

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
February 11, 2026**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA. Councilors present: Jane Callaway-Tripp, Ted Cormier-Leger, Robert Dellorco, Gene Grella, Caroline Griffith, Michael LeBlanc, Stephen Malloy, Max Morrongiello, Kenneth Ojukwu. Councilors absent: None. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Julie McCann, Operations Manager.

Note: Documents presented to the Town Council are on file and provided in the online meeting packet.

CALL TO ORDER: ► Chair Dellorco called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. He called for a moment of silence. All recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR: ► Chair Dellorco reviewed the following as posted on the agenda. A Note to Residents: All citizens are welcome to attend public meetings in person. To view the live meeting remotely, citizens are encouraged to watch the live stream on the Franklin Town Hall TV YouTube channel or the live broadcast on Comcast Channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29. To listen to the meeting remotely citizens may call-in using the number on the agenda. To participate in the meeting remotely citizens may join a Zoom Webinar using the information provided on the agenda. Meetings are recorded and archived by Franklin TV on the Franklin Town Hall TV YouTube channel and shown on repeat on Comcast Channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29. Any participants who wish to speak during the webinar must enter their full name and email address when joining the webinar. All participants will be automatically muted upon joining the webinar. In order to speak, participants will need to select the “raise hand” function to request to be unmuted. All speakers will be required to state their full name and street address before commenting. This meeting is being recorded by Franklin TV and shown on Comcast channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29. This meeting may be recorded by others. ► Chair Dellorco said for upcoming events, the Town Council’s office hours will be held on February 9 at 8:30 AM at the Franklin Senior Center.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: ► School Committee Vice Chair David Callaghan, 30 Plain Street, said at last night’s School Committee meeting they had the FY27 budget open hearing. He said the budget was presented as a 2.5 percent increase from last year, a very sustainable level service budget. It is on the website. He said it is a line-by-line budget which outlines how every dollar is spent. Anywhere there is a plus/minus 10 percent from last year, there is a column that fully explains it. He said during the meeting, almost the entire Town Council was watching via Zoom. He said Franklin has a lot of financial struggles, but it is by all of us working together to find the progress. ► Mr. Steve Sherlock, 13 Magnolia Drive, Community Information Director for Franklin Matters and Franklin Public Radio and TV, said Ali Rheaume has published a children’s book “Buddy the Brain” which is available on February 20. She had a brain injury and the book incorporates brain injury information. He said the number two killer in Massachusetts is high blood pressure; the library has a blood pressure desk. He said this is the first of many collaborations between the health department, library, and American Heart Association. Additional details are available at the library. He said regarding last night’s meeting, we have a struggle with the structural deficit, and we have financial analysis. He said he has hope that we may be the first of many communities to address that significant structural deficit that is facing everyone across the state. ► DPW Director Brutus Cantoreggi said last night they were out clearing the road; it was the 20th event. He said we have had 44 in. this year. We are now over the operating budget. He said they are at \$1.51 million; we are \$110,000 over.

COUNCILOR COMMENTS: ► Councilor Malloy commented about the new meeting format. He said an objective was to put councilor comments closer to citizens comments. He reminded all that you can email the Town Council with questions and comments. He thanked the DPW staff for their hard work. ► Councilor

Ojukwu thanked DPW staff for their hard work. He said that they are over budget causes some concern. He said we all know the town has some financial challenges to address. He said thank you to school finance folks. The documents they have shared are helpful and educational. He said we have some tough decisions to be made. He said if folks have additional questions, please feel free to reach out and email is a fantastic way to make sure you are being heard. ► Councilor Griffith said the Franklin Food Pantry finished their Super Bowl drive and brought in more than 6,000 cans of soup; she thanked the Franklin community. She commented on the benefit of the Town Council members speaking at the beginning of the meeting. She noted the School Committee budget hearing and was glad so many Town Council members could attend. She thanked the schools for the work they did and maintained a 2.5 percent increase. She said it is still level service. She mentioned that Councilor Callaway-Tripp had some great questions. She explained the school revolving funds cannot be used for any purpose other than what they are collected for. ► Councilor Morrongiello thanked the department heads for being here for the capital budget and for the operating budget today. He thanked the finance committee for their work on this. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp thanked the School Committee for their new budget and said she can understand what she is looking at. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said he is excited to see councilor comments after citizens comments. He thanked all department heads for being here tonight. He said they are starting the budget relatively early and thanked the school department. He said the discussions ahead tonight are going to be difficult, and the intention is not to divide us but to figure these things out as a group. He said they are going to deliberate and look at capital requests and start these budget conversations. He said they are going to do their best tonight to meet everyone's needs. ► Councilor Grella thanked Mr. Sherlock for bringing up blood pressure and said it is really important to have it checked. He said the work the School Committee did last night was terrific, and they want to move forward as a united team. He thanked the DPW for the great job. ► Chair Dellorco thanked Mr. Sherlock for bringing up the blood pressure machines at the library. He said he likes the councilor comments after the citizens comments. He said it will be great. He thanked all department heads and School Committee for working so hard over the years. He gave a shout-out to Officer Samuels regarding coaching the JV basketball team.

SUBCOMMITTEE & AD HOC COMMITTEE REPORTS: ► None.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT: ► Mr. Hellen announced there will be a press release going out with a slight bit of bad news. The aggregation program that has a \$0.14/kWh rate now has to be adjusted to a \$0.15/kWh rate. He said the cold snap in the Northeast has put major stress on the system. He said that will be in effect on the March readings. He said hopefully later this year, they will be able to reverse that rate and go back. He said there is more information on the Town Administrator's website page. He said the rate of \$0.15/kWh is still slightly lower than the average National Grid base rate. He said they entered into this before the pandemic, but the rates went into effect during the lockdown of the pandemic. This is our seventh calendar year. He said residents in the program have saved \$16.4 million in electricity costs. He said he wants to make sure the message is clear, this aggregation program protected every residential homeowner in the community from seeing 25 cent rates. He said he hopes everyone still realizes we really dodged the bigger bullets over the past five years; people saved a lot of money over the years. He said by the next meeting on March 4, there will be a new colleague in their office with the new communications director. He hopes to have an announcement on the part-time admin. ► Chair Dellorco questioned that if the rate went up because of the weather, will it then go down. ► Mr. Hellen said it would be his hope, but it is to be determined.

PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS: ► None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: ► *January 21, 2026.* ► **MOTION** to **Approve** the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes by **Malloy**. **SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger**. **Discussion:** ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp asked why each question asked during the meeting was not specifically written in the minutes. ► Mr. Hellen stated AI technology is not there yet to produce a verbatim transcript. ► Councilor Morrongiello said an amendment can be made to the minutes if someone wants to add something to the minutes. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp

said this item should be tabled as the questions should be put in there. ► **MOTION** to **Table** the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes to March 4, 2026, by **Dellorco**. **SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger**. **No discussion**.
 ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

APPOINTMENTS: ► **None.**

PUBLIC HEARINGS - 6:00 PM: ► **None.**

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS: ► *Modification of a Section 15 Retail Package Store Wine & Malt Beverages License: Change of Officers / Directors - Shaw's Supermarkets, Inc. d/b/a Shaw's, Located at 255 East Central St., Franklin, MA.* ► Mr. Hellen said state law requires that the Town Council has to go through any of the various changes to the liquor licenses including, but not limited to, changes to officers, directors, managers, and stock options. The Town Council must approve said changes before it is sent back to the ABCC. This ensures local compliance with codes. All departments have signed off on this application. He noted the online permitting system and said Ms. McCann manages the licensing process through the Town Administrator's office. ► Attorney Nick Zozula (via Zoom) said he represents Shaw's/Star Market for all their liquor licenses in Massachusetts. He said as was just stated, this is an administrative change at the corporate level, and this amendment needs to be filed. He said there are zero operational changes for the store. It is an administrative change that has to go through the town first before the state. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the license transaction. ► **MOTION** to **Approve** the Modification of a Section 15 Retail Package Store Wine & Malt Beverages License: Change of Officers / Directors - Shaw's Supermarkets, Inc. d/b/a Shaw's, Located at 255 East Central St., Franklin, MA, by **Cormier-Leger**. **SECOND** by **Grella**.
Discussion: ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp asked if it is typical for them to have multiple licenses with the same names on them. ► Mr. Hellen explained under state law, grocery stores have a quota of the number of licenses they can have statewide. So, it is not uncommon for chain stores to have multiple licenses. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said in 2006 they had a sale to a minor in a Boston location. ► Mr. Hellen explained there is a bylaw in Franklin's town code that when there is a violation there is a penalty that the Town Council enforces on them. He said a change in officers has nothing to do with the actual violation in 2006. He said in the paperwork they are required to disclose it. He said in the town code there are bylaws regarding violations that happen in Franklin. In response to additional questions, he noted that Section 15 refers to off-premises licenses. The beverages are purchased and then taken home. Section 12 is for on-premises consumption such as restaurants. ► Councilor Morrongiello asked about the CORI documentation. ► Attorney Zozula said usually if a notary does not tell you what the identification was, usually his understanding is that it is personal knowledge; for a notary that means if you know the person is who they say they are. He said he does not think there is a conflict for a CORI; if there was an issue, the ABCC on their review would raise it at that time. He said he believes precedent would state there is not an issue. He said he believes the CORI forms would be acceptable to the state. ► Chair Dellorco said the only person you cannot notarize is yourself and immediate family. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

PRESENTATIONS / DISCUSSIONS: ► *Revised FY27 Budget Model & Five-Year Fiscal Forecast.*

► Mr. Hellen explained that all the budget documents are on the website and reviewed specific website locations. He reviewed the documents listed on the agenda and provided in the online meeting packet for this item. He noted over the next few years a tremendous amount will change with federal, state, and local budgets. He noted it is early in the budget season. He said there are a lot of decisions to be made by the Town Council, School Committee, and Finance Committee. He said this is a problem that dates back 15 to 20 years, and a structural budget deficient has always been an issue in the community. He noted the two failed overrides. If the override had passed, we would not be sitting here with these grave choices. He said using free cash is not uncommon in Massachusetts. ► Councilor Malloy asked if the overall budget including schools goes up 5 percent. ► Mr. Hellen said about that. ► Councilor Malloy said he would like to go over some of the expense items that have gone up. ► Mr. Hellen said at the bottom of the entire memo, he did a budget calendar of dates to look forward to. He said when he releases the full budget on March 27, that is where you will get all the expense items and all the detail which is part of the entire budget book. If you go

through that and see something questionable, you can amend something you might see. ► Councilor Malloy explained the 5 percent increase seems a bit high. He would like to get this as lean as he can. He said growth is something to keep in mind. He said this year we are going to use free cash to restore a good bit of what was cut last year including the additional police officers, ambulance, and deputy town administrator. He said it is that all due to the use of free cash. ► Mr. Hellen said in this model, yes, and he further explained if they did not use the \$2.1 million free cash. He said when they did the model in August, they assumed 2.5 percent down the side. The irony is the budget deficit is almost the same as it was last August. He said there is revenue growth as local receipts go up 5 percent each year. He said when he said 2.5 percent, that is the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). He explained they have been at their levy capacity for the past 25 years. He said the COLA is the spinal cord of your culture and your community and your staff. He said to him, the 2.5 is the majority of your budget and the single most important factor. But when looking at local aid going up 2.53 and looking at some expense lines coming below 2.5, that is where we look at much more honed in numbers. He said for us, local receipts have plateaued. He explained that most of that money is offsetting costs in the municipal budget. He said he hopes this answers the question about free cash. The alternative would be to have a discussion about what we would have to cut. He said he hopes the takeaway mostly is the override last year was not a joke, and it is going to be really hard to find where to cut \$1.5 million without other issues that fall downriver. He said he has heard loud and clear over the last eight months on how angry people were on the items they lost. He has found very few people who were thrilled with the cuts made last year. He said he wanted to file a budget that did not bring any more cuts and bring the community more division. ► Councilor Malloy asked if they had a lot of free cash last year. ► Mr. Hellen said they had about the same amount and used it for capital. He agreed they could have used it for operational. He said the philosophy was that the first override was for schools, and the thought was that if the pain were shared across all departments, that would bring people together with the structural budget deficit with the second override, but that was not the case. ► Chair Dellorco reviewed that in May for the two budget meetings they go over it all line by line. ► Councilor Ojukwu said he thinks they will find that the operating budget has very little fat on it. He said we are running very lean. He said he gets the proposal to bring back what we can and get us to a better spot for the next year, but that puts us in a difficult place. If we do that, we do not have a plan to support our future. He said we have not put together a plan that puts together financial stability for this town. It is a good gesture to get back a little of what we lost, but his fear is by doing that, they may miss the fact that all of that will be gone in two years as we burnt through our rainy-day funds. He said we need a plan to guide us forward. He said we need a joint budget subcommittee. He said we actually need to make a plan on how we are going to move forward. He said there has to be some economic development, some growth has to be part of it, and some realistic cuts have to be part of that, and we need to find more sources of funding; we need a plan. Right now, going to our rainy-day funds is not a sustainable option. ► Chair Dellorco said he could not agree with Councilor Ojukwu anymore; he took the words right out of his mouth. ► Councilor Griffith said Mr. Hellen's memo says we have \$2.235 million in free cash, and he is proposing to spend \$2,030,000, but the capital plan is at \$4.5 million, and she confirmed the calculations to get to \$2.235. ► Mr. Hellen said it sounds about right. He confirmed there would be \$226,988 in free cash if tier 1 was approved. He said health care is an issue, and no one knows the deficits or surpluses from exiting our self-insured consortium and subscribers and enrollment in April. He said the OPEB presentation is on May 13. ► Councilor Griffith said bringing down free cash to \$226,988 scares her. ► Mr. Hellen explained they have been using free cash for all capital. This is about how we are using it. ► Councilor Griffith said she notes that there are some positions being hired through free cash, and that feels irresponsible to hire people with one-time use monies. She cannot support hiring people with free cash. If we are talking about making cuts next year, she does not know why we are talking about restoring this year. She said this proposal does not make sense to her. She said we need a plan to figure this out. We should not be looking at restoring things and hiring people with one-time money. She talked about the FY25 revenue analysis by department. She said she noticed for property taxes we overestimated by about \$1 million for FY25, and there were other lines we also overestimated. She asked if we are being more conservative with our estimations this year. ► Mr. Hellen said the property taxes are the amount people have not paid. He discussed the levy capacity. He said on the building permits, the building commissioner just brought in a \$600,000 building permit for the Maple Gate Country Club. He explained it is hard to predict when you are going to get occupancy on a property and get a

permit fee. He explained this is why we only do a moderate projection on local receipts. He explained how they do the projections and that it is difficult to target these numbers. ► Councilor Griffith asked about the rentals bringing in \$250,000 to the town administrator's office. ► Mr. Hellen said it is the cell towers. ► Councilor LeBlanc said he would like to see the salary line broken out. He noted police expenses appear to have gone up. He will be looking for explanations of the increases. Regarding the use of free cash to effectively balance the budget this year, he is all for that, and 100 percent for doing it for next year as well to put together a long-range plan. The plan will take a couple of years to put together and sell to the public. That plan needs to be an all-inclusive plan that takes care of capital as well. He explained that free cash is like a tax return. He said 20 years ago the Town Council used free cash to balance the budget. The process changed with the prior administrator to fund capital. He talked about the services that were cut, and he wants to add them back as that is what the community wants. He said he would do the same thing for the schools. He said he likes what he sees in general. He said directionally, he is all for what he is seeing right now. ► Councilor Morrongiello said the budget is balanced on free cash, and there is a lot of reliance of local receipts. He said they are expecting the World Cup to bring in local receipts but what about after that and what if there is a recession. He asked if there was a model if they had a recession. ► Mr. Hellen noted items in his memo regarding reviewing some of the fees. He noted that at some point local receipts are going to plateau with consumer spending. ► Councilor Morrongiello said he is open to balancing the budget with some cuts, a level service budget with some free cash, but he will not vote yes on a budget that restores with the exception of contractual obligation. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said on the slide for the schools there is a blue line and purple line at the bottom. She said she wants to understand that on the right it shows an increase of 3.32 percent for both of them. That does not make sense. ► Mr. Hellen said on the above line you have the deducted one and you can see the 7.62 percent and the number on right was transposed and should be in a deficit. The 3.32 would have been if they kept health care in that account. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp asked about the Munis system. ► Mr. Hellen explained the Munis system is the entire financial system for the town and schools, and they have had it for 20 years, and it is the general standard for municipal financial management. He explained they are looking for systems improvement and this is an important position. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp asked about the assessor admin assistant and confirmed this would end the contracting out that we do. ► Mr. Hellen said the contract costs \$9,000 per year. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said that is \$9,000 to contract and \$54,000 for an employee. ► Mr. Hellen said the key is that the appraisers who are supposed to be on the streets have to do all the admin work in the office. If you are looking for a revenue generator, that is the number one thing. He said they will be able to go out and do more appraisals instead of spending time doing all the administrative work. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp asked about encumbrances. ► Mr. Hellen explained it is money spent over two fiscal years. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said she is struggling with the free cash aspect. She said we talk about the override and cuts that they had to make. She said it was not that people did not understand and voted no, but it is that people cannot afford it. She talked about the high cost of electricity, groceries, insurance. She said that this state is the worst; they are crippling the residents. She does not like bringing back employees with one-time monies when we cannot promise them sustainability in that role. She said she does not have an issue with using free cash to buffer some things that are already in the budget, but we need to stay within the budget that we already have. She said leaving some free cash there and we will accrue interest. There are some things residents are going to have to help out with as not everything can be funded. She is hard pressed on approving free cash for new positions even if they are needed. She said stay within our means. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said everyone can speak to the energy and grocery spikes. Life is very expensive. He said he is finding himself in the middle. He said he worries about funding any position with one time revenue. It is not sustainable and not fair to that person. He said he struggles with the 2.5 percent COLA to all staff. He said the unfortunate reality is that some staff may have to take a smaller increase in FY27. He said he thinks people understood just fine the ramifications of the last override. He said I think we are finding is 60 percent that did not bother to vote at all. They are not focused on this stuff. He said he worries about restoring all this stuff with one-time funds and then we fall into complacency. He talked about the DPW projects that cannot be funded. ► Mr. Hellen explained that it is the FY26 free cash that you are looking at. He explained that for the next few fiscal years, you could realistically try to use \$1 million to \$2 million in free cash to make sure there are no cuts and layoffs. He said he thinks every department will have to take a step back. ► Councilor

Cormier-Leger reviewed that free cash is different than the rainy-day fund. He said this year already we had some creative solutions. He said the part-time nurse at the Senior Center was restored because the Senior Center re-evaluated their staffing model and shifted some responsibilities and said we can restore this person. And we also looked at restoring the two ambulance drivers because we got creative with monies. He said he would throw out to department heads, like Park and Rec, there are some creative things that can be done. He said show us a sticker at Beaver Street. He said he thinks there are some creative ways. It shows steps in the right direction. He said he encourages Mr. Hellen that we might be able to patch a few holes with free cash, but he does not think we can restore everything that Mr. Hellen has outlined here. He said he cannot support it fully as is. ► Councilor Grella asked about the Munis administrator and if there are shared services even with another town. ► Mr. Hellen said from a return on investment standpoint, you would spend exponential amount of dollars trying to enter into a shared services agreement, or MOU or IMA, with another town, but we tried this with other positions just working between town and schools and could not get it done, so working with another community is ten times harder. He said regionalization sounds great and in certain situations works great, but in practicality, working it out with another town is extraordinarily difficult. He noted some examples of where regionalization works. ► Councilor Grella said he does not agree with using one-time funds in restoring positions. He said we do not want to restore something and then have to take it back again. He said the idea of how we use free cash needs to be looked at as well; it does not need to just be used for capital. He said we have to look at everything. ► Chair Dellorco said he kind of agrees with all of the council members. He said I believe if we give a 2.5 contract raise, I do not believe that we should cut or that the fire chief and police chief should get a 1.5 percent raise as they are doing just as much work. He said when the school got 4.5 and the municipal got 2.5, you saw the divide in the town. He said everyone deserves the same amount of raise. He said he agrees we keep a level budget, and he agrees we need a plan for the next couple of years. He said it is going to be a lot of work, but we have to get that plan. ► Mr. Hellen said great feedback from everyone. He said he agrees that affordability is the biggest threat in this state. He said he understands a lot of people simply could not afford an override. He said he hopes Councilor Callaway-Tripp acknowledges that a lot of people are really upset about the cuts. He said with the conversations he has with people, often people just did not realize the cuts that were going to happen. He said there are very many opinions about the budgets. He said a lot of people do want the positions restored. He said this is very hard as you are dealing with so many decisions. He said the overrides were 49/51. He said he wants to make sure the people in the room are heard, and this is what the departments brought forward. He explained if you do not fund the positions with one-time funds, you will have less capacity to do the work that you want to do. He said part of what needs to be decided, is maybe the townspeople do want a lot less, and the Town Council needs to set those expectations. He talked about that the overrides were both very close votes, and they were both huge voter turnouts. He said he gets a lot of feedback every day and some people are very unhappy with the cuts. He asked Town Council members, what is the plan and how do you want to create a plan. He said he hopes all of them ask themselves how are they going to create the plan to make this more sustainable. He asked how do you get the officers back, and how do you keep up with the demand. If you take an override off the table, and you really cannot borrow, how does the Town Council want to create a plan for sustainability; he said May is just around the corner. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said she can acknowledge what Mr. Hellen is saying. She said she knows some people are unhappy about the cuts. She said that it is really more of a financial aspect for many people. She said she knows they need a plan. They need a subcommittee to have the time to sit and communicate with each other. ► Chair Dellorco said he would make a committee of three. He said people have this meeting, and it would be another night that people have to come out. ► Councilor Malloy said they need to include more people than just the Town Council. ► Councilor Ojukwu said the joint budget subcommittee is the first priority, but it is not a bad idea to also have a subcommittee with this group. He said what we want to do is have the broader group talk through the priorities for the joint budget subcommittee. ► DPW Director Brutus Cantoreggi said he wanted to reiterate that when you start affecting his budget it is not personnel, it is a lot of maintenance type things and preventative maintenance. He said money you do not spend now you will spend later. Your roads will fail in a few years and catching up will cost a lot of money. ► Senior Center Director Sarah Amaral said she thinks they are all putting together budgets thinking about what potential cuts could come. She said so much time could be spent on actual efficiencies and strategic planning that we do not have the time for. She said

she thinks the staff are looking for this too. She said seeing momentum with having a plan would see staff morale boost. ► Superintendent of Schools Lucas Giguere said he echoes what Ms. Amaral said. He said he appreciates the debate and opinions. He said none of this gets solved in one meeting. He talked about the impact of cutting and the consequences of that. He said this week he has had to notify three people that they are not in next year's budget. He noted the idea of being in the arena and every elected body is in the arena with you. He talked about the move to put all health care together; this is a signal they are all listening. He said he sees value in that decision. He talked about the Munis administrator and the need. He hopes to continue to work together on thoughtful long-term planning. ► Archivist Rowan Lowell said for many of the smaller departments such as herself and arts and Senior Center, they are already approaching a point and trying to find creative solutions to support each other. She said her budget for the historical commission is 0.05 percent of the town's overall operating budget. She said for many of us we have spent the last two years in the hot seat of are we going to have a job come July. She talked about using one-time funds to fund positions. She said we are here to serve the community and hope the community as a whole can find the best way forward. ► Councilor Morrongiello said he hears that the staff want certainty from the Town Council. He would like to provide some guidance to them in the form of a motion. ► **MOTION to Move** that there is a sense of the Town Council that there will be no FTE cuts in FY27 by **Morrongiello. Discussion:** ► Some councilors suggested there is not enough information to say that today. ► Chair Dellorco said we are way too early for that. **No Second.**

► **FY26 Capital Plan.** ► Mr. Hellen said the book is the book. He said this is the first year we have a capital plan book. He said it is not perfect, but it is better than just a packet of spreadsheets. He said we have a six-year plan in here for everywhere. He said next year we are going to try to get to a 10-year capital plan for all departments. He said this will provide a more formal look. He noted some towns have full-time staff members that deal with just this. He said the overview is the resolutions that are before you tonight. He said one is the general capital plan which is about \$1.81 million. Mostly, if not all, are tier 1 priorities. He said they recommended the OPEB deposit. He noted the contributions have stalled. He said in two years we have not made the deposit from free cash. He referenced documents provided in the meeting packet. He recommended tabling until the June 10 meeting to see where all the budget numbers show up. He said the finance committee recommended this on an 8:1 vote; he explained the dissenting vote. He noted amendments can be made to the resolution. He said this is our recommendation and the finance committee's recommendation. Departments heads are here if you have any questions. ► Chair Dellorco asked to go into the source of free cash returns. ► Mr. Hellen said we are certified for about \$4.5 million in free cash which has been fairly stable for a while. He said about \$2 million of that is income tax returns and what departments turn back. He said all of the free cash is certified by the Commonwealth. The second category is excess revenues. It shows some of the overs and under where revenues come in. He explained these are all reasonable estimates. ► Councilor Malloy confirmed they are talking about the tier 1 investments. He said at \$750,000 he wants more information on the sprinkler system at the Senior Center. ► Mr. Hellen reviewed the history. He said the building was built over 20 years ago. It was built cheaply. He said they have had two sprinkler breaks. They did insulation repairs last year. ► Facilities Director Kevin Harn explained the Senior Center facility sprinkler problem. He explained they found the existing pipe in the Senior Center is worn. He explained where the past breaks were. He said it is insulated now. He said the \$750,000 cost could be less. ► Mr. Hellen said we are out of insurance claims; insurance covered some of the costs of the previous breaks. ► Councilor Malloy asked about the police vehicle replacements. ► Chief of Police Thomas Lynch confirmed it is three vehicles for \$284,000. He explained the vehicles requested and make/model/equipment. There will be two Tahoes and one Explorer. He noted they keep their cars for four or five years now. ► Chair Dellorco said the state is turning to Tahoes also. ► Councilor Ojukwu said for the tier 1 requests there is nothing that jumps out at him that is out of place. He said the proposal which is to focus on tier 1 for now seems to make a lot of sense. He asked about tier 2 for school and IT: \$375,000 for teacher laptop replacements and classroom infrastructure improvements. He asked why we do not need them this year. ► Director of Technology Tim Rapoza said regarding laptop replacement, he would like to do it this year as the 300 laptops were purchased in 2020. They are going on six years old. He said they are out of warranties and some motherboards and batteries are dying. He said they will have to start replacing them and that would

come out of the technology budget. He said the Chromebooks are for the students entering sixth grade. They are in tier 1. He said \$100,000 will give us that. They will have those from sixth grade through graduation.

► Councilor Morrongiello asked about the virtual environment, access point licenses, and how the vendors were chosen. ► Mr. Rapoza said access point licenses are pretty standard, and he works to get discounts. He explained the pricing for the access point licenses and that only one vendor gets the discount pricing; it is called a registered deal. He explained the virtual environment. He said you now have a stack of big servers; there are two at Town Hall and two at the high school. He explained the system. He said it was purchased six years ago and is very expensive. He said typically we would have been replacing it by now. We extended three years because the hardware is still working great. He is extending the maintenance plan another two plans. If he could not cover it, he would have to replace it. He said the hardware will have to be replaced in two years, and it will be at least \$.5 million. He discussed Microsoft Hyper-V has always worked great for them. He discussed that they ask every year for Chromebooks. He said in 2020 they bought 4,500 Chromebooks for \$1 million. They are all the same age. We have to start replacing these. He said every year he will be asking for 350 Chromebooks for \$100,000 to start replacing them. He said this should be in his regular budget, but he cannot just increase his budget by \$100,000. ► Councilor Ojukwu wanted information on the tier 2 classroom infrastructure improvements. ► Superintendent Giguere explained that as a result of the reorganization, they picked up classrooms in every school and moved people around. They did some walkthroughs with facilities. He said they asked how do we make these rooms suited for age and grade. After moving everything, we had to look at wall repairs, tiles, and other items. A list was put together if we were to chip away at these items and continue to keep up with them. He said they have tiered this and broken down the next phase of what needs the most attention right now. He said this is part of multi-year asks around capital. ► Mr. Harn said they will continue to work on phase 2 items from the redistricting and what they can actually do. ► Councilor Ojukwu said the tier 1 seems to make sense. That is what he would support. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger asked about the 4,500 Chromebooks purchased with federal money and said there really is not a plan to fund the maintenance and replacement of those computers. ► Mr. Rapoza said correct. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said there has to be a plan to pay for them when they break and need replacement. He said the \$100,000 for Chromebook replacements for sixth grade does not make sense. It makes more sense to look at the tier 2 request for school safety improvements for \$75,000. He said maybe the larger conversation is with parents that the school department can do a group purchase and everyone is going to pay the \$250 as a fee, and maybe the kids will take better care of the computers if the parents own it. He said the school department only contributed \$34,000 to free cash; the veterans services department contributed more than that, and they are only two people. He said they are asking for \$100,000 for a program they only contributed \$35,000 to, but our police and fire departments have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars and are waiting for their fire and police vehicles. He said if there is no money to fund the computers, then phase them out or figure out another way to pay for them. He said he can support everything else in tier 1 but cannot support the \$100,000. ► Chair Dellorco said he was going to say the same thing. ► Superintendent Giguere said if they could put it in their operations budget they would, and it would not come before you. He said one thing that did not make this list is that they received an earmark from Senator Rausch for \$100,000 to fix the courtyard area at the Lincoln Street school. He said they have a one-to-one device program like many communities. He talked about affordability for students to buy their own. He said some of this is an equity piece. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said they are going to have to come for computer replacements every year as every six years a computer needs to be replaced. ► Mr. Rapoza explained it used to be one-to-one at the high school, and it was more sustainable. Then it moved to the middle school. It was manageable. When we hit covid, we bought so many at one time. Every district did this. and everyone is in the same boat. All the money we collect from insurance is used to repair and replace devices that are insured. He said they chose a learning program around Chromebooks ten years ago. You cannot require a student to have their own device. He explained we have to provide the devices. He discussed that students are offered the opportunity to purchase insurance at the beginning of the year. If it is insured and has accidental damage, it is replaced. If not insured, it is a \$250 fee. The insurance costs \$45 for the whole year. He explained intentional damaged is not covered. ► Councilor Morrongiello asked if you could pay them if they opt out and they are incentivized to use their own laptop. ► Mr. Rapoza said he has not explored that. ► School Committee Member Al Charles (via Zoom) confirmed that if we have students use their own laptops or

devices, does that add more technical challenges. ► Mr. Rapoza said there is the educational piece and the support piece. He said they have the option to bring their own device at the high school level. If they chose that and their device breaks, they have to get it fixed and get a loaner of out the media center for the day. He explained the challenges for this is we are not managing that device. He explained that educationally, it makes it more difficult for the teacher. ► Councilor Grella confirmed you cannot do the MCAS on a personal device. ► Councilor Griffith asked about the tier 2 school safety improvements. ► Superintendent Giguere said some of that is camera replacement and camera servers. He said some are aging out and need to be repaired or replaced. He explained some of the safety items at the schools. He discussed prioritizing capital. ► Councilor Griffith said if we do not do it this year, more will need to be done next year. ► Superintendent Giguere talked about the cameras, school vans, and other items in tier 2. ► Chair Dellorco said safety is very important in the schools. ► Councilor LeBlanc said when he looks at the free cash number and the sources, where is the other \$1 million from. ► Mr. Hellen said from overlay surplus which he explained. He said when abatements and exemptions in the budget are not spent, they go into the free cash certification. Overlay surplus is controlled by the Board of Assessors. He said they pay the senior tax work-off program from overlay surplus. ► Councilor LeBlanc said he likes the prioritization in the book. He suggested definitions around these tiers. He said he would flip 3 and 2. He said there are almost three dozen departments, but only eight departments making requests for capital. He asked do any other departments have requests for capital that did not make this book. ► Mr. Hellen noted the school departments requests are only about \$300,000 because technology is all in technology and facilities is all in facilities. He said they started asking all departments and most of the other items that you are going to see from them are very low-cost dollars or not very expensive or there may be another way to pay for them. He said this helps to focus on the eight or nine big ones. ► Councilor LeBlanc said they need a 10-year plan that lists everything regardless of how it is going to get funded. ► DPW Director Brutus Cantoreggi said there is \$10,000 on here for a \$5 million budget general fund. He said even the worst years in 2009 with the recession, public works still got over \$200,000. He said we are not getting the funding. He said he wanted to point out on the tier 2 the traffic study. He put on there \$150,000 and is not sure where it can be obtained from, but that not only looks at the timing of the lights, but also looks at the assets we have out there. He noted some of the issues and what needs repair or to be looked at. He said we are in reactionary mode right now and that costs more. ► Mr. Harn said he echoed what Mr. Hellen said. He goes around to other departments regarding facilities and asks for their lists of what they need and puts it on the sheet for capital requests. ► Councilor LeBlanc asked about the Design Review guidelines item. ► Mr. Hellen said that is going to be looked at through a grant. The Design Review Commission wants to do an analysis of the sign bylaw, and it is a Master Plan goal. He said there are probably some grants to be able tap into. He said they need to look at the entire set of sign bylaws. ► Councilor LeBlanc said relating to safety, he would be for swapping out the \$100,000 for Chromebooks for the safety improvements. He asked to amend this. ► **MOTION to Amend** to remove the \$100,000 for the Chromebooks and replace it with the \$75,000 for the safety improvements at the schools by **LeBlanc**. ► Chair Dellorco said this has to wait until they do the resolution. ► Councilor Malloy said he is not sure he wants to reduce the Chromebooks, so could we just add the \$75,000 for the school safety. ► Councilor LeBlanc said it is unusual that a \$70 million department turned back \$30,000. He said the school committee does a lot of things, and he wants to understand that better. ► Mr. Hellen said under the law, schools can keep all their money from one fiscal year and towns cannot. He said there are also very finite things they have to turn back, and he does not know why encumbrances get turned back. He said schools, under Massachusetts law, once they get their money they can keep their money. ► Superintendent Giguere said they have to expend the money. He said most of their money is salary driven. He said when you commit to the salaries, that is what gets expended throughout the year. ► Councilor Morrongiello asked what are the items on this list that are going to come up every year. ► Mr. Hellen discussed that Franklin does not have the tax levy as does Natick or Needham. For example, portable radios, Chromebooks, tasers, and other items would be in for an annual cost. He confirmed police vehicles come up every year. He said they used to get grants for some of these items from the federal government. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp discussed why the schools do not return money and gave an example that the sprinklers for the Senior Center may cost less than budgeted. She said what is in the school budget is already planned out to the penny; they are not overbudgeting. She said she liked tier 1. ► Councilor Grella said he likes tier 1 as well. He said regarding

safety, if the Superintendent says we do not need it this year and the current cameras are okay, I am fine without spending the money. For these students, this is what their main device is to work off, they need to have a decent device, and I am not for cutting that. He said for this year he is onboard for replacing these Chromebooks. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said it is difficult. He said you can want what is best for the whole town and still be critical of some decisions. He said it is our place to question funding and how funding gets used. He said everything is a decision. He provided examples of the number of principals and vice principals in some of the schools. He said when you make those decisions, money is not available somewhere else. On an \$80 million budget, you cannot tell him that you are spending every penny down to the penny because every department deals with personnel and trying to make ends meet with very little. He said he is embarrassed that the police, fire, and DPW departments have to come to us every year with these lists. He said why should the police department have to ask for protective gear or radios. We have talked about this for five years. He said they tried putting it in their operating budget and it was taken away. He said the safety concern at the school is more important than Chromebooks. Maybe there is a way for FY27 for the superintendent and his group to go back and find the money for the Chromebooks. He said his inbox is going to be full now because of what he just said. He said he 100 percent supports the schools, but these numbers are not making a whole lot of sense. He would support an amendment to support that change for now. He said maybe if the schools cannot figure out the Chromebook thing in the next four or five months and we have to talk about it again with some other tier 2 and tier 3 requests, maybe that is what we have to do. For now, making sure the schools are safe is far more important than the Chromebooks. ► Mr. Hellen commented on school security and safety. He said the schools are incredibly safe. He said this is a study. If everyone wants to vote for the study, he is fully supportive. Where he gasps for air is hearing about school shootings in British Columbia and drawing that comparison all the way to Franklin and portraying to our community that our schools are not safe. He said they have spent millions of dollars in the last 10 years for school security. He said what happens during these debates and gets out on YouTube and Zoom is that we are not safe because we are worried. He needs people in the community to realize that some people also believe our schools are like prisons. There are cameras up in every single corner. If the superintendent or facilities director knew of a problem, they would have put it number one on the list. It is not an immediate emergency; it is a study to look at this. He said the study will show another several million dollars' worth of improvements to be done in the next several years. He said he is bewildered that people do not feel safe. He said our schools are incredibly safe. He would appreciate everyone in the room finally saying that to our children and families and ensuring them that our schools are safe. ► Superintendent Giguere agreed. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said Superintendent Giguere said the money was to replace the broken cameras. ► Superintendent Giguere said study is not the correct word. It is about keeping up and replacing these items as they age and the ones that are broken need repair. That is a mix of both. What he does not like is the mischaracterization as though we do not value safety and that is how it came across. He said he is tired of getting pitted against his fellow department heads. He said they have been working really hard for a balanced budget; they came in at 2.5 percent. He said when the Town Council frames things and the way you message things, even your comments about revolving funds, he gets emails after you have a meeting, so he has to clarify now misinformation. He said the schools are safe. He talked about the things on the list and that they are tiered differently. He said he feels like what he just heard, the comments like that, detract and put us back where we do not want to be in the battles and fighting for what people need. ► Police Chief Lynch said he agrees with everything Mr. Hellen and Superintendent Giguere said. He said for the last 10 years he hears the same stuff on the capital plan on the police cruisers that they buy every year, bullet proof vests, taser lease program, out of the capital program. He said Town Council predecessors decided that they were going to move that stuff out of operations so they could balance the budget without asking for an override. He said the Town Council does not have the money to take it out of capital and stick it in the operations budget. He said the town has had a structural deficit for 20 plus years and this is how they somewhat fixed it. ► Mr. Hellen clarified it is not a study, it is replacement.

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION:

Note: Two-Thirds Vote requires six votes; Majority Vote requires majority of members present and voting.

- a. Resolution 26-03: Free Cash to Stabilization Account Transfers (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-03 - Majority Vote).** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve** Resolution 26-03: Free Cash to Stabilization Account Transfers by **Grella. SECOND by Morrongiello. Discussion:** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said Mr. Hellen attached a memo recommending tabling this. He read aloud the memo from Mr. Hellen dated February 6, 2026, requesting the Town Council table this vote until June 10, 2026, when he anticipates a final budget vote. ► Mr. Hellen explained why they were recommending tabling. ► **MOTION to Amend** Resolution 26-03: Free Cash to Stabilization Account Transfers **to Table** it until June 10, 2026, by **Grella. SECOND by Cormier-Leger. No discussion:** ► **VOTE (to table): Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- b. Resolution 26-04: FY26 Capital Plan (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-04 - Majority Vote).** ► **MOTION to Waive** the reading by **Morrongiello. SECOND by Ojukwu. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.** ► **MOTION to Approve** Resolution 26-04: FY26 Capital Plan by **Grella. SECOND by Morrongiello. Discussion:** ► Councilor Morrongiello said he has an amendment that he emailed to Councilor Cormier-Leger and Mr. Hellen earlier which he read aloud. ► **MOTION to Amend** Resolution 26-04: FY26 Capital Plan, to insert before the last sentence, be it further resolved that the Town Council refers to the joint budget subcommittee for investigation and report the question of identifying recurring annual capital expenditures for schools, public safety, and technology currently funded through the capital improvement plan that should instead be funded through the annual operating budget and to recommend sustainable funding strategies for such expenses. The subcommittee shall report its findings and recommendations to the Town Council by September 30, 2026, by **Morrongiello. SECOND by Ojukwu. No discussion.** ► **VOTE (on the amendment): Yes-2 No-7, Absent-0. Amendment fails.** ► **MOTION to Amend** Resolution 26-04: FY26 Capital Plan, to add the \$75,000 for the district-wide school safety improvements and to remove the \$100,000 for the Chromebooks from the IT department by **LeBlanc. SECOND by Cormier-Leger. Discussion:** ► Councilor Griffith said it does not make sense to ignore Superintendent Giguere’s professional opinion about what he believes is the most pressing priority for the schools. She said she agrees the schools are safe and safety is important to keep at the forefront. She would be in favor of adding it, but would not be in favor of removing the line item of the Chromebooks as the schools have said that is their top priority. ► Chair Dellorco said he would have to second that. He said can we add it and keep the Chromebooks. ► Mr. Hellen said absolutely. ► Councilor Morrongiello explained he strongly opposes this motion as the students need the Chromebooks and the schools are safe. He encourages a no vote on this motion. ► **VOTE (on the amendment): ► ROLL CALL VOTE:** Callaway-Tripp-NO, Cormier-Leger-YES, Dellorco-NO, Grella-NO, Griffith-NO, LeBlanc-YES, Malloy-NO, Morrongiello-NO, Ojukwu-NO. ► **VOTE: Yes-2, No-7, Absent-0. Amendment fails.** ► **MOTION to Amend** Resolution 26-04: FY26 Capital Plan, to add \$75,000 for the district-wide school safety improvements by **Dellorco. SECOND by Grella. Discussion:** ► Councilor Ojukwu said he will support this but wants to call out that the superintendent did just suggest that for the \$75,000 they can wait a year on. ► **VOTE (on the amendment): ► ROLL CALL VOTE:** Callaway-Tripp-YES, Cormier-Leger-YES, Dellorco-YES, Grella-YES, Griffith-YES, LeBlanc-YES, Malloy-YES, Morrongiello-NO, Ojukwu-YES. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-1, Absent-0. Amendment passes.** ► **MOTION to Approve As Amended** Resolution 26-04: FY26 Capital Plan, by **Grella. SECOND by Griffith. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- **MOTION to Extend** the meeting past 10 PM so the agenda can be finished by **Callaway-Tripp. SECOND by Griffith. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- c. Resolution 26-05: FY26 Capital Enterprise Funds (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-05 - Majority Vote).** ► **MOTION to Waive** the reading by **LeBlanc. SECOND by Dellorco. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.** ► **MOTION to Approve** Resolution 26-05: FY26 Capital Enterprise Funds by **Grella. SECOND by Cormier-Leger. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- d. Resolution 26-09: Gift Acceptance - Veterans Services Dept. (\$450) (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-09 - Majority Vote).** ► **MOTION to Waive** the reading by **Malloy. SECOND by Ojukwu. No**

discussion. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.** ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 26-09: Gift Acceptance - Veterans Services Dept. (\$450) by Grella. SECOND by Cormier-Leger. Discussion:**
 ► Councilor Cormier-Leger thanked the doners for the donations. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: ► Councilor Griffith said she would like the subcommittees up and running again. ► Chair Dellorco said they were going to do liaisons. ► Mr. Hellen said he thinks the issue is the bandwidth issue. He does not know who will do all the work. They have to figure out the bandwidth on this. He cannot do four nights a week of meetings. ► Councilor Griffith said Mr. Hellen is doing MMA work. ► Mr. Hellen said that is over and he questioned if anyone would like to know what he does, how much time he spent on it, why, and the cost benefit for the town for doing it. He said his MMA term is up and no one even knows. He said it is frustrating. They want more meetings which means more drafting, more work, more agendas, and more priorities. All the department heads are here tonight and saying that we are not managing expectations well. And, every time he makes a small error, he gets grilled. This is very tense and frustrating. They need to talk about what he does, what his hours are, and a lot of other dynamics to the bandwidth of himself in addition to the staff that are in the room tonight. This is not sustainable. ► Councilor Griffith asked if subcommittees are not going to be filled, do we close them. ► Mr. Hellen said he does not know the answer. ► Chair Dellorco said he thinks they need to talk about the fire truck. ► Fire Chief Charles Allen said they had a truck they had to take out of service; it has a serious safety issue with the frame. They are working on a plan to replace that. They are looking at a demo truck. He asked the Town Council to reach out to him. He explained that all the departments rely on each other. We all work together. He said ordering a truck takes 36-48 months. They are looking at about \$935,000. He said the demo truck is being held for them for 30 days.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: ► **None.**

ADJOURN: ► **MOTION to Adjourn by Grella. SECOND by Callaway-Tripp. No Discussion.**
 ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
 Recording Secretary