



Budget Committee Meeting

Minutes

January 8, 2026 7:00 PM

Open the Meeting and Roll Call

Chair Cutting opened the Budget Committee meeting at 7:02 PM.

Budget Committee members present: Michael Cutting (Chair), Robert Blake, James Sherman, Rick Bixby, and Bill Hanson. Kelly Lombardi arrived at 7:14 PM. Ray Martin was absent.

Select Board members present: Harry Seidel and Alfred Hanson.

Harry Seidel opened the Select Board meeting at 7:04 PM.

Approval of Minutes December 18, 2025

Bill Hanson made a motion seconded by Robert Blake to accept the Budget Committee meeting minutes for December 18, 2025 as presented. Motion Passed.

2026 Budget Review/Questions

Computer hardware: Mike Cutting questioned the computer hardware line item in the Select Board budget for \$7,000. Alfred Hanson explained that there is replacement schedule for computers. Harry Seidel stated that the funding is in case computers need to be replaced. Alfred Hanson will provide additional explanation.

Office Supplies: Mike Cutting asked about the office supplies line item of \$5,000 noting that it has increased significantly. Harry Seidel explained that the \$5,000 is a reduction from what has actually been spent. The Board discussed cost saving steps regarding purchasing office supplies. Judy Newman-Rogers via Zoom explained that paper and toner are the biggest expenses. She stated that currently paper is much less expensive through Quill Office Supplies. The Board discussed the copier expense. She noted that toner is not included in the copier contract. Mike Cutting stated that the contract has not been found in the past. There was a discussion regarding multiple printers in town hall and the possibility of consolidating printing. Harry Seidel explained that individual printers for department saves time for the departments.

Hiring Expense: \$1,000 Mike Cutting asked if the number is accurate. Alfred Hanson explained that covers the advertising of open positions.

Auditor: \$35,000 Harry Seidel stated that the RFP has been sent out. Alfred Hanson explained that two proposals have been received as of now.

Assessing: Mike Cutting questioned if the wages are salary or hourly. Alfred Hanson stated hourly wages.

Assessing Outside Services: \$33,000 includes annual pickup and other assessing services and money set aside for the next five years for the reval. Alfred Hanson will speak to the Assessor for clarification on the break down.

Assessing Software: \$6,500 for the CAMA software and mapping

1 Legal Expenses: \$40,000 Kelly Lombardi asked if the final dollar amount is known for 2025.
2 Mike Cutting explained that the books are closed around January 25, 2026.

3
4 Town Hall maintenance/repairs: \$6,000 Mike Cutting asked if there are projects lined up. Harry
5 Seidel stated that the funding is for repairs as needed to ensure that the Town is in compliance
6 with the Department of Labor.

7
8 Ambulance service: Harry Seidel explained that \$89,000 was Hopkinton's original estimate for
9 2025 but later they revised that to \$241,000. Harry Seidel reiterated that the contract protected
10 Warner for 2025. He explained that going forward the new calculations will be enforced. Harry
11 Seidel explained that the Select Board agreed to encumber half of the \$241,000 from unspent
12 funds to apply towards the 2026 amount. Harry Seidel stated that the 2026 estimate has not yet
13 been given to Warner. Robert Blake acknowledged that the impact will be felt in 2027 by using
14 the unspent funds it takes money away from what could be used to offset taxes. Harry Seidel
15 stressed that ambulance costs are a significant financial hardship on small towns like Warner.
16 Harry Seidel advised the board that the 2026 estimate is \$266,000. Mike Cutting is concerned
17 that Warner does not have a definitive number to accurately budget. Judy Newman-Rogers
18 explained that the contract has not changed and Hopkinton continued to invoice Warner the
19 estimated amount. She explained that the estimated amount comes out in the fall and then in May
20 of the following year Hopkinton is supposed to calculate the amount. Robert Blake is concerned
21 that Hopkinton will expect Warner to pay more for 2025. Harry Seidel stressed that Warner will
22 pay the budgeted amount of \$89,000 for 2025 but 2026 will be the new amount of approximately
23 \$266,000. Harry Seidel spoke about the need to rewrite the contract. Bill Hanson asked if there
24 is a way to end the contract. Robert Blake reiterated the need to take a hard look at this for 2026.
25 Harry Seidel explained that \$120,000 of unspent funds has been encumbered and the 2026
26 budget amount should be \$146,000. Kelly Lombardi stated that \$266,000 should be in the
27 budget, Rick Bixby agreed adding that the \$120,000 could be used for offsetting taxes. Robert
28 Blake concurred. Harry Seidel disagreed, questioning why the full impact needs to be felt in
29 2026. Kelly Lombardi stated that it will expedite the decision making if the true value is applied
30 for 2026. Harry Seidel stressed to the Board that Warner does not have any other options for
31 ambulance service. He explained that Henniker and New London are not viable options. Harry
32 Seidel stressed that Hopkinton needs Warner as much as Warner needs Hopkinton. Harry Seidel
33 asserted that Warner should be more involved in the management of this agreement. He
34 explained that the change is the revenue that come in to offset the ambulance costs. Harry Seidel
35 stated that their revenues have dropped by 50%. Harry Seidel spoke about the need for Warner to
36 have the ability to review the revenue calculations. Mike Cutting called the question regarding
37 the amount to have in the budget for 2026. Robert Blake echoed the comment from Rick Bixby
38 to use the unspent funds to offset taxes by reducing the tax rate. Mike Cutting explained using
39 the unspent fund balance towards the ambulance cost will not affect the first issue tax bill in
40 2026. He stated that it would impact the December tax bill. Harry Seidel advised the Board that
41 the Select Board has already voted to encumbered the \$120,000. Robert Blake stated that should
42 be disclosed to the voters. Harry Seidel reiterated the intention of the Select Board was to ease
43 the burden on the taxpayers. Mike Cutting asked how the money was encumbered without an
44 invoice. Harry Seidel stated that the Select Board has a contract. Judy Newman-Rogers
45 suggested holding off until the Board can hear from the Finance Director regarding the
46 encumbered funds. Robert Blake questioned using encumbered 2025 funds for an invoice in

1 2026 and he encouraged the Select Board to speak to legal counsel. The Board debated the best
2 use of unspent funds. The Board debated unexpended fund versus surplus.

3
4 Harry Seidel reiterated that ambulance costs are rising. He would like to soften the blow for
5 2026. Robert Blake explained that the voters should be made aware how much ambulance costs
6 are increasing. He stated that using unspent funds is deceptive. Robert Blake explained that the
7 Select Board has the opportunity to reduce the tax rate using unspent funds which would soften
8 the blow.

9
10 **Alfred Hanson made a motion seconded Rick Bixby to increase the budget line item for**
11 **ambulance service to \$146,000 for the year 2026. Roll Call Bixby YES Lombardi NO**
12 **Sherman ABSTAIN Blake NO B. Hanson NO and A. Hanson YES Motion Failed**

13
14 *Discussion on the motion:* Mike Cutting explained that the bottom line budget increased by
15 \$533,958 over last year which is an 11.6%. He noted that if the ambulance line item is increased
16 to \$146,000 the operating budget increase is \$559,000 or 12.2%. Robert Blake explained that he
17 would reconsider his vote if the use of encumbered funds in this way was approved by the DRA.
18 Bill Hanson explained that this could be explained at town meeting. Robert Blake agreed and he
19 would still like approval from the DRA. He stressed that public confidence will not be earned
20 until big adjustments after the fact are stopped. Harry Seidel explained that he will check with
21 DRA. Alfred Hanson reiterated that the Town has a responsibility to provide ambulance service.
22 He stresses that the Select Board has tried to do what is best to soften the blow the best way they
23 can. Alfred Hanson acknowledged the significant increase between the ambulance and the
24 library increase. The Board discussed the possibility of contacting Pine Rock Manor to discuss
25 their excessive use of the ambulance. Kelly Lombardi suggesting drafting the new contract with
26 Hopkinton to include quarterly reporting on costs and reimbursements received for Warner calls.

27
28 Highway Department: Mike Cutting asked for a status update on the hiring of new Director.
29 Alfred Hanson informed the Board that the position has been offered to someone and
30 negotiations are ongoing. Mike Cutting asked if the salary of \$87,412 a sufficient amount.

31
32 Rick Bixby asked for clarification on a piece of equipment that has been pulled out of service.
33 Alfred Hanson explained that the funds to outfit the truck are in the capital reserve account. He
34 stated that he is hoping to receive a maintenance schedule.

35
36 Supplies: \$45,000 Mike Cutting asked if there is sufficient funds to complete the sidewalk
37 pavers. Alfred Hanson explained the department has been understaffed.

38
39 Parks and Rec: Bill Hanson questioned a cut of \$700 Alfred Hanson will look into it.

40
41 Mike Cutting requested that the spreadsheet include ending dates (payoff).

42
43 **Analysis of 2025 Revenue vs 2025 Anticipated Revenue**

44 Mike Cutting stated that the projected revenue was \$1,371,300 and to date \$1,654,199 has been
45 received which is an increase of \$282,899. Mike Cutting explained that \$226,800 came from an
46 additional grant from the State. Harry Seidel noted that the rooms and meals tax also increased

1 significantly. Mike Cutting explained that vehicle registrations also increased by \$12,500 over
2 what was projected.

3

4 **Other Business:**

5 Mike Cutting stated that the CIP requests total \$377,500

6 **Meeting Schedule:**

7 No meeting January 15, 2025

8 January 22, 2026 for final review

9 February 3, 2026 Petition warrant articles deadline

10 February 10, 2026 Public Hearing

11 February 12, 2026 Public Hearing continuation

12 February 19, 2026 Final vote on budget

13

14 **Adjournment**

15 **Alfred Hanson made a motion seconded by Harry Seidel to adjourn the meeting. Roll Call**

16 **Vote Hanson YES Seidel YES**

17

18 **Robert Blake made a motion seconded by Kelly Lombardi to adjourn the meeting. Motion**
19 **passed.**

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21 The meeting adjourned at 8:53 PM

22 Respectfully submitted by Tracy Doherty