

**Town of Lunenburg
Select Board Meeting Minutes
School Committee Meeting Minutes
Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**
Lunenburg Middle/High School, LMS Collaborative Room #D12
Monday, January 12, 2026

Note: References to the Tri-Board in the context of this meeting refer to Finance Committee, School Committee and Select Board

Select Board Members Present: Chair Caesar Nuzzolo, Vice-Chair Amanda Moore, Clerk Renee Emkey, Member Brian Lehtinen, Member Glenn McLeod

School Committee Members Present: Chair Anthony Sculimbrene, Vice-Chair Laura Brzozoski, and Secretary Mandy Gilman (Absent: Emily Young and George Yapp)

Finance Committee Members Present: Chair Chris Menard, Member Tanya Dall, Member Jay Simeone and Member Mike Rupp (Absent: Jean Russell, Tom Gray, and Ana Lockwood)

Tri-Board Moderator: Finance Chair Chris Menard moderated the meeting.

Also Present: Town Manager Jennifer Warren-Dyment

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting was called to order by Finance Committee Chair Chirs Menard who served as Moderator. He asked everyone to stand and address the flag for the Pledge of Allegiance.

NEW BUSINESS

Preliminary Budget Presentation Under the Following Categories: General Government, Unclassified, Debt Service, Intergovernmental

Town Manager Jennifer Warren-Dyment led the preliminary budget presentation, stating at the outset that her goal was "to go relatively quickly through the remaining budgets," covering general government functions, debt service, intergovernmental, and unclassified items. She noted that all salary figures were currently presented at FY26 rates, as several union contracts remained under active negotiation and no cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) had yet been finalized.

Select Board and Town Manager Budgets:

Town Manager Warren-Dyment presented the Select Board budget at approximately \$180,000, noting that \$160,000 of that figure was driven by staff costs which include the Assistant Town Manager/HR Director, the Executive Assistant, and pool of minute clerks, with the remainder of the budget covering expenses. The Town Manager's budget was presented at approximately

\$305,000, described as nearly a fifty-fifty split between salaries and expenses, with legal costs as the primary driver on the expense side. She noted that she was pleased with the town's legal representation.

She stated the most significant change proposed within these budgets was the creation of a new, standalone Assistant Town Manager position. She explained that the title of Assistant Town Manager and Director of Human Resources would be split. She stated that the Assistant Town Manager position would also include the procurement functions. Town Manager Warren-Dymont acknowledged the difficult budgetary environment but stated, "this is a need that I think is of the Town of Lunenburg." She indicated that to avoid absorbing the full cost in a single fiscal year, the position would not be funded until January 1, making it a half-year expense of approximately \$60,000, with the full salary estimated at \$120,000. She described it as a full-time position once fully funded.

Finance Committee Member Jay Simeone inquired about the drivers behind the \$20,000 increase to the Select Board budget. Town Manager Warren-Dymont explained that the primary driver was an increase in the contracted services line, from \$6,000 to \$13,500, to provide room for unforeseen contracted needs. She noted the town had routinely exceeded the prior contracted services budget and needed additional flexibility. She committed to following up with specific detail on the Select Board contracted services line, as well as on the Town Accountant's contracted services line.

Finance Department:

Town Manager Warren-Dymont described the Finance Department budget as having experienced significant upheaval. The department, which had been budgeted at \$323,000 for FY26, had required a \$160,000 supplemental appropriation at a Special Town Meeting due to costs associated with departmental transition, increased hiring ranges, and the use of outside consultants. She stated that she did not anticipate these one-time costs carrying into FY27 and would not budget around them.

She noted that reductions in the clerical line, driven by a recent staff retirement at top rate, were partially offsetting increases in the Finance Director position. The Payroll and Benefits position was described as a real number, pending appointment by the Select Board. The Assistant Town Accountant position had also been filled. She flagged that the audit cost had been historically under-budgeted at \$40,000, with the actual FY27 audit cost expected to be \$65,000, calling it "a pretty large jump."

School Committee Chair Anthony Sculimbrene asked whether the audit cost increase was due to prior under-budgeting or an actual increase in the cost. Town Manager Warren-Dymont confirmed that \$65,000 represented the actual cost of the audit going forward. She also informed the boards that, for those who might prefer a different auditor, there are now essentially only two municipal auditors operating in the state of Massachusetts and they are CBIZ and Roselli & Clark, and that Roselli & Clark is not accepting new clients at the time.

Treasurer/Collector:

Town Manager Warren-Dymont presented the Treasurer/Collector budget with few structural

changes, noting that the tax title line was being moved. The primary salary driver was a request to increase two staff positions from 36 hours to 40 hours per week, a level that had previously been supported by ARPA funds. She stated that this change was being requested to allow the Treasurer/Collector to dedicate more time to tax title work and other departmental responsibilities, resulting in a \$15,000 increase in the Treasurer's budget and a \$10,000 increase in the Collector's budget.

Information Technology:

Town Manager Warren-Dyment reported that the IT budget in FY26 had been approximately \$500,000, and that the preliminary FY27 budget represented an increase of approximately \$90,000, driven primarily by the Munis financial management software platform. She introduced Kara McCarthy, the Communications and IT Manager to field questions if needed.

She explained that the town had upgraded Munis in December of the prior year at a total cost of \$108,000, offset by ARPA funds, with \$61,000 coming from operations. In FY27, there would be no ARPA offset, and the contract stipulated a 5% increase in year two, with year three priced "at market." Finance Committee Member Simeone and School Committee Chair Sculimbrene asked clarifying questions about whether Munis was priced by seats or modules, and whether unused modules or seats could be reduced to yield savings. Town Manager Warren-Dyment committed to following up with detail on this question.

She described the role of Munis broadly: "It's doing all of our bills for sewer billing... it's the data source for everything else, all of our people are in there, all of the payroll is in there, all of that accounting is in there," including school department functions. She relayed advice from the town's financial advisor, who had told her that "Munis is like your gas stove in your house, you can use it to warm up a bowl of soup, but if you're not careful, you can burn your house down," characterizing it as a robust program typically used by much larger municipalities.

Town Manager Warren-Dyment also flagged ClearGov, a budgeting, forecasting, and transparency software that had not been actively used since Town Manager Lemieux departed. She stated she had planned to cut it in FY26 but heard strong objections. Given continued non-use, she indicated she would likely terminate the contract in the current fiscal year, pending a conversation with the incoming Finance Director. She noted hearing no real opposition from those present to cutting ClearGov.

Regarding the Suzor IT contract, she noted the vendor was currently on-site five days per week, an arrangement that she described as non-typical for a municipality of Lunenburg's size. She had already reduced on-site presence to four days per week as of January and stated she intended to formalize a four-day schedule in FY27, with an aspiration to reduce to three days. She noted that one day per week, Fridays, would be dedicated exclusively to public safety and DPW. She stated that ticket volume had declined as system maintenance had improved, allowing the on-site technician to focus on proactive work such as inventorying, device replacement scheduling, and network projects.

Finance Committee Member Dall asked about the cost differential between an internal IT hire versus the outsourced vendor contract. Town Manager Warren-Dyment responded that hiring a

single internal person would not necessarily be cheaper and would limit the town to that individual's specific skill set, whereas the vendor contract provides access to an entire team with diverse technical expertise.

Town Clerk:

Town Manager Warren-Dyment noted that FY27 is an election year, which drives the Town Clerk's budget upward. The budget of \$143,000 was described as largely salary-driven. She noted the Town Clerk is an elected position overseeing an Assistant Town Clerk, with a dotted-line relationship to the Town Manager's office. She noted the \$15,000 budget increase was primarily driven by election costs.

School Committee Chair Sculimbrene raised concerns about the workflows and operational efficiency of the Town Clerk's office, noting a lack of standardized digital submission processes for agendas, materials, and room scheduling. Town Manager Warren-Dyment acknowledged the concern, stating that the elected Town Clerk has authority to dictate how agendas and materials are accepted, and that while she has influence, she does not have direct authority over the office. She took the opportunity to share her broader view that she does not believe in the year 2026, that an elected town clerk serves anymore, noting that the statutory duties of the office had grown substantially more complex since the 1960s and 1990s. She was careful to note her admiration and confidence in the current Town Clerk, Kathy Herrick, saying, "It has been a blessing to work with Kathy. I have no concerns about Kathy's skills." She observed that a number of communities have been transitioning away from the elected town clerk model and described charter mechanisms used by some towns to manage such a transition without displacing an incumbent.

Miscellaneous General Government Lines:

Town Manager Warren-Dyment walked through a variety of miscellaneous general government lines: The Finance Committee budget was reduced by \$475, reflecting a realignment of training and event funds to actual usage. The Finance Committee Reserve was maintained at \$185,000, noting it had been nearly fully utilized in the prior fiscal year. The Salary Reserve was presented at \$210,000, which she characterized as a placeholder at this stage. She disclosed that the town is currently in active negotiations with three bargaining units: the DPW, Fire, and Clerical unions. She explained that COLAs and pending contract agreements are typically held in the salary reserve rather than embedded in departmental budgets.

The Town Report line was increased from \$7,000 to \$16,000, with Town Manager Warren-Dyment clarifying that this figure covered not only the annual town report but also the printing costs for the annual town meeting booklet and special town meeting materials, which had historically been underfunded and covered through ad hoc transfers.

Central Purchasing saw a minor increase of approximately \$1,500. She noted that consolidating all departmental postage into a single central line — implemented for the first time in FY26 — was currently running at approximately 40% utilization. She expressed a desire to reduce that line once the first full year of actuals was available.

Land Use Department:

Town Manager Warren-Dyment introduced Building Commissioner Brian Gingras to present on the Land Use Department, which consolidates Building, Planning, Conservation, ZBA, Historic, and APDC functions into a single budget. She noted this consolidation had provided significant flexibility during FY26, and expressed interest in applying a similar approach to the Treasurer/Collector.

Building Commissioner Gingras reported that permit fee activity for FY26 was tracking at approximately the historical average: roughly \$325,000 in building permit fees, \$420,000 in electrical, \$140,000 in plumbing, and \$120,000 in gas. He noted that a 35-lot subdivision before the Planning Board that evening had been effectively reduced to 24 lots following that night's Planning Board session. He also flagged a potential 104,000-square-foot commercial building on Summer Street that could generate permit revenue if permitted during FY26 and reaching occupancy in FY27.

Regarding the budget, Commissioner Gingras noted that the Director of Planning and Economic Development, a retitled version of the former Land Use Director, would see a salary increase from \$106,000 to \$112,000. He noted that salary reductions in the clerical line reflected the retirement of a long-serving employee and the elimination of the ZBA clerical line item. He explained that technology, particularly the OpenGov platform, had made it possible to consolidate duties and eliminate that position without operational impact. He described the meetings and schools training budget line as serving over 20 staff and volunteers across multiple boards, noting new Conservation Commission members and new administrative staff members were actively pursuing required training.

Town Manager Warren-Dyment added that this department is uniquely sensitive to external economic conditions: "Economy is doing well, he's busy, he's ramping up... if nobody's building, then we want to look at perhaps some sensible contractions."

Preliminary Revenue Projections

Town Manager Warren-Dyment transitioned to presenting preliminary revenue projections, describing the overall picture as "not good if you looked ahead." She stated that total preliminary revenues for FY27 were projected at \$51,331,000, with 71% driven by property taxes, followed by state aid and local receipts.

Property Tax / Levy Calculation

Town Manager Warren-Dyment walked the members through the mechanics of the levy limit. Starting from the FY26 levy limit, the town adds 2.5% under Proposition 2.5, adds estimated new growth, and then adds excluded (exempt) debt. She stated: "We add the excluded debt on the top end to the available revenues and then take it out in the expenditures." She clarified that excluded debt service appears both as revenue and as an expenditure because the exclusion authorization adds the revenue to fund that specific debt service cost.

A discussion arose regarding the distinction between excluded debt and non-excluded (inside-the-levy) debt. Town Manager Warren-Dyment clarified that the non-excluded debt that had

been falling off the levy in recent years represented smaller projects, such as the DPW building design, a ladder truck, the Saliba property acquisition, and artificial turf and that as this debt retires, those dollars effectively get absorbed into operating expenditures rather than being set aside for new non-excluded borrowing.

The discussion also addressed the timing strategy for municipal borrowing projects and the importance of staggering large excluded debt projects so that retiring debt is replaced by new debt at a pace that levels out taxpayer bills. Town Manager Warren-Dymont referenced the strategic effort made in the prior year to time certain municipal building projects ahead of an anticipated Turkey Hill School submission to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). School Committee Chair Sculimbrene confirmed that the School Committee anticipated submitting a proposal for MSBA funding in the fall, noting that the accelerated repair program would likely not be appropriate for Turkey Hill given the scope of need, and that Dr. Fortuna had advised the committee to develop a strong proposal for the following year. He acknowledged the MSBA process involves a five-plus-year timeline from submission to construction.

Finance Committee Member Dall asked whether the town had a combined limit on exempt and non-exempt debt. Town Manager Warren-Dymont confirmed that there is a policy.

New Growth

Town Manager Warren-Dymont reported that new growth for FY27 had been estimated by the Board of Assessors at \$400,000, following a process that included consultation with Building Commissioner Gingras. She noted that FY25 actual new growth had come in at \$518,000, above the \$400,000 estimate used that year. She explained that new growth captures not only new construction but also additions, enclosures of previously unheated spaces, and renovations that add assessable values, but that does not include value increases attributable to normal market fluctuation.

Select Board Vice-Chair Moore expressed concern that the \$400,000 estimate might be too high, citing a perceived slowdown in new construction. School Committee Chair Sculimbrene noted the estimate was supported by historical trends. Town Manager Warren-Dymont responded that the Assessors had voted on the figure in the prior week as part of the overlay calculation, and that Commissioner Gingras had concurred. She reminded the boards that the entire revenue pie does not need to hit exactly on each line; rather, the aggregate needs to be equal to or greater than total appropriations.

State Aid

Town Manager Warren-Dymont presented current FY26 state aid actuals of \$11,244,422, which included Chapter 70 education aid, unrestricted government aid, school choice, library aid, and veterans' benefits. She stated her intention to hold this figure level until the Governor's budget recommendation was released, anticipated around the time of the Massachusetts Municipal Association conference. She expressed tempered concern about state revenues. Select Board Member Glenn McLeod observed that the 22% state aid share in Lunenburg's revenue pie was well below the national average of approximately 31% for municipal aid from states, noting this gap was directly related to the fiscal pressures on cities and towns

highlighted in the Municipal Association's "Perfect Storm" report. Town Manager Warren-Dymont agreed that this was particularly challenging for a community like Lunenburg with a limited commercial and industrial tax base, noting, "that big green piece of the pie — that's largely being supported by residential homeowners."

School Committee Vice-Chair Brzozski suggested inviting local state legislators to an upcoming Tri-Board meeting to better understand the magnitude of the funding gap. An unidentified participant recalled that one state representative had previously told the town to "just raise taxes," eliciting broad frustration from those present.

A discussion arose about the commercial tax rate and whether a split rate would be beneficial. Town Manager Warren-Dymont stated that she would not recommend a split rate for Lunenburg at this time, noting that the town should maintain a welcoming posture toward commercial and industrial development: "We want arms wide open — come." She noted that a neighboring community, Lancaster, had recently voted to split its rate, and that communities with strong positioning on major highway corridors (citing Route 495 and Route 2) had structural advantages Lunenburg did not currently share.

Local Receipts

Town Manager Warren-Dymont stated that local receipts, which comprise motor vehicle excise, meals tax, fees, fines, licensing and permits, and investment income, were being held level pending closure of FY25 books. She noted that investment income had significantly outperformed projections in recent years, with an FY25 projection of \$100,000 against actuals of approximately \$414,000. She cautioned against relying on continued market performance at that level and stated: "I don't want to rely on the market to continue in that way." She also noted that ambulance receipts were included in local receipts and were flowing into the operating budget as estimated revenue, not through a free cash appropriation process.

Preliminary FY27 Budget Plan Discussions

Town Manager Warren-Dymont presented the preliminary budget gap analysis. Starting from total available revenues of \$51,331,376.99, she subtracted approximately \$1,400,000 in non-appropriated expenses (including state assessments taken off the top, school choice and library state aid pass-throughs, overlay, and the newly repositioned tax title line), as well as a pay-as-you-go capital contribution (referenced at \$244,000 in the prior year). This left approximately \$49,682,496 in available operating funds. Subtracting the total FY26 appropriations from the omnibus budget left \$1,306,059 in new revenue available for FY27 for all purposes: the town, the school department, Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School (Monty Tech)-every employee, every contract, and every new initiative.

She described the traditional apportionment approach, under which the school department would receive approximately \$696,521 of that amount above FY26 levels, the town would receive approximately \$573,000, and Monty Tech would receive approximately \$36,000.

She then presented an illustration of the actual budget pressure: the school department's projected health insurance increase for FY27 was approximately \$740,000, and the town's projected health

insurance increase was approximately \$480,000. Together, those two non-discretionary increases alone exceeded the entire \$1,306,059 in new revenue by approximately \$34,000, leaving only \$86,000 for all other purposes after health insurance, before even Monty Tech's assessment (which she noted is anticipated to exceed \$36,000), COLAs, any new positions, or any programmatic additions.

Select Board Vice-Chair Moore noted that a request from the Fire Department for a fourth shift, estimated at approximately \$500,000, was also not yet reflected in the available figures, confirming that number was included in the Fire Chief's budget request as submitted.

The Town Manager summarized the fiscal situation plainly: "If we do not have either significant cuts or an override or a combination thereof... we don't have enough funds to meet our obligations."

Finance Committee Member Dall noted that the city she was working with in her professional capacity was in a similar position and was asking all departments to prepare 5% budget cuts. Town Manager Warren-Dyment confirmed she had already issued a similar request to Lunenburg departments, and stated that she had asked department heads to undertake that exercise so we can start seeing where things are.

School Committee Chair Sculimbrene cautioned that the school department had already been significantly cut and could not sustain further reductions without affecting classroom performance, noting that kindergarten classrooms were operating with 25 students and no aides.

Finance Committee Member Mike Rupp expressed concern about the long-term trajectory, citing declining state revenues, population loss in Massachusetts, business outmigration, and an estimated \$57 billion in unfunded pension liabilities statewide: "I just don't think this state, on this situation, is going to get any better in the coming years." Town Manager Warren-Dyment agreed on the need to protect OPEB funding no matter what, while noting that the public sector compensation model meant that asking employees to absorb further benefit reductions or forgo COLAs would be inappropriate in the current environment.

Discussion turned to specific operational cost-reduction opportunities. Town Manager Warren-Dyment noted the recycling market had shifted dramatically and what was once a revenue source was now a cost. She suggested the boards consider whether the community values the current curbside program, and whether expanding the pay-as-you-throw bag fee program could offset the full cost. She cautioned that removing the community from the trash enterprise program would likely be very difficult to reverse. School Committee Chair Sculimbrene expressed concern about effectively swapping a hidden tax cost for an explicit per-bag fee burden on residents.

Town Manager Warren-Dyment also discussed the TC Passios (TCP), stating she had asked the Facilities Director to prepare a cost analysis of the building's carrying costs. She explained that the large, oversized boilers originally designed to heat two buildings were continuing to generate high heating costs, and that while a partial decommissioning had been completed, the savings were not materializing. She stated that a winding-down to begin July 1 was unlikely, but that planning for a wind-down sometime in FY27 needed to begin. She identified the permanent

occupants as PAC, Recreation programming, the food pantry, cold storage for the town clerk's election machines, and a license agreement with the Shapiro Behavioral Educational Center for four rooms.

School Committee Vice-Chair Brzozski stated plainly, "I can't do a third year of telling people you may be losing your job," noting the emotional and professional toll that budget uncertainty had taken on school staff. She stated the school committee could not cut another position. School Committee Chair Sculimbene stated his position clearly: "I am happy to work with all the departments to come up with a number. But the schools, as a school committee, I think I can confidently say we cannot cut another position."

Town Manager Warren-Dyment offered her current thinking on override strategy: "My current thought is that it would be best to have it be one, that everybody is together, because that fight of who wins and who loses on town meeting floor- we could have either everybody walks away loser, everybody's individual override fails, or you have winners and losers." She suggested a unified override request covering both municipal and school needs.

School Committee Chair Sculimbene argued against the practice of treating the budget as separate pies for the town and the school: "The problem isn't that we have a shrinking pie. It's that all of the groups think that we have separate pie and we don't." He called for a collaborative approach, noting that territorial budget fights resulted in self-inflicted wounds and that "the people who suffer are the old people in town, the kids in town, and our employees." He also raised the emerging risk of federal aid reductions: "We receive federal aid and the federal aid is going to lapse... it is unlikely that we will get the same amount of aid from the federal government."

Select Board Member McLeod argued that the root cause of the problem was the state's failure to adequately support cities and towns and encouraged the boards not to allow the issue to become divisive in the community. He also raised the pending results of the state legislative audit passed by 72% of Massachusetts voters, suggesting it was difficult to support another override without that fiscal transparency. Town Manager Warren-Dyment pushed back firmly, noting that the audit in question was an audit of the behavior of the state legislature, not of state funds, and that "the state is not responsible for the health insurance increase. The state is not responsible for other increases that we're seeing. This is the economy. We cannot lay it all on the feet of any one group. This is the perfect storm."

Finance Committee Member Dall stated that her support for another Proposition 2.5 override would require greater transparency in how town funds are managed, moved, and used. School Committee Chair Sculimbene acknowledged this, stating: "Before we ask them to pay more, we really need to do some reflection about what we're spending and what our priorities are." Town Manager Warren-Dyment endorsed the idea of a public forum: "I'm hearing a lot of conversation in the community that folks want to have that forum... the sooner that you guys are able to do that, I think the more questions that are lingering can at least get answered." Finance Committee Member Dall suggested such a forum might also reduce the length and conflict at Town Meeting. Town Manager Warren-Dyment also suggested the possibility of a tiered override structure, while cautioning that voters historically tend to select the lowest tier offered.

Discussion touched on the mechanics of a large-scale override and whether an override could be approved at a figure larger than immediately needed, with the town taxing below the full ceiling in the near term while maintaining excess levy capacity for future years. Town Manager Warren-Dyment described having tried this approach in a prior community, noting that residents ultimately preferred to vote on the exact dollar figure each time rather than grant what felt to some like open-ended capacity.

Town Manager Warren-Dyment indicated she was in the process of compiling the full gap figure of the difference between all departmental requests and available revenue. She stated that the number would be in the millions: "I'm plugging in what everybody's requests have been. We're in the millions." She committed to bringing that complete gap figure to the next meeting.

She closed the budget discussion with an expression of gratitude for the early start on the process: "I'm so grateful that everybody has embarked on this effort because I think the one thing that we have compared to some of the other communities is it's January 12th and here we are. It's not March."

IMPORTANT DATES & UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Tri-Board discussed scheduling its next joint meeting. The Finance Committee noted it was entering an intensive budget review cycle, with a tentative Finance Committee public hearing and vote anticipated around March 12th and 19th respectively, and a warrant closing around March 16th.

After discussion of room availability and scheduling conflicts, the Tri-Board agreed to hold its next joint meeting on Monday, February 9, 2026 at 7:00 PM, to be held at the school (Middle/High School) due to a Planning Board meeting occupying Town Hall that evening.

The Town Manager commented that School Committee Member Yapp (who had informed the School Committee of his intention to resign) needed to formally submit his resignation to the Town Clerk.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Member Lehtinen to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:53 p.m. Seconded by Clerk Emkey. Call for the vote: Four-aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).

Motion by Member Simeone to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 9:30 p.m. Seconded by Member Rupp. Call for the vote: Four-aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).

School Committee Secretary Gilman departed the meeting at approximately 9:16 p.m. at which time the Committee lost its quorum.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Warren-Dyment, Town Manager

These Minutes were reviewed and approved by the Select Board on: Tuesday June 13, 2026.