



# MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA

FINANCE COMMITTEE • TOWN HALL  
Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts 01944-1399  
Telephone (978) 526-6405 FAX (978) 526-2001

## Minutes of the Finance Committee

March 19, 2026

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Sarah Mellish, Chair, Andy Oldeman, Vice Chair, Mory Creighton, John Croft, Gar Morse, Dean Nahatis and Peter Twining

**MEMBER NOT PRESENT:**

**STAFF PRESENT** Town Administrator, Tony Barletta, Finance Director, Andrea Mainville

**STAFF ONLINE:** Administrative Assistant, Gail Hunter

**SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ann Harrison and John Round

**Call to Order** – Ms. Mellish called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

### **FY27 Budget, Open Items**

Ms. Mellish confirmed that to the best of her knowledge, there were no open items remaining for the FY27 Budget. Town Administrator, Mr. Barletta, confirmed that nothing had changed since the Committee's last discussion.

### **FY26 Snow Removal Budget**

Mr. Barletta reported that Ms. Mainville was working on getting a more accurate assessment of the current Snow and Ice spending, which was estimated to be in the range of \$200K over budget. The discussion centered on whether to address some or all this deficit using free cash, or to handle at Year-End with transfers from other budget lines.

Ms. Mainville provided updated figures showing the Town was approximately \$250K over the budgeted amount for snow removal. She recommended taking the full amount from Free Cash rather than waiting for year-end transfers, explaining that the State puts a hold on deficit amounts in Free Cash, making it essentially the same as spending upfront by incentivizing towns to provide for deficits in the Fiscal Year they occur.

Committee members discussed the mechanics of snow removal budget overruns. Ms. Mainville explained that even with this allowance, the State still encumbers the equivalent amount from free cash, making it more sensible to appropriate the funds directly at Town Meeting.

### **FY25 Unpaid Bills**

The Committee discussed outstanding bills from FY25, specifically unpaid invoices from the audio-visual contractor who provides services for Town Meetings. Mr. Barletta reported that the contractor had not yet submitted bills for previous Town Meetings, with estimates around \$2K per meeting for two meetings, potentially totaling \$4K. However, the contractor might provide the services for free.

Ms. Mainville noted that they have other prior year bills totaling \$1,897 that would be included in Article 3. The Committee emphasized the importance of having actual invoice amounts before Town Meeting, as appropriations cannot be made without knowing specific dollar amounts.

### **Warrant Article Finance Committee Recommendations**

Most of this discussion focused on a proposed Senior Center/Community Space project. Mr. Barletta presented updated information showing the conceptual design had come back with a cost estimate of \$7.2M significantly higher than the previously assumed \$3M budget.

Mr. Barletta explained that after reviewing various scaled-back options, the Select Board decided to proceed with the full concept but expand its use beyond just seniors to include community programming and potentially some Town offices. This expanded use would justify asking for Town contributions beyond the original \$1M appropriation and make the Parks and Recreation Revolving Fund an eligible funding source for design work.

The immediate request was for \$350K for full design and procurement documents to bring the project to "shovel ready" status. Mr. Barletta noted this would be funded from the Parks and Recreation Revolving Fund, which currently has approximately \$800K, with about \$300K-\$350K needed for ongoing operations.

Committee members expressed significant concerns about the process and timing. Several members questioned proceeding without a signed Purchase and Sale Agreement with the Masons, noting they were still in negotiations after years of discussions. Others worried about the lack of concrete fundraising commitments and the precedent of spending substantial Town funds before knowing the full funding picture.

Ms. Beckman, representing the fundraising effort, explained the challenge of raising funds without knowing the final cost, noting that a Feasibility Study had projected the ability to raise \$3M over three years, but the current estimate far exceeds that amount.

Committee members debated whether the Town should commit to design funding before seeing concrete fundraising results. Some suggested giving the fundraising effort 18-24 months to demonstrate success before the Town commits additional funds. Others emphasized the need for better integration with the Town's Facility Planning Committee.

The discussion revealed tensions between moving the project forward expeditiously and ensuring proper financial controls and transparency. Several members expressed support for the project's goals but concern about the process and financial commitments involved.

The Committee ultimately decided that this should be a separate Warrant Article rather than being included in the General Capital Article, and that it should include the specific \$350K amount and Funding Source.

### **Long Term Capital Budget Review**

This agenda item was not discussed due to time constraints, though Ms. Mellish distributed bond information for the Essex Elementary School project for incorporation into their Capital Planning spreadsheet.

### **Finance Committee Booklet Discussion**

Ms. Mellish reviewed various charts and data presentations for the Annual Finance Committee booklet. The Committee discussed maintaining consistency with previous years' charts while making some updates. Key topics included:

- Updating tax rate calculations and projections
- Adding a separate chart for School Debt alongside Town Debt
- Clarifying funding sources for various Warrant Articles
- Including percentage breakdowns rather than specific dollar amounts for tax bill impacts
- Ensuring the estimated tax rate increase of 1.75% for FY27 is properly explained

The Committee requested that Capital Articles include specific language about potential grant funding offsets where applicable, like the PFAS Article language.

### **Liaison Updates**

No liaison updates were reported.

### **Approve 3/12/26 Minutes**

*Gar Morse moved to approve the minutes from March 12, 2026. Peter Twining seconded the motion. The motion passed with Mr. Croft abstaining.*

### **Meeting March 26, 2026 (Finalize Finance Committee Booklet & Any Remaining Budget Issues)**

The Committee confirmed their next meeting for March 26, 2026, at which they would finalize Warrant Article recommendations and complete the Finance Committee booklet for printing.

### **Meeting April 16, 2026 (Auditors, FY Q3 Report, Town Meeting Prep)**

The Committee confirmed this meeting would include presentations from the Town Auditors and OPEB consultant, Mr. Sherman. Along with the FYQ3 Financial Report and Annual Town Meeting preparation.

### **Other Business not anticipated by the Chair, discussion only**

Mr. Nahatis raised concerns about construction beginning on Reed Park expansion before Town Meeting approval. It was clarified to be grant-funded work that doesn't require Town Meeting action.

### **Adjourn**

*At 9:15 p.m. Mr. Twining moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Morse seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*