



Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 14, 2026
6:00 PM

Franklin Municipal Building, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street

A meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, January 14, 2026 at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA.

Members Present

George Conley, Chair, Natalie Riley, Vice Chair, Lauren Nagel, Clerk, Christopher Diaz, John Barnes, Ryan Lavorgna, Shannon Nealon, Jen D'Angelo

Member not Present

Bill Batchelor

Agenda

1. Call to Order

SUMMARY: George Conley, Finance Committee Chair, called the January 14th meeting of the Finance Committee to order at 6:00 PM.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

2. Public Comments – Citizens are welcome to express their views for up to three minutes on a matter that is not on the agenda. In compliance with G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20 et seq, the Open Meeting Law, the Finance Committee cannot engage in a dialogue or comment on a matter raised during Citizen Comments. The Finance Committee may ask town staff to review the matter. Nothing herein shall prevent the town staff from correcting a misstatement of fact.

SUMMARY: Steve Sherlock, resident of 13 Magnolia Drive and community information director for Franklin Matters Franklin Public Radio, welcomed the committee to 2026 and to the Franklin TV studio. He reminded members to speak close to the microphones so that viewers listening to recordings on YouTube can hear clearly. Chair Conley noted there was one person on Zoom but no phone participants.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

3. Approval of Minutes

a. December 10, 2025

SUMMARY: Chair Conley asked if there were any objections, additions, or deletions to the minutes from December 10, 2025. Natalie Riley noted the minutes were not in the packet but indicated there were no comments. Riley made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 10 meeting as presented.

VOTE(S):

Subject: Approval of minutes from December 10, 2025

Mover: Natalie Riley

Second: Lauren Nagel

Result: Passed

Details of the vote: Voice vote, unanimous (all ayes, no opposition).

4. The Bill Dowd "Deep Dive Series"

a. Board of Assessors and Town Staff: The Economics of Development

SUMMARY: Jamie Hellen, Town of Franklin, introduced the topic, explaining that the Board of Assessors along with department heads from police, fire, facilities, DPW, and schools were present to answer questions about the economics of development. He clarified this was an open-ended discussion rather than a formal presentation.

Chair Conley began by asking about the assessment of warehouses on Forge Parkway or Constitution Boulevard when they become vacant. Christopher Feeley, Chairman of the Board of Assessors, and Kevin Doyle, Director of Assessing, explained that commercial and industrial properties are valued using an income approach rather than a cost approach. The value considers potential rent and vacancy rates. Cheryl Hanley, member of the Board of Assessors, added that market data including rental income, vacancy and collection loss, operating expenses, and capitalization rates are analyzed annually.

Feeley clarified that residential properties are valued based on resale value, while commercial properties factor in potential income generation. This is why vacant commercial properties may see reduced values, whereas residential properties do not receive the same treatment. He also noted this is why Franklin has historically chosen not to implement a split tax rate, given the town's location outside the 495 belt where businesses have more location choices.

Lauren Nagel asked about split tax rates among local towns. Feeley confirmed Bellingham and Plainville have split tax rates, but noted those communities have unique circumstances (Bellingham has a power plant, Plainville has a casino). Hellen added that communities with split tax rates typically have major commercial attractions like malls, stadiums, or casinos. He noted Franklin's permitting process is advantageous compared to adjacent

communities, citing positive feedback from recent businesses including the tavern on East Central and a cricket indoor arena.

Shannon Nealon asked whether vacancy reductions apply to apartment complexes. Doyle explained that apartment complexes, while classified as residential property, are valued using the income approach because they are commercial ventures providing human habitat. Hanley clarified that large apartment complexes must be assessed as residential class per Massachusetts general law, even though they are valued using income approach methods.

Hellen discussed legislative recommendations in the "perfect storm" report regarding potential changes to how certain properties are taxed, including properties owned by LLCs used for Airbnb and similar purposes, which are currently taxed as residential but could potentially be reclassified as commercial.

Natalie Riley asked about the annual review of tax rates. Feeley confirmed the Town Council makes the decision on tax rates annually, and that a split tax rate doesn't generate additional revenue but merely shifts the burden between residential and commercial taxpayers. For Franklin, every \$1 reduction in the residential rate would increase the commercial rate by approximately \$4.

Ryan Lavorgna noted that from an overall budget perspective, Franklin is currently as attractive as possible commercially since no override has been implemented.

Hanley asked about the Maplegate property sale and its revenue impact. Hellen explained it was a Chapter 61 property (golf course) that received tax breaks, but now that it's being converted to a solar farm, it will be assessed based on the new use with equipment value. Feeley noted that for the property to generate the reported \$300,000 annually, the project value would need to be around \$25–26 million. Doyle explained the assessment process would occur once construction is complete.

Nagel asked about tax incentives for new businesses. Hellen explained that the Town Council approves Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreements, noting Franklin has a handful including with Plan Z and Cold Chain Technologies.

Chair Conley then directed questions to department heads regarding capacity for development.

Doug Martin, Water and Sewer Superintendent, addressed water capacity. He confirmed Franklin pumps approximately 2.5 million gallons per day with a maximum permitted capacity of 3.4 million gallons per day. He explained the water conservation restriction in summer is required by the Water Management Act permit, not because the town is running out of water. Robert Cantoreggi, DPW Director, added that Franklin is recognized by DEP as probably the best utility in the state for water conservation.

Martin explained that regarding sewer, Franklin uses about 60% of its allotted capacity at the Medway treatment facility. He noted that for large developments like 444 East Central, the developer is required to pay for consulting engineer evaluation of flow impacts. Cantoreggi added that the 444 development would generate approximately \$700,000 in tie-in fees for water and sewer.

Fire Chief Chuck Allen addressed fire department capacity. He reported total emergency calls for FY25 were approximately 5,561, up about 2.7% from the previous year. Of those, about 632 calls were to apartment buildings, while over 55 communities, assisted living, and nursing homes generated about 1,500 calls. He noted that about 75% of calls are for emergency medical services, and revenue from EMS transports covers about a third of the department's budget.

Allen acknowledged the department uses mutual aid at a 2-to-1 ratio (taking in twice as much as giving out), but explained this is due to historical underinvestment in capacity, not recent development. He stated that four additional firefighters would allow staffing of a third ambulance 24/7 and more reliable staffing of the ladder truck.

Nealon questioned how development isn't a concern when the department is already understaffed. Allen clarified that the staffing shortage predates recent development, and if the department were properly staffed, new development would be naturally absorbed into the system. Hellen added that no town is fully staffed for all public safety services, which is why mutual aid exists.

Police Chief Thomas Lynch addressed police capacity. He noted the department has been understaffed for 25 years, currently at 56 officers compared to 54 budgeted in 2000. He listed multiple developments that have been built since 2000 that didn't exist when the department was last at that staffing level. Lynch explained the minimum overnight staffing is three patrolmen and a sergeant covering 27 square miles and 220 miles of streets. The station is closed from 2 AM to 6 AM.

Lynch stated he would like to be at 63 officers. With additional staff, he would restore 2 SROs moved to patrol, and establish a dedicated traffic unit. He explained that SRO costs come entirely from the police budget except for a 50% cost share with Tri-County High School for one officer.

Riley summarized the discussion, noting that while new growth does tax departments like fire and police, new growth is necessary to expand the tax base because costs are rising faster than 2.5%. Without new growth, deficits would grow and potentially lead to bigger cuts.

Superintendent Lucas Giguere of Franklin Public Schools addressed school capacity. He reported Lincoln Street has functional capacity of about 1,200 students with current enrollment of 1,050; Washington Street has capacity of about 1,100 with enrollment around 850; Franklin Middle School has capacity of 1,200 with enrollment around 1,000; and the

high school has capacity of approximately 1,750 with current enrollment of 1,480.

Hellen explained that under 40B requirements, over 60–70% of units must be 1-bedroom, which would assume no children. Two-bedroom units are more fluid, and 3-bedroom units might produce children before families transition to single-family homes. He emphasized that when development is built and assessed, the tax base comes through the levy, and when children arrive, the superintendent welcomes them while the tax base eventually catches up through the budget process.

D'Angelo added that beyond numbers, the demographics and needs of children moving into apartment complexes often look different from single-family homes, potentially requiring more services. Hellen acknowledged this point and noted that fiscal analyses of developments can be requested but are only estimates until residents actually arrive.

Conley noted that at the planning board level for the Starbucks on West Central Street, there were predictions of traffic Armageddon that did not materialize.

The presentation on Understanding Abatements, Exemptions and Overlay was deferred to a future meeting due to time constraints. Materials were sent to all members, and they were invited to contact staff with questions.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

b. Board of Assessors and Town Staff: Understanding Abatements, Exemptions and Overlay

SUMMARY: Due to time constraints, this presentation was deferred to a future meeting. The materials were sent to all members, and they were invited to contact staff or the Director of Assessing with any questions.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

5. FY2026 Capital

a. Capital Improvement Book & Breakdown of Free Cash

i. FY2025 Expenditures Analysis by Department

ii. FY2025 Revenue Analysis by Department

SUMMARY: Evan LaCasse, Deputy Chief Financial Officer, presented the capital book highlights. He explained that capital decisions assist in maintenance and replacement of town assets and bring capital needs of both school and town departments into a single framework. He noted that free cash consists of revenues that come in over projections and expenses that come in under budget, while retained earnings serve the same purpose for enterprise funds.

Staff explained that free cash is certified by the Department of Revenue by June 3, after which departments submit capital requests. Jamie Hellen and Kerri Bertone (staff member)

along with Evan and Linda Darling (Comptroller) review all requests.

Riley asked whether capital requests can only come if there is free cash. Staff confirmed this is correct, and that free cash and grants are the only sources of revenue for capital items other than borrowing for larger projects over \$1 million.

Nealon asked about the calculation of free cash. Linda Darling explained that the DOR uses a formula that accounts for fund balance, revenues, deferred revenues, and other factors. She offered to send the DOR calculation sheet to the committee.

Staff presented the history of free cash and retained earnings and reviewed fiscal policies regarding stabilization funds. Chair Conley noted that general stabilization is important for the town's triple-A bond rating.

Staff explained that this year, only the OPEB trust is being funded from stabilization policy requirements, with remaining free cash reserved for tier 1 capital requests and the anticipated budget deficit. Hellen noted that OPEB hasn't been funded the last two years, but the town needs to show commitment to it for upcoming borrowing related to water tank projects, police station, Remington Jefferson, or Horace Mann roof.

Nagel asked about the Norfolk County pension system. Hellen explained that an 8% increase is expected this year and that when the pension is fully funded, those funds could potentially go toward OPEB.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

b. Resolution 26-03 Stabilization Funds

SUMMARY: Staff presented Resolution 26-03, which proposes moving \$451,845 (10% of free cash) from free cash to the OPEB Trust Fund Stabilization Account. This represents the only stabilization fund being funded this year, with other stabilization deposits being paused to allow departments to receive tier 1 capital requests.

VOTE(S):

Subject: Recommendation of Resolution 26-03 to move \$451,845 from free cash to OPEB Trust Fund Stabilization Account

Mover: Natalie Riley

Second: George Conley

Result: Passed

Details of the vote: Voice vote, unanimous (all ayes, no opposition).

c. Resolution 26-04 FY26 Capital Funds

SUMMARY: Staff presented the tier 1 capital requests totaling approximately \$1.8 million. Department heads were available for questions.

Tim Rapoza, Director of Technology, explained that Chromebook and laptop replacements are capital requests because putting them in the regular operating budget would significantly increase annual costs. He explained that the extended support for virtual environment allows the town to extend coverage on six-year-old hardware for an additional two years rather than replacing it at much greater cost.

Nagel asked about the presentation format compared to last year. Kerri clarified that the capital book contains all detail, and the presentation was meant to summarize it.

D'Angelo asked about the technology replacement schedule. Kerri confirmed it's in Appendix B of the capital book.

Nealon asked about police vehicle replacement. Police Chief Lynch explained this is for three cruisers on the regular replacement schedule (normally five, but reduced due to insurance replacements after accidents). Jay Stearns, Fleet Manager, explained that emergency response vehicles have shorter life cycles due to their demanding use.

Barnes asked about the rationale for purchasing Tahoes versus interceptors. Lynch explained one is for the operations lieutenant (functions as a mini command post) and one is for the K9 unit.

Lavorgna asked about the DPW general fund fuel pumps item. Staff explained the fuel pump purchase is split proportionally between general fund and enterprise funds based on which vehicles would use the pumps. It's listed as tier 1 because the enterprise fund portions are already allocated, and the general fund portion is needed to complete the purchase.

Nagel asked about the Perimeter Code Review Study and Traffic Signal Assessment being included in capital. Hellen explained they're one-time costs, and studies were grouped into tier 2 because the combined cost of approximately \$400,000 felt less pressing given the budget situation.

D'Angelo asked about tier 2 and tier 3 items. Staff explained that based on the budget deficit, there may be a second round of capital in June if funds remain after addressing the deficit. Staff emphasized that using free cash to cover budget deficits is not a regular practice and cannot be sustained long-term.

Barnes asked for an updated deficit projection. Staff indicated the original forecast showed a \$1.5 million deficit, but it could now be between \$2-3 million, with better numbers available at the February 11 Town Council meeting.

Riley asked about tier 2 facilities items regarding equipment replacements and potential cascading costs if delayed. Kevin Harn, Director of Facilities, explained that most items wouldn't see significant cost increases if delayed, though emergency repairs would be more

disruptive.

Barnes asked about the senior center sprinkler system given the memo listing the senior center as a potential closure. Hellen emphasized that when he files his budget in April, the senior center will not be cut, and it would take elected officials to close it, which he considers highly unlikely.

Lavorgna made a motion to strike the facilities senior center fire prevention system from the tier 1 list. Nealon seconded for discussion purposes.

Chair Conley expressed opposition, stating the building must be protected whether open or closed. Chris Diaz noted the item represents 41% of tier 1 funds and expressed concern about the building potentially not being open next year.

Hellen strongly emphasized that the senior center is not going to close, stating it would be the least likely layoff scenario given the population served (25% of the town's population with a \$600,000 budget). He stated he does not want the committee to vote based on a fallacy that the building won't be open.

Nealon clarified that the proposal was about fiscal conservatism and holding back savings longer, not about closing the senior center.

Fire Chief Allen stated that the sprinkler system must work for the building to be occupied, and if the system goes down, the building would have to close until repaired, creating significant liability.

Kevin Harn noted this is the number one priority because unlike other equipment, this is a life safety system.

Steve Sherlock provided historical perspective, noting multiple sprinkler incidents over the years, including closures of approximately five days and flooding. He explained this repair is the final piece of a multi-phase resolution to a problem that has existed since the building was built improperly.

Arndt explained that if approved, the project would need to go through design, bidding, and construction, making it tight to complete before December 2026. Delaying six months would push construction into winter.

Chastity Murray-Cheng, Deputy Director of the Senior Center, reported 250-300 seniors use the building daily, with projections of 300-350 daily within the next couple years. She emphasized safety concerns given the population served. Sarah Amaral, Senior Center Director, spoke via Zoom, noting the center was closed for three weeks in March and there was nearly an uprising. She reported the center brings in about \$2,000-2,500 daily in revenue, and closures result in significant revenue loss. She emphasized that meals and respite care services cannot be easily replaced and encouraged the committee to push the

repair through.

Barnes stated he was strongly in favor of spending the money now, preferring to know this going into the budget process rather than dealing with it afterward.

Harn added that unlike other equipment where delay may only mean additional construction costs, delaying the sprinkler repair could result in significant costs if something happens.

The committee voted on Lavorgna's motion to remove the senior center sprinkler system from tier 1. The motion failed.

The committee then voted on Resolution 26-04 as presented.

VOTE(S):

Subject: Motion to strike facilities senior center fire prevention system from tier 1 capital requests

Mover: Ryan Lavorgna

Second: Shannon Nealon

Result: Failed

Details of the vote: Voice vote. Yes votes heard from some members; No votes from majority including Nagel and others.

Subject: Recommendation of Resolution 26-04 to move \$1,800,000 from free cash to appropriate towards tier 1 capital requests as presented

Mover: Natalie Riley

Second: Lauren Nagel

Result: Passed

Details of the vote: Voice vote, unanimous (all ayes, no opposition).

d. Resolution 26-05 Enterprise Funds

SUMMARY: Staff presented the enterprise fund capital requests for water, sewer, and stormwater. Barnes asked whether equipment purchased by enterprise funds can be used elsewhere in town. Cantoreggi explained there is crossover in use, particularly for projects that involve multiple utilities.

Nealon asked about asset management phase 2 under sewer. Martin explained that phase 1 analyzed sewer pump stations from a risk standpoint, and phase 2 will look at horizontal assets (pipes in the ground) to create a prioritized plan for repairs.

D'Angelo asked about studies being included in enterprise funds while general fund studies were deferred. Hellen clarified that the approach to defer studies only applied to general fund, not enterprise funds.

D'Angelo asked whether DPW has a vehicle and equipment replacement schedule. Staff confirmed it is in Appendix B of the capital book via links.

D'Angelo asked about the stormwater enterprise fund, noting it's new as of two years ago. Hellen explained that approximately \$1.1 million in stormwater costs were moved from the general fund operating budget to the enterprise fund, while snow and ice removal was fully funded in the operating budget (previously paid from free cash).

D'Angelo asked about the allocation of enterprise fund expenditures and whether there's opportunity to examine nice-to-have versus need-to-have items. Cantoreggi explained that the department has already been financially reduced over the last three years, particularly on the general fund side. He noted that equipment like excavators supports in-house work that would otherwise need to be outsourced at greater cost, and emergency response capability for water and sewer requires reliable equipment.

Martin clarified that the excavator under water enterprise (\$280,000) is to replace a 2009 mini excavator, while the item under stormwater is for attachments (brush cutter and other items) that stormwater will use with that equipment.

Conley confirmed that enterprise funds have legal restrictions and cannot be shuffled to other departments.

Barnes asked about stormwater enterprise funds not having an emergency reserve. Bertone confirmed they are looking at establishing one as the enterprise fund is still new.

Nealon asked about balances in each enterprise fund. Linda Rodrigues reported: Water retained earnings approved by DOR was \$2.9 million, with \$1.4 million requested leaving \$1.5 million remaining; Sewer approved at \$4.7 million, using \$1.7 million leaving \$2.9 million; Stormwater approved at \$830,000, using \$267,000 leaving \$563,000; Solid waste has \$1.1 million and is not using any retained earnings this year.

Nealon emphasized that these detailed breakdowns help regular citizens understand how the \$3.4 million in free cash is being used and why certain purchases are necessary. She noted that this type of information addresses public concerns about spending during deficit discussions.

Lucas Giguere, Superintendent of Franklin Public Schools, spoke in support of Chromebook funding, noting impacts of not funding would include loss of equitable access, challenges with digital assessments, equity issues for students of different socioeconomic status, and increased tech support needs as devices age. He explained that sixth graders receive Chromebooks that last through graduation and emphasized that these are necessary items the district feels strongly about.

VOTE(S):

Subject: Recommendation of Resolution 26-05 to appropriate retained earnings from each

enterprise fund as noted in the resolution

Mover: Natalie Riley

Second: ---

Result: Passed

Details of the vote: Voice vote, unanimous (all ayes, no opposition).

6. Future Agenda Items / Next meeting Dates:

a. February 25, 2026 (Q2 Revenue Report and Year to Date expenditures)

b. March 11, 2026

c. April 6, 7, 8 & 9, 2026 Anticipated Finance Committee Budget Hearings

SUMMARY: Chair Conley indicated future items would be discussed offline due to time constraints.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

7. Finance Committee Member Comments

SUMMARY: No member comments were made due to time constraints.

VOTE(S): [NONE]

8. Adjourn

SUMMARY: Chair Conley accepted a motion to adjourn. Riley moved to adjourn.

VOTE(S):

Subject: Motion to adjourn

Mover: Natalie Riley

Second: ---

Result: Passed

Details of the vote: Voice vote, unanimous (all ayes, no opposition).

[January 14, 2026 Finance Committee Meeting](#)