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Board of Finance 2026-2027 Budget Workshop

Friday, February 6, 2026
Town Hall Meeting Room –8:00 a.m.

(Unapproved)

Attendance

Board of Finance Members Present: Chairman Kevin Houlihan, Vice Chairman James Leahy, Dr. Ajeet Jain, Joseph Nuzzo, Kevin McNabola, Dr. Anna Mahon, and alternate Chad Lombardi

Staff: John Cifarelli, Finance Director; Karin Lewis, Assistant Director of Finance; Deborah Satonick, Recording Secretary

1. Orange Police Services – Chief Robert Gagne & Assistant Chief of Police Max Martins

- Chief Gagne reviewed the crime statistics for the Town of Orange. He noted that medical emergencies increased by 6.6% and the police continue to be the first responders. While motor vehicle theft and burglaries have decreased, shoplifting is on the rise.
- Chief Gagne discussed staffing requirements with the Police Department. Currently, there is one vacancy, but there are three other vacancies due to an officer in field training, another at the academy, and a third officer with long-term disability. To be fully staffed would require 46 officers. Chief Gagne requested additional staffing in the 2026-2027 proposed budget.
- Chief Gagne discussed the Defined Benefit Plan versus the Defined Contribution Plan and noted that there are three remaining officers on the Defined Benefit Plan. He felt that the Defined Contribution Plan is a factor contributing to the difficulty in retaining officers. He noted that other factors include the lack of challenging assignments within the Police force. He would like to establish a traffic control task force and other specific assignments within the police department but insufficient staffing prevents him from doing so.
- Chief Gagne discussed the need for an upgrade in technology. He reported that over 90% of the police in the State of Connecticut are using Nexgen software and he added this to his operating budget at \$95k. He took questions from the Commission members regarding specific line items.

2. Public Works – Robert Brinton, John Stewart, & Don Foyer

- Mr. Brinton discussed the snow budget and the resulting overtime due to the most recent snowstorm two weeks ago on a Sunday. He also discussed the need for an additional Maintenance

Technician and added this position to his proposed 2026-2027 budget with a new line item of \$72k. He proceeded to review each individual line item with the Board members and explained the reasons behind any monetary line item increases in his budget. Don Foyer and John Stewart were equally engaged to answer all questions from the Board members.

3. Fire Marshal & Emergency Management – Fire Marshall James Vincent, Assistant Fire Marshall Timothy Borer

- Fire Marshall Vincent discussed the resurgence of the drone program, which was originally established in 2017. The drones allow the department to do roof inspections, locate missing individuals, among other tasks. He pointed out that the Fire Department also plays a role in emergency response, along with the Police Department. New drone equipment, made in the USA, is required and proper licensing is needed. He is actively looking for grant money to support this project. In addition, their current vehicle cannot hold all of their required equipment so \$74,500 has been added to their budget to pay for a new vehicle. If the Board of Finance does not buy the vehicle now, but rather chooses to wait on the purchase, the cost for the vehicle will be \$79,365. Mr. Vincent added that their current vehicle is in good condition and can be repurposed to another Town department.
- Mr. Borer explained the CERT program to the Board members, which is currently comprised of thirty volunteers from many different disciplines and walks of life. This program is self-sufficient and funded through grant money. These volunteers have done a tremendous amount of work in the town, particularly during COVID. Mr. Leahy was particularly impressed and suggested that they should have more publicity about the program.

(Mr. Lombardi excused himself from the meeting at 9:30 a.m.)

4. Orange Volunteer Fire Department – Chief Vaughan Dumas & Bert Gallant, Treasurer

- Mr. Dumas presented their budget to the Board of Finance members, noting that low salaries make it very challenging to find qualified part time inspectors. He mentioned that they have a six-month budget but they are currently converting to a one-year budget to coincide with the Town budget. Mr. Dumas reviewed in detail each line item and took questions from the Board members. The Fire Department continues to run solely on volunteers and the hope is that they will be able to continue to do so. As donations have gone down from \$78,468 on 2/4/25 to \$48,600 on 2/4/26, the Town continues to supplement their budget by over 50%.

5. Parks & Recreation – Director Dan Lynch, Chris Small, & Megan Lasto

- Mr. Lynch introduced Ms. Lasto, the new Aquatics Director, to the Orange Board of Finance. He proceeded to discuss the need for a new Grounds Crew employee. Mr. Small advised that the individual for consideration would be a tremendous asset to the Town, as he is reliable and a very hard worker. The salary line item for this position has been added to the proposed 2026-2027 budget at \$50k.

(Mr. Lombardi returned to the meeting at approximately 10:30 p.m.)

- Mr. Small discussed the irrigation at Fred Wolfe Park, Old Tavern Sports Complex, and the Town Green. The water line item has increased substantially as a result of the baseball field

maintenance. Mr. Leahy inquired if the outside groups using the fields are contributing to this cost. Mr. Lynch explained that Orange Little League does contribute with field preparation and fertilizing, but irrigation has always been the sole responsibility of the town.

6. Case Memorial Library – Director Kathy Giotsas

- Ms. Giotsas distributed an informational packet to the Board members and she reviewed the library statistics with them. There was a brief discussion about the elimination of fines on overdue books versus movies and Ms. Giotsas explained that she is following the general policies of most of the other libraries within the State of Connecticut.
- Ms. Giotsas requested \$5k for the book budget and noted that her 2026-2027 budget reflects her long-term strategic plan. Patrons have requested that the library remain open additional hours and this might require staffing for next year. She also noted that as library employees receive wage increases the Director should also receive a similar wage increase. She stated that this has not been happening. Mr. McNabola supported this idea, noting that if there is not an adequate salary buffer between the staff and the Director it could be difficult to fill vacancies. Lastly, Ms. Giotsas noted that nonunion substitute librarians are underpaid and their salary should be raised to \$25 per hour.

(Mr. Lombardi returned to the meeting at 10:30 p.m.)

7. Community Services – Stacey Johnson

- Ms. Johnson spoke on the age of the transport vans, with over 100,000 miles, which are used to transport individuals to their medical appointments and to High Plains Community Center. Most of the medical appointments are in New Haven and Hamden, but they also travel to North Haven and Shelton as well. They have five drivers and about 100 seniors that participate in this program, which has allowed seniors to live and age in place in their own homes. Mr. Leahy was impressed with this program. The department is actively applying for two grants to purchase a newer vehicle but they may have to ask for funding next year if the grant money does not come through. These vehicles are parked at the High Plains parking lot and the Highway Department lot.
- Ms. Johnson funded \$130k for Family Counseling Services, an increase of \$10k from last year. She spoke about the Tracey Bunch in much detail, and Dr. Mahon felt that these types of programs are needed in the community. Ms. Johnson advised that she is unable to expand the program due to the limitations of staffing and other resources. The group is comprised of high functioning individuals with disabilities. They meet each Monday evening for socialization.

8. Information Services – Paul Mongillo

- Mr. Mongillo presented his 2026-2027 budget and spoke briefly about how he had to play “catchup” in 2018 with the outdated technology that was being used by the Town. Mr. Leahy asked how our technology compares with neighboring Towns and Mr. Mongillo advised that he would investigate this. Mr. Mongillo noted that the Town has three security levels in place and he is not concerned about a security breach issue, as Firewalls are in place. He spoke highly of his staff, Chris Kelly and Dean Celotto, for their expertise in troubleshooting and overall maintenance of the system.

9. Capital Planning Committee – Chairman Bill Kraut

- Mr. Kraut presented the list of Capital items in priority order, explaining in detail each request. It was noted that until the Town receives the Grand List at the end of the month the Capital items cannot fully be addressed. Mr. Kraut paid particular attention to our Town pool, which he felt has been a great asset to Orange. Chairman Houlihan noted that while funding is needed for the development of Fred Wolfe Park, it is critical that we maintain our other facilities, especially the pool, which is heavily used by our residents.
- Mr. Kraut spoke about his new position as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Capital Planning Committee. He advised that this new position has been an educational experience for him as he received a much broader view of our Town.

10. Amity Budget Discussion & Vote

- There was a brief discussion on the Amity budget and Chairman Houlihan suggested an anonymous voting procedure to give Mr. Nuzzo instructions on how he should vote on their behalf. Board members submitted their votes and the votes were calculated..

Mr. Leahy made a motion to instruct Mr. Nuzzo to approve the Amity 2026-2027 budget only if the overall budget increase was 0.99% or less. Dr. Jain seconded the motion and the vote was recorded as follows: Chairman Houlihan, aye; Mr. Leahy, aye, Dr. Jain, aye; Mr. Nuzzo, aye; Dr. Mahon, nay; and Mr. McNabola, nay. (4-0-2)

11. Discuss & Possible Approval of Budget Hearing Date – April 22, 2026

- Several upcoming budget workshop dates were discussed. The Budget Hearing Date was set for April 22 and additional budget workshop dates were set for 2/23, 3/11, and 2/26. The February 23rd meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. to allow Ms. Loso to present the yearly audit and, at the same time, allow for Dr. Scarpetti to present the Orange Board of Education budget at 7:00 p.m.

12. Approval of January 21, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Jain made a motion to approve the January 21, 2026 Board of Finance meeting minutes, seconded by Dr. Mahon. All were in favor and the motion PASSED.

13. Adjournment

Mr. McNabola made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:45 p.m., seconded by Dr. Jain. All were in favor and the motion PASSED.

Respectfully Submitted,
Deborah Satonick
Recording Secretary