

## **SELECT BOARD FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET POLICY DIRECTION**

The Town Manager will prepare the FY26 operating budget and a three-year projection of expenses and revenue. The FY26 budget should:

- Fund all debt obligations first.
- Satisfy existing and anticipated future contractual and mandated obligations.
- Make every attempt to fund OPEB obligation as outlined in the OPEB Funding Policy.
- Maintain minimum recommended reserves at 5% of the general fund operating budget.
- Attempt to maintain services at current levels. If anticipated FY26 revenue and excess Free Cash, if any, is insufficient for that purpose, then identify options for specific expense reductions and/or new revenue sources to balance expenses with funding. FY26 will be extraordinarily challenging and will require steady communication among Select Board, School Committee, and Finance Committee to understand scale of budget shortfalls and potential service impacts.
- Reflect ongoing coordination of joint chairs meetings during the budget forming process.
- Reflect early consideration and discussion of potential approaches to address budget shortfalls taking into consideration the recommendations from the Budget Task Force, including but not limited to looking at solid waste collection and health care.
- Allocate a minimum of \$1.5M for capital expenses, from Free Cash, in keeping with past practice. If less than \$1.5M is recommended for capital expenses in FY25, then the difference should be added to the capital reserve for anticipated future costs related to town facility and road needs. The target total for bond payments should fall within the range of 7-10% of the Town's operating budget.
- Any new proposed ongoing positions (funding for associated benefits included) or expenses must be accompanied by corresponding ongoing expense reductions or by new recurring revenue, so that the merits of the trade-offs may be evaluated to determine whether to move forward with the new position or expense.
- Continue to monitor the balance in the health insurance trust fund and support a FY26 health insurance budget that is in line with the trustees' recommendations.
- In the event that the above conditions are met and available funds remain, the Town Manager will meet with department heads and the Superintendent of Schools to identify and prioritize unfilled departmental needs, other capital requirements, or other town necessities and make a recommendation to the Select Board, Finance Committee, School Committee, and Town Meeting.