

Town of Charlemont
Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting Minutes
April 15th, 2026, 4:00 p.m.
Town Hall and via Conference Call

Board Members Present: Lynn Hathaway, Amy Wales, Jay Healy, Rich Filoramo, Wilder Sparks
Ron Smith

Others present: Sarah Reynolds, Star Atkeson, Sheryl Stanton, Evie Locke

Amy Wales called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm

4:00 pm - Mohawk school committee representative and superintendent to discuss Mohawk budget; Hawlemont school committee representative to discuss budget.

- Superintendent Sheryl Stanton reviewed the proposed Mohawk Trail Regional School District FY26 budget and the factors driving the increase. Evie noted that the presentation was on the MTRSD website.
- Sheryl said the district is facing several major cost increases, many at 10% or more.
- Special education costs are up at \$482,466.
 - Out-of-district special education transportation is projected at about \$558,000, 67% increase.
- Insurance and employee benefits are up about 13%. Salaries are increasing approximately 6%, and transportation costs are also rising.
- Chapter 70 state aid is flat, with only a small increase per student.
- Stanton said the main pressures on the budget are out of district Special Ed placements, out of district Special Ed transportation, and health insurance costs.
- Sheryl said the district has already made staffing reductions, with approximately 21.5 full-time equivalent positions. This included 6.5 teaching positions in the elementary schools and districtwide, not including Hawlemont, as well as occupational and physical therapy positions, paraprofessionals, and one non-union position. Some of the eliminated positions had been vacant.
- Jay asked about the gap between state aid increases and rising district costs. Stanton said the difference between what the state provides and the actual cost of operating the schools is passed on to towns through local assessments above the minimum contribution. She said the Student Opportunity Act changed contribution formulas, but districts such as Mohawk have been “held harmless,” meaning aid has not kept pace with expenses.
- Stanton said regular transportation has remained relatively stable, but out-of-district special ed transportation has dramatically increased. (\$558,000) While some reimbursement is available through the state Circuit Breaker program, reimbursement typically comes a year later. She added that the district has little ability to negotiate tuition or transportation rates charged by private providers, though the superintendent’s organization intends to get answers.
- When asked how many students are involved, the estimate given was around 20 students being transported to Easthampton, Holyoke and Springfield
- Committee members discussed the need for legislative advocacy regarding Circuit Breaker reimbursements, transportation reimbursements, and broader rural school funding. Healy commented that many of these costs are state-mandated, leaving local districts with little control.

- Ron asked whether athletics and extracurricular activities might face reductions in future years. Stanton responded that those cuts have not yet been made, but if another round of reductions becomes necessary, the district would face difficult choices. She said future cuts could involve athletics, vice principals, instructional coaches, enrichment opportunities, and in-district special education programming, which could result in even more expensive out-of-district placements. She described future reductions as cutting into the core operations of the schools.
- Rural districts are being squeezed by state-controlled costs and insufficient aid increases. Student Opportunity Act directed substantial new funding toward districts with higher numbers of economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and greater special education needs, while many rural communities remain held harmless and receive only minimal Chapter 70 increases. He argued that modest annual increases per student do not solve the funding challenges facing many towns.

Agenda items:

1) Review/ Approve minutes from March 25, 2026

Ron Smith made a motion to approve the March 25th minutes as written. Jay Healy seconded the motion. All in favor.

2) Capital Planning Committee items FY 27

Not quite done, has a meeting tomorrow at 1:00, nothing has changed since last meeting except some questions from Scott about the truck.

Administrator's Report:

- Free cash amount – no certification yet
- Town meeting warrant articles Sarah explained what was in the warrant and said it would be nice if recommendations could be done by the 2nd week of May. Once Free Cash number comes in, they will have a better idea of what to recommend.
- Budget review
 - The Rowe late bus number line item will be taken out.
 - The board noted that there was no Hawlemont Representative to talk about increases, so would wait on that recommendation.
 - They talked about the salary increases, Police, HWY and school.

Amy Wales made a motion that the Charlemont Finance Committee approve all budget line items except for Line item 40 and Line item 76 Police and Hawlemont (pending continued discussion) Jay Healy seconded the motion. All in favor.

Amy Wales adjourned the meeting at 5:30.

Documents viewed at meeting:

Agenda of 4/15/2026

Minutes of 3/25/2026

2 packets of School funding workshop for Charlemont from Ken Rocke 14 pages and 24 pages.

Town of Charlemont FY 2026 budget

Proposed Warrant Article for the Annual Town Meeting May 26, 2026