



Finance Committee

350 Main Street
Webster, MA 01570

Mat Fitton, Chairman
Kaitlin Morin, Secretary
Raquel Colby

Christine Aronson, Recording Secretary

Wilfrid Cournoyer, Vice Chairman
Michael Stevens

FINANCE COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, September 22, 2025

Community Meeting Room

Gladys E. Kelly Library, 2 Lake Street, Webster, MA 01570

6:00 p.m.

Present: Mat Fitton, Kaitlin Morin, Michael Stevens, Raquel Colby, Recording Secretary Christine Aronson, Town Accountant, Timothy Bell, Town Administrator, Richard LaFond, Assistant Administrator Courtney Friedland, Thomas Klebart, Mark Rogers, Elaine Davies, Scott Dziedzic, Earl Gabor, Kelly Lyman, School Superintendent Monique Pierangeli, Business Manager Lisa Kontoes, Kelly Seddiki, Miranda Sgariglia, Lauren Koleris, Linda Millet and Nicholas Adamopoulos.

Call to Order: Mark Rogers, Vice-Chairman Board of Selectmen called meeting out of Recess
Chairman Mat Fitton called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Tri-Board Meeting: Town Administrator, Rick LaFond, opened the meeting with a presentation titled Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Landscape (documents attached). The projected structural deficit for FY27 is estimated at 2.3, almost 2.4 million. Major Revenue estimate drivers for the next 5 years, with a concentration on FY 2027, average estimate of \$900,000 from State Aid, Estimate increase in receipts of 2% and Water/Sewer increases of 2%. The Expenditure forecasted 3.5% annual increase in non-school department salaries, 2% annual increase in non-school department expenses and 3.75% increase in total school budget.

Town Administrator LaFond invited comments from Town Accountant Tim Bell, School Superintendent Monique Pierangeli and School Business Manager Lisa Kontoes. Tim Bell suggested that a focus on a longer term picture as well as FY27; understanding without additional revenue source this will be a recurring issue every year. State Aid has increased within the past couple of years and hoping for \$900,000 each year. Town Administrator LaFond added can always guarantee there will be something to deduct from the modest number given by the State. We do have a healthy stabilization fund due to the Town building it up by those increases. Of which, some was used last year to bridge the gap. The only new funds expected this year would be the Millionaires Tax, which is supposed to be used for Education and Transportation,

however where it is brand new it is uncertain if it will be recurring to a certain amount which makes the Governor hesitant of releasing at this time. There are no other expected substantial increases in any other aid.

Town Administrator La Fond suggested possible reworking of the Chapter 70 Funds. School Superintendent Monique Pierangeli gave a brief overview of what feeds into the Chapter 70 Funds; enrollment is pretty flat and increase in special needs and out of district tuition and programs which are high. Tough decisions made last year even with using the free cash there was a reduction in positions, already stretched thin and unsure that they could absorb additional cuts. Board of Selectmen Member Elaine Davies asked if they are seeing any rollbacks in regulations required in Education. Superintendent Pierangeli answered no however she does have concerns about grant money on the national level and how families are losing food assistance which impacts Chapter 70 Funds. Business Manager Lisa Kontoes: it just highlights dynamics in this financial climate and the uncertainty. The Schools are trying to navigate through uncertainties. She gave an example of 43 students moving into the district this summer requiring IEPs, having to support and be compliant with them. Board of Selectmen Member Elaine Davies offered there have been grants on the Town level also lost.

Town Administrator LaFond asked Finance Chairman, Mat Fitton if he had a question or comment. Finance Chairman, Mat Fitton inquired if the Health Insurance increase listed on the forecast is enough or possibly too conservative. Town Administrator LaFond explained that it is a reasonable projection as the Town has done better than Medical Inflation in the past few years. Finance Chairman, Mat Fitton, informed parties that Wil Cournoyer, Finance Vice Chairman, is uncomfortable with Town using any free cash this year and Mat also does not feel comfortable with that idea. Town Administrator agreed.

Board of Selectmen Chairman Thomas Klebart asked if Town Administrator LaFond knew of any projected revenue or lost revenue from grants. Town Administrator LaFond is concerned about possible Senior and library grants lost but not sure at this time for lack of information. Town Accountant Tim Bell offered grants should not impact General Funds but there are some Health Grants that may impact Health operations, the loss of services. School Superintendent Pierangeli is concerned on the projected 3.75% and finding it to be too modest.

Town Administrator LaFond's goal for this meeting was all to have a better understanding of the responsibilities set ahead for obligations to balance the budget. A lot of government management is to comply with State and Federal regulations. Last year Town was able to create a self-run Health Code department but nothing planned for this coming year at this time. Finance Committee member Raquel Colby asked if there were any other models that could be looked at which include the higher expenditures talked about. Also, she is hoping to see last year's information. Finance Chairman, Mat Fitton is concerned about a couple of things. Town Administrator LaFond agrees and offers working with a lot of uncertainty and can look at different models with other figures. Town Accountant Tim Bell offered the numbers can be changed to analyze. The analysis presented in this meeting was agreed upon after a few meetings with the Finance team starting back from May. To answer Raquel Colby's question about last year's model, Tim Bell explained when the model was provided a couple years ago for the 5 year projection, FY27 deficit looked to be about \$936,000 compared to \$2.4 million and the drivers were the school transportation and the Health Insurance increases. We have been budgeting Health Insurance increases around 5% the last 4-5 years to anticipate the higher

increases, which other communities in the area are now dealing with high teens to 20% increase rather than the 10% we are projecting.

School Committee member Nicholas Adamopoulos spoke about how Police Dept. is understaffed and with free cash not planned to be used, he is thinking there may need to be an Override and asking if there is really any interest for that in the community right now. If so, how would that look; two different options with an Override menu and would it be presented to the Town in May. Town Accountant Tim Bell explained this is at the discussion level right now and trying to get everyone to understand the budget information provided at this time. Town Administrator LaFond offered he is hoping for more information from the State level with more funds increased to the Chapter 70 formula or the Millionaire fund or other revenue from the Tax Levy. Board of Selectmen Vice-Chairman Mark Rogers offered the Water/Sewer rates will continue to rise 8-12% factoring into the rates of the Taxpayers. Town Administrator LaFond believes at this time the important thing is to have a general understanding of items that are driving the budget and the options that we have at this time.

Finance Chairman, Mat Fitton asked the second #2 or possible #3 item under Budgeting Options, is that draconian cuts? Board of Selectmen Chairman Thomas Klebart offered there are so many Fixed Costs in the budget that it would have to be draconian. Town Administrator LaFond is talking about draconian but it could be a combination of some reserves and reductions. Finance Committee Chairman Mat Fitton, states looking at the budget we're bare minimum on everything. Town Administrator LaFond explains how using one time money compounds the problem. Finance Committee Chairman, Mat Fitton questioning if we need a 2 ½ Override, how much would be needed? Town Administrator LaFond cannot provide that number at this time. Board of Selectmen Chairman Thomas Klebart mentioned there should be another model if that is the path taken. Finance Committee Member Michael Stevens inquired as to when we would get a clearer picture of actual numbers in order to really come up with a plan for the upcoming budgets. Superintendent Pierangeli answered that they usually get answers to Aid around March – April timeframe. Administrator LaFond agreed that it is usually in late spring that there are more concrete numbers from State Aid. School Committee Member Nicholas Adamopoulos asked when one of the options discussed need to be chosen. Town Administrator LaFond does not want to cause a panic with a draconian budget and this meeting was intended to be informative in order to begin the process. Town Accountant Tim Bell added the Finance Team has been discussing when to bring up an Override and how to increase the odds of a successful Override. Do we use free cash again to bridge the gap as we need one more year? Having higher balances of free cash was due to COVID money and the High School renovations and at this time should some be used. School Committee Member Nicholas Adamopoulos gave thoughts to go to the various groups like Seniors, that are having difficult time absorbing the issues and have discussions to try to promote a successful outcome.

Finance Committee Member Michael Stevens spoke about how the Town of Dudley had a successful Override and it can be done with a great group of people collaborating for a great community. School Committee Member Kelly Seddiki mentioned how she would like to have more time spent trying to increase other ways to increase the Tax Revenue from businesses as well. School Committee Member Linda Millet spoke about how if there is an Override there will

be a lot of residents struggling to afford housing within the Town and a large portion will lose their homes. Finance Committee Chairman Mat Fitton explained that he understands. Board of Selectmen Chairman Thomas Klebart agrees and stated she brings up a very good point and needs to be considered when coming up with a solution, there are several in the room that will hopefully come up with a good solution. School Business Manager Lisa Kontoes suggested that they get the local State Representatives involved as voices to help our Community and other local communities in the area.

Finance Committee Chairman, Mat Fitton, should the groups get together sooner rather than later. Town Administrator LaFond agrees that is a very good idea.

Select board Member Elaine Davis went over upcoming events.

Adjournment

Motion by Board of Selectmen Chairman Thomas Klebart, seconded by Mark Rogers Vice-Chairman, to adjourn the Tri-Board meeting at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Aronson
Recording Secretary – Finance Committee

FY27 Budget Landscape

Why Are We Here?

Tri-Board Meeting September 22, 2025