

Town of Charlemont
Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting Minutes
February 26th, 2025
Town Hall and via Conference Call

Board Members Present: Rich Filoramo, Jay Healy, Lynn Hathaway, Kim Blakeslee

Others present: Anne Kaplan, Ken Bertsch, Sarah Reynolds, Star Atkeson

Members On phone: Amy Wales

Rich Filoramo called the meeting to order at 4:30PM.

APPOINTMENTS:

4:45 Dana Johnson, Ambulance Director, to speak about 2026 department budget

This appointment will be rescheduled.

5:00 Anne Kaplan, School Committee, to speak about Hawlemont 2026 budget

Anne Kaplan and Ken Bertsch came to speak about the budget. Rich let them know that he didn't think the Town could afford a 5% increase. Anne had looked into combining grades as a solution and the school didn't want to do it because it would be too difficult for the teachers to teach 2 different curricula. Kim Blakeslee, has had great success with combining grades, teachers align with the higher grades and the younger grades rise to the occasion. She did it with 1st and 2nd at Conway. As well, to note, teachers are not required to teach to the MCAS anymore.

Jay said that the demographic just does not support the cost of school.

Rich said that next year still needs to be funded. They will need to look at combined classes as he is not sure they will get an increase of 5% from the town.

Anne thinks there will be pushback regarding combined classes and the exodus will increase. There have been a lot of improvements over the last few years. Student achievement has gone up.

All the fixed costs are going up, and all the offsets revolving funds and grants went down. Amber has gotten a huge amount of grants over the years. This year there's a 140,000 reduction in grants. They spoke about the cuts that were made to the budget.

They spoke about the Sustainability Study solutions, about a single campus at Mohawk and the pros and cons of other options. Its a critical time to figure it out with the community hearings over the next 6 weeks. Everyone agrees that Ashfield will be reluctant to close Sanderson.

There is discussion about where 6th graders should go. If it's more appropriate to keep them with the younger grades or with the higher grades. Opinion is split. They suggest Hawlemont and Colrain go to BSE, and Buckland go to Sanderson. It's noted that the Hawlemont facility is in better shape than BSE.

On March 19th there is a community meeting at Hawlemont, and on March 20 at 6:30 pm at Mohawk. Information can be found at 2district8town.org.

Jay said they should have meetings and find out where Sanderson stands, if it is key, then they can move on to phase 2. Rich thinks they should combine grades for the short term.

AGENDA ITEMS:

1. Review/ Approve minutes from 5/15/2024 and 1/29/2025 and 2/12/2025

Rich Filoramo made a motion to Accept the minutes as Written. Lynn Hathaway seconded the motion. All in favor.

Administrators Report:

1. New budget numbers:

Health insurance increased by 20%

Building Department is up 3.6%

Health Inspector is up 2.6%

Solid waste is up 5.2%, Thorne has been working to combine recycling hauls, hopefully a reduction will happen soon.

The core assessment went down a hair. Not all the numbers are in.

Animal Control officer is up 2.5%, the Dog Kennel went up substantially but will be reduced again, they sent an explanation. Sarah will find out if the fine for a kennel stay is standard fee or if can be higher. It should be paid with a revolving fund.

Electricity will increase. Sarah will look into it. There could be some savings with a streetlight upgrade. She'll check the status with National Grid.

As an FYI, the USDA ambulance grant came in (\$135,000.) It will go to the general fund and go against next year's free cash.

The Sustainability Study uncovered an error in Mohawk's count of Charlemont's students, of around 6-12 students off over 5 years! The formula was fixed, and it was taken off the assessment. They give a list every year, it would be a good idea to check it. Thorne could do it with addresses.

Rich Filoramo motioned to adjourn at 5:30ish. Lynn Hathaway seconded the Motion. All in favor.

Next meeting to be held on March 12, 2025.

Documents viewed at meeting:

Agenda of 2/26/2025

Minutes of 5/15/2024 and 1/29/2025 and 2/12/2025