier* stated that we are investing now for what we want our library to look like in the future, and that she would like to see the voters approve the original amount of \$100,000.

*Regina Flynn* asked for clarification on the amendment and article vote.

*Ralph Wegner, Moderator,* offered clarification.

(Volunteer counters: Jose Rivera, Claire Murdough, Bob Fletcher)

**Vote:** Counted show of cards (Yes 83 – No 42)

**Result:** Amendment to Article #13 Passes

**Discussion:** (Further discussion of Amended Article #13) None

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #13 as Amended Passes by visual majority

**MOTION: Restrict reconsideration of Article #12.**

**Motion:** Heath Howard

**Second:** Gibran Mancus

**Discussion:** None

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Motion Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair,* reported the amount in the fund is \$21,159.

*Mike Harrington* asked what the difference was between this article and Article #18.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair,* stated that Article #14 is for building maintenance and Article #18 is for general expenses such as utilities, supplies, and equipment.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #14 Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair,* reported the amount in the fund is \$44,000.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #15 Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Lynn Sweet

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported the amount in the fund is \$3,800.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #16 Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported the amount in the fund is \$56,383.13.

*Jeff Tilton* asked why the amounts were presented in separate articles rather than combined.

*Brian Monahan, Selectman*, explained that separate articles allow voters greater control over how funds are allocated.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #17 Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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..... \$2,079,091.

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

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Mike Harrington* spoke several times about this article, stating that taxpayers should not have to contribute to the charity line items and asked about revenue generated by the Conservation Commission.

*Liz Evans, Conservation Commission Secretary*, explained that the revenue comes from current use penalties and can only be used for land conservation purposes. She stated that the budget line item for Conservation Commission is used for state dues and supplies.

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, reported that page 36 of the Annual Town Report shows approximately \$91,000 as Conservation Commission revenue in 2025.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Article #18 Passes by visual majority

**MOTION:** Restrict reconsideration of Article #18.

**Motion:** Heath Howard

**Second:** Dan Howard

**Discussion:** None

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** Motion Passes by visual majority

**ARTICLE 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)

**Motion:** Lynn Sweet

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Lynn Sweet, Selectmen Chair*, explained the change was required due to State law modification preventing two separate credits for Veterans with service connected total disability.

*Kurt Wuelper* asked if Veterans would still be eligible for the \$500 credit.

*Brian Monahan, Selectman*, stated that non-disabled Veterans would still receive \$500, and this change

ensures disabled Veterans still receive a \$1,500 total credit.

*Dennis Boston* asked about increasing the credit for all Veterans and it was pointed out that the article on the floor was addressing the optional tax credit for service connected totally disabled Veterans.

*Joe Pomerleau* noted that Veteran tax credits are not automatic and require an application.

*Jay Schaefer* questioned why the State no longer allows both credits.

*Brian Monahan, Selectman*, stated that they were unsure why the State made the change.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Article #19 Passes by visual majority**

## **ARTICLE 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.

**Motion:** Steven Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

## **MOTION: Amend Article #20.**

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$130,000. 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.

**Motion:** Cindy Gale

**Second:** Nancy Goodspeed

## **Discussion:**

*Cindy Gale, Primary Petitioner*, explained the petition and safety concerns related to road access. She asked if the Road Agent, Matt Messenger, would comment.

*Matt Messenger, Road Agent*, stated that if the Town spends money to upgrade this Class VI road, it would be required to assume maintenance as a Class V road.

*Dan Brooks* asked if \$130,000 was enough to do that.

*Matt Messenger, Road Agent*, replied that maintained as a dirt road, yes.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result: Amendment to Article #20 Fails by visual majority**

## **Discussion:** (Continued discussion on Article #20)

*Michael Witonis* spoke several times about this article, questioning the wording of the article and stating that he pays to maintain the Class VI road he lives on. He stated that property owners should fund improvements themselves if they want a road upgraded from Class VI to a Class V. He stated that towns are not legally allowed to spend money to maintain a class VI road.

*Stephen Leighton, Selectman*, stated that once funds are spent the road classification would change and confirmed the Article was written correctly.

*Kurt Wuelper* spoke several times about this article, asking why the Selectmen did not support the article and whether spending \$70,000 would require the Town to assume ownership and future costs.

*Stephen Leighton, Selectman*, stated the Selectmen did not support the article because property owners were aware of the road conditions when purchasing and responsibility should not fall on the Town.

*Mike Harrington* stated that there are many Class VI roads in Town and expressed concern about potential future costs. He asked if \$70,000 would be adequate.

*Matt Messenger, Road Agent*, stated that \$70,000 may make the road passable but it would not bring it to Class V standard required for Town maintenance.

*Gibran Mancus* stated that the road is not passable right now with over a foot of water.

*Regina Flynn* stated that she appreciates the discussion because it is a safety issue.

*Ralph Wegner, Moderator*, closed discussion.

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** **Article #20 Fails by visual majority**

**MOTION: Restrict reconsideration of Article #20.**

**Motion:** Michael Witonis

**Second:** Bill Gillis

**Discussion:** None

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** **Motion Passes by visual majority**

**ARTICLE 21**

To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.

**Motion:** Stephen Leighton

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:**

*Mike Harrington* reminded residents about the change in NH vehicle inspections.

**MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.**

**Motion:** Bob Fletcher

**Second:** Brian Monahan

**Discussion:** None

**Vote:** Show of cards

**Result:** **Motion to Adjourn the meeting Passes by visual majority**

Meeting adjourned at 10:21 AM.

Given under my hands and seal, this 18th day of March, in the year of our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-six.

Respectfully Submitted,



Terri L. Marsh

Strafford Town Clerk

\*Comments made during the meeting are summarized for the purpose of the minutes and are not intended to be verbatim transcripts.