

Falmouth Finance Committee
Hermann Foundation Meeting Room, Falmouth Public Library – January 20, 2026
Meeting – 4:00 pm
MINUTES

Present: *Keith Schwegel – Chair; Kathleen Beriau - Vice Chair; Susan P. Smith – Secretary; Mary Harris; Joseph Lemay; Russell Murphy; Eileen Miskell; Robert B. Dugan; Addie Vaccaro; Peter Hargraves; Lee Bordick*

Absent: *Ron Dyer; Tim Gordon*

Representing the Town: *Peter Johnson-Staub, Deputy Town Manager; Laura Sitrin, Finance Director; Fire Chief Smith; James Thomas, Communications Center Administrator; Scott McGann, Health Agent; Julie Williams-Tinkham, Recreation Director*

1. Call to Order

Chair Keith Schwegel called the meeting to order at 4:08pm.

2. Discuss/Vote: Public Safety - Fire/Rescue

MOTION by R. Dugan/R. Murphy to move \$11,799,785 for the Public Safety – Fire/Rescue.

Discussion:

R. Dugan - most of their budget is salaries and wages. The Department is trying to do the mandate of a six station model for the fire stations. There is usually a request for eight additional positions. The information from Town management is that this was not allowed. In lieu of that, the Department is running approximately \$1M in overtime in order to cover for the six-station model.

Chief Smith – in 2025, ambulance receipts totaled \$3.4M. Currently, the ambulance billing company charges 3.5% per billing. In FY17, billing from the company was \$56,000, and in FY25, it was \$100,000. This is based on a call volume in 2017 of 7,800 calls, and in 2025 of over 9,200 calls. There is a 96% collection rate through the company. The company works to obtain the funds before sending it to collections.

K. Schwegel – how can any of this amount not be collected, if it comes through insurance and everyone has to have insurance?

Chief Smith – this is unclear. One possible idea is that this is a seasonal community. There are some instances where the billing information is incorrect and it is difficult to find the correct information.

P. Hargraves – it sounds as though the overtime is almost enough to pay for the personnel requested. Hopefully, the intention is not to over-commit to personnel, because the six-station model will not be in place at some time in the future. Why doesn't the Town commit to the right level of personnel to make the difficult job of managing Fire & Rescue a bit easier from the personnel side?

Chief Smith – the request for more personnel is associated with the six station model and to have staff on hand at the beginning of the day. The overtime allows for this to be maintained through contractual agreements. Typically, overtime is being used on a regular basis.

P. Johnson-Staub – the Chief would like to have more robust staffing for the six station model, and this would be ideal. A staffing study reviewed the Town's conditions and indicated adding 20-30 police officers to the force. The DPW also has a compelling case for adding 4-5 employees to its department. Resources are limited.

All in favor.

3. Discuss/Vote: Public Safety - Consolidated Communications

MOTION by R. Murphy/A. Vaccaro to move \$1,775,187 for the Public Safety - Consolidated Communications.

Discussion:

R. Murphy – this budget includes a request for two new dispatchers for the Center. Also, an amount of \$40,000 of contractual services for the new platforms going into place. The 2027 proposal for salaries is \$1,569,137.00, an increase over last year of \$206,620. Staffing is a central concern for this department. There are currently eight full-time staff, and there is an ongoing search for one additional staff person, bringing the total to nine. There is currently authority to hire two more full-time staff members based on previous approval from Town Meeting. This brings total staffing to 11. The proposed fiscal year 2027 budget authorizes two more full-time positions, bringing the total staff to 13. The two positions are funded for new dispatchers at \$142,234. The recent Matrix Consulting Report on the Communications Department indicated a minimal full staffing number in the range of 16-17. At the current 13, this number seems to be a bare bones staffing situation.

James Thomas - the average training period for a public safety telecommunicator takes 18 months. The average career of a 911 operator in the United States is 30 months. On average, you are investing 18 months in an FTE to get 12 out. At the time of consolidation, the Department was authorized for 9 FTEs. Since that time, there have been more responders added to the field, the population of the Town has increased, the demographics of the Town have changed, and the call type by volume has increased, but there has not been an increase in staffing in the Department since its creation.

R. Dugan – will the department begin to use AI?

J. Thomas – yes, we will begin using an AI recording software at some point.

P. Hargraves – this budget contains funding for 14 positions, including the Administrator. The shift differentials are included to fund the premium pay.

J. Thomas – the shift differential is an additional \$0.75 per hour for an additional dispatcher to be on each shift for 365 days a year.

P. Hargraves – I thought the temp per diem position was to provide respite for leadership,

J. Thomas – it is being used for multiple things. We are up to a complement of 10 per diem dispatchers. Ideally, the temp per diem position would become obsolete because all the shifts would be filled by full-time people.

All in favor.

4. Discuss/Vote: Community Development - Health Department

MOTION by E. Miskell/S. Smith to move \$539,950 for the Community Development - Health Department.

Discussion:

E. Miskell - as of December, the Town has hired a new full-time, non-deployable Assistant Health Agent. Contracted services in the budget includes different testing needed which can vary from year to year. This does not include the budget for Clinics & Nurses.

S. McGann - the short-term rental by-law has not yet been enacted. Last year, the Department took the short-term tax list and mailed out letter. Instead of it being passive registration, it became an active registration. The Town went from around 300 rentals to around 850. The Town increased its rentals simply by contacting everyone. This was done without adding any budget or any staff. Once the bylaw is enacted, the Department will need to figure out what is needed and request necessary funding under next year's budget. This will depend on whether the Department will continue to just register rentals or actively inspect them.

K. Beriau – shouldn't there be a revenue gain based on the number of registered short-term rentals?

S. McGann – yes. The fee will have to match the time spent managing and enacting the bylaw.

All in favor.

MOTION by E. Miskell/S. Smith to move \$45,980 for the Community Development – Clinicians & Nurses

Discussion:

S. McGann – this is the VNA budget used for things such as communicable disease surveillance, and blood pressure clinics. This eliminates the need for a full-time, in-house nurse.

All in favor.

5. Discuss/Vote: Community Services – Recreation

MOTION by S. Smith/M. Harris to move \$802,678 for the Community Services – Recreation.

Discussion:

S. Smith – this budget is essentially planned to be level-funded.

M. Harris – salaries are up almost 13%, which is not level funded.

S. Smith – the Department has not added any hires.

L. Bordick – what is the total revenue of fees collected and do any of those revenues offset some of the programs?

P. Johnson-Staub - the revenues offset some of the cost of the programs, such as for some of the equipment and supplies.

J. Williams-Tinkham - the Department does charge \$30 for youth programming and has started charging \$30 for adult programs. We also increased fees for the summer program, the sailing program, and other rentals.

P. Hargraves – the message from the Town Manager indicates that we're headed for a deficit situation. We may have to increase fees or institute fees where they were not ever present before. Could the program fees ever be increased to cover the costs?

J. Williams-Tinkham – at this time last year, it cost \$0 to play pickleball as a Falmouth resident and now it costs \$30. There may be room to further increase the fees, based on what other towns are doing.

All in favor.

6. Discuss/Vote: Community Services - Senior Center

This item was deferred to a future meeting.

7. Discuss/Vote: General Government - Town Clerk

MOTION by R. Dugan/M. Harris to move \$476,403 for the General Government - Town Clerk.

Discussion:

R. Dugan - under the postage line, the cost is \$30,000. This is mainly due to the Town's incentive program to obtain stickers online ahead of time. This has been very successful but leads to additional costs to mail them out. The Assistant Clerk position has been filled.

All in favor.

8. Discuss/Vote: General Government – Elections

MOTION by R. Dugan/R. Murphy to move \$165,000 for the General Government - Elections.

All in favor.

9. Discuss/Vote: General Government - Town Meeting

MOTION by R. Dugan/R. Murphy to move \$66,000 for the General Government - Town Meeting.

Discussion:

R. Dugan – in terms of the commercial advertising, a projection is made.

All in favor.

10. Discuss/Vote: General Government - Town Manager

MOTION by E. Miskell/M. Harris to move \$1,015,670 for the General Government - Town Manager.

Discussion:

E. Miskell – there is not much change in this budget. The number of positions in the Department has decreased, as the Coastal Resiliency position was moved to DPW. The DEI officer position is still vacant, and consulting services are being utilized for it.

P. Hargraves - I looked through all of the positions, and most of the proposed increases seem to be in the high single digits, 7%-9%, but the proposed 12% increase for the Town Manager seems over the top.

P. Johnson-Staub – there was an adjustment after last year’s book was produced in terms of what the Town Manager received in FY26.

K. Schwegel – the Cultural Council grants went from \$10,000 to \$15,000?

P. Johnson-Staub – a case was made for this increase, though the Select Board has not yet voted on it.

M. Harris – this is not where I would start to take money out of the budget.

All in favor.

11. Review & Vote Approval of Meeting Minutes

- January 14, 2026

None at this time.

12. Chairman Report

K. Schwegel – we will meet next Wednesday at 4PM.

13. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kristan Patenaude, Recording Secretary