

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

Present: *Keith Schwegel – Chair; Kathleen Beriau; Tim Gordon - Vice Chair; Lee Bordick; Ron Dyer; Susan P. Smith – Secretary; Mary Harris; Joseph Lemay; Russell Murphy; Robert B. Dugan; Peter Hargraves*

Absent: *Addie Vaccaro; Eileen Miskell*

Representing the Town: *Mike Renshaw, Town Manager; Peter Johnson-Staub, Deputy Town Manager; Laura Sitrin, Finance Director; Police Chief Lourie; Jennifer Lincoln, Conservation Administrator; Jed Cornock, Town Planner/Community Development Director; Jim Gouzas, Director of Veterans’ Services; Noreen Stockman, Zoning Administrator; Susan Clondas, Human Services Department; Peter McConarty, Director of Public Works; Edwin Rivera, Fleet Manager; Jeremiah Pearson, Tree Warden; Brian Stokes, Library Director; Judy Fenwick, Chair of the Library Board of Trustees*

1. Call to Order

Chair Keith Schwegel called the meeting to order at 4:00pm.

2. Discuss/Vote: Public Safety – Police

MOTION by T. Gordon/R. Dyer to move \$10,577,184 for Public Safety - Police.

Discussion:

T. Gordon – the majority of increases in salaries are contractual. However, the Woods Hole detail, which was funded last year but not included in the budget, is now in the budget but still being funded by the embarkation fees.

J. Lourie – this service went very well last year. If extra is needed for next year, it will be requested at that time.

K. Schwegel – how many cruisers will the budget request get you?

J. Lourie – two.

All in favor.

3. Discuss/Vote: Community Development – Conservation

MOTION by L. Bordick/R. Dyer to move \$504,494 for Community Development - Conservation.

Discussion:

L. Bordick - the department has two primary missions. One is on the regulatory side in terms of issuing permits, and the other side is for land management. A vacancy under the personal services line has since been filled.

J. Lincoln – under field equipment, last year it was requested that we move the field equipment article into the operating budget, because it is an annual expense. Last year, we requested \$10,000 and this has

since been almost depleted. We are now requesting an additional \$10,000 in field supplies for a total of \$20,000. We will not be requesting a separate land management capital item.

K. Schwegel – what is the uniform line under supplies?

J. Lincoln – the agents and land manager receive a uniform allowance each year.

All in favor.

4. Discuss/Vote: Community Services – Veterans

MOTION by P. Hargraves/R. Dyer to move \$605,994 for Community Services - Veterans.

Discussion:

J. Gouzas – there is a unique model in Falmouth. We're the only town on the Cape that has a specifically designated veteran service officer to support the veterans in Town. The advantage of that is easy access to one-on-one services. Veterans Services is not discretionary, it's a mandated municipal function under state law. There have been many regulations passed by the VA and the State which have tremendously impacted the amount of volume of veterans requesting services. Although the volume of business has increased, the staffing model has stayed the same. Outreach is a large part of the office's work. It has embedded itself into the community in many ways and created a symbiotic relationship.

J. Gouzas - Chapter 115 is a financial assistance benefit. It is means-tested using a complicated formula. This determines what veterans are eligible for and not everyone gets the same amount. If an individual is not eligible for any financial assistance, they may be eligible for medical only, which is a reimbursement of their out-of-pocket medical bills. Chapter 115 assistance is year-round and non-discretionary. \$353,901 were paid out in benefits for FY25 for our Chapter 115 clients. This equates to an average of approximately 40 low-income households served per month. On average, we're currently servicing about 40 Chapter 115 clients. This is fairly high compared to most of the towns on the Cape. The Town of Falmouth absorbs 25% of this financial responsibility and is reimbursed 75% quarterly by the Commonwealth. Accuracy and timeliness are critical. Once a veteran is in an assisted living facility, benefits stop. In FY25, \$13,245,086.90 in federal VA benefits were distributed to 632 local veterans and surviving spouses. Between the Chapter 115 benefit receivers, as well as veterans receiving VA benefits, approximately \$13.6M flowed directly into the Falmouth community, strengthening the local economy. These benefits support housing, food, healthcare, and local services. The majority of benefits are going to East Falmouth veterans. Veterans bring in, on average, more money than the average citizen does in terms of injecting money into the economy. For every \$1 Falmouth spends on a veteran in the community, the community gains \$4 in economic value. Having more individuals receiving VA benefits may cause a higher financial burden to the municipal budget, but in turn, the payback in terms of what is injected back into the economy, justifies that. The request is for a level services budget.

10 in favor, with Smith abstaining.

5. Discuss/Vote: Community Development – Zoning

MOTION by P. Hargraves/R. Dyer to move \$221,290 for Community Development - Zoning.

Discussion:

P. Hargraves – this is \$27,000 off of Line 5120. That line was intended to complete the work of sorting through files that are waiting to be scanned. There is residue in Article 19 of the April 2024 Town

Meeting and the Article 7 of the November 2024 Town Meeting, leading to the idea of eliminating \$27,000 from the budget by utilizing these funds. Instead of a 7.2% budget increase, this leads to a 4.5% budget reduction.

All in favor.

6. Discuss/Vote: Community Development – Planning

MOTION by K. Beriau/R. Dyer to move \$642,113 for Community Development - Planning.

Discussion:

K. Beriau – this department is meeting most of its goals, with one of the most forward facing being affordable housing funds. The Department is requesting a new position for \$30,000. The planned duties for that role will be to monitor deed restrictions and sales, manage the subsidized housing inventory, update the housing website, etc. One of the line items for \$23,000, includes 11 users on the GIS software. There is one vacant position for the office assistant.

J. Cornock - the 11 licenses are for the desktop, ArcGIS mapping software. The additional cost shown is for the public-facing interactive GIS. These are two separate things, but together total \$23,000.

J. Cornock - in the past, the Planning Department was divided into a Town Planner and two Assistant Town Planner positions. The first Assistant Town Planner was full-time, and the second was a part-time community development type planner. Instead, he has worked to create the part-time position into a Preservation Planner who staffs the Historical Commission. This freed up the Assistant Town Planner to help with regular planning activities.

R. Dugan – I would suggest that the Community Development Director position still be shown in the budget, even though it is not technically funded, as it is being filled by the Town Planner.

All in favor.

7. Discuss/Vote: Community Services - Human Services

MOTION by K. Beriau/R. Dyer to move \$726,201 for Community Services – Human Services.

Discussion:

K. Beriau - the bilingual social worker was originally a temp position. Those dollars have been moved into the salary line, along with increased hours for the position, up to 14 a week from 8.

S. Clondas - the need for the increased hours for the position was demonstrated by feedback received from the schools, other municipal departments, and community partners.

P. Hargraves – how does the opioid settlement revenue show up in the budget?

S. Clondas - the opioid settlement funds do not sit in the Human Services budget. This is a separate line item called opioid settlement fund. For this year, \$262,216 will be going out to ten different organizations that are delivering substance use-related services. The funds go into a specific line item and must be spent on related items. The Human Services page and the Substance Use Commission page shows which organizations are receiving the grants.

All in favor.

8. Discuss/Vote: Public Works - Admin & Engineering

MOTION by R. Dyer/R. Dugan to move \$1,470,676 for Public Works – Admin & Engineering.

Discussion:

K. Schwegel – what does the beach nourishment line item used for?

J. Wrigley – the \$25,000 line item has been level funded since 2023. Last year, 1,470 cubic yards of sand was purchased and placed seaward of the Mitchell bath house on Surf Drive. All public beaches need nourishment eventually. This is to help in areas that erosion is greatest.

K. Schwegel – would ocean reclamation ever be considered?

J. Wrigley - offshore sediment sources would be a good idea to explore. The wholesale movement of sand has several regulatory restraints.

R. Dugan – are embarkation fees being used for maintenance of the Woods Hole bridge?

P. McConarty – no.

All in favor.

9. Discuss/Vote: Public Works - Street Lighting

MOTION by R. Dyer/T. Gordon to move \$120,000 for Public Works – Street Lighting.

Discussion:

R. Dyer – the lighting has been changed over the years to be less bright and less expensive.

All in favor.

10. Discuss/Vote: Public Works - Fleet Services

MOTION by R. Dyer/T. Gordon to move \$672,245 for Public Works – Fleet Services.

Discussion:

J. Lemay – this budget is the definition of level funded. This Department is responsible for maintaining the entire Town's fleet, including the Police, but excluding the Fire Department.

All in favor.

11. Discuss/Vote: Public Works - Tree & Parks

MOTION by R. Dyer/T. Gordon to move \$1,788,862 for Public Works – Tree & Peaks.

Discussion:

J. Pearson – two small increases and being proposed in the budget. There are currently approximately 207 Elm trees in Falmouth. There is not much that can be done at a Town level to control the pine beetle

borer that is attacking trees. This will spread quickly and the Town will see devastation from this. Forests will regrow eventually. The request will likely be for people not to remove trees during the growing season but instead wait until the winter months.

M. Renshaw – management plans for this to minimize spread will be important.

K. Schwegel – why are these three cemetery funds?

J. Pearson – one of these are for perpetual care funds and another is for subcontracting projects.

All in favor.

12. Discuss/Vote: Community Services – Library

MOTION by S. Smith/R. Dyer to move \$2,650,834 for Community Services – Library.

Discussion:

S. Smith – Falmouth has a population of roughly 33,150. But the Library population is 32,440. This is almost 100% utilization by our population and visitors. The Library has almost 541,000 items in its total circulation. Dividing that by the number of users leads to roughly 17 times that a user comes through the Library and uses something. One of the items proposed to expand the core Library services is a vision to offer world language content for residents and visitors desiring to read popular material in their native language. There are some vacant positions, primarily in the information services area. Currently, the Director has been serving as the IT person in that capacity.

B. Stokes – the facilities are a destination, of sorts, for both residents and visitors. Circulation continues to increase each year. The total hours that our locations were open for the Falmouth community were over 5,000 in FY25. The Library held over 1,564 programs at its three locations, and those programs were attended by nearly 20,000, people.

J. Fenwick – the Trustees Trust Fund, Public Library Support Fund, and Friends of the Falmouth Public Library help with additional funds for the Library.

P. Hargraves – are there any updates on the East Falmouth Library project?

B. Stokes - last January, we found out that we had been awarded a grant and we were awarded immediate funding for the planning and design phase for the new library. At that point, we were informed that we were waitlisted for construction funding. We are waiting for the green light from the State to proceed with obtaining support in the community for construction. The Town should be informed in early 2028 that those funds are available, at which point we would begin the process of going out to get support. Construction would likely start around 2029, with completion in 2030.

All in favor.

13. Discuss/Vote: Employee Benefits – Retirement

MOTION by M. Harris/R. Dyer to move \$13,756,731 for Employee Benefits - Retirement.

Discussion:

M. Harris - Town is told what to contribute by actuaries. This is a defined benefit plan to which employees and the Town contribute. The cost is up 8.28% from last year. This is one of the main drivers for the budget, with 7.5% of the annual budget going toward this. This is projected to be 8.5%-9% of the budget by 2033. This will continue to increase and place pressure on the budget. A valuation is completed every two years, with the most recent one dated January 1, 2024. This was the first valuation that took into consideration the market drop in 2022. The Town's salaries, on average, increased higher than the actuarial assumption in the plans, causing some of this cost. The new valuation will be as of January 1, 2026.

L. Sitrin - the law specifically says 2040. However, given how difficult it is to get the results to match actuarial assumptions, the insistence is that everyone be fully funded five years earlier than 2040. We have asked Falmouth's retirement system to consider extending this another year past 2033, because the 8% increase each year is difficult for the budget to handle. It is unrealistic to think that defined pension plans need to reach 100% to be considered fully funded. I think that anywhere from 80%-90% is probably a reasonable level of funding.

P. Hargraves - is there a pot of money which is managed by Falmouth on behalf of Falmouth?

M. Harris - there is a big pot of money managed by the Falmouth Retirement System, divided over approximately 12-15 different investment advisors who have a layer above them that advises which managers to actually use. It is monitored constantly. There is over \$200M in this fund. The funding level is approximately 73% currently.

All in favor.

14. Discuss/Vote: Employee Benefits – Medicare

MOTION by M. Harris/R. Dyer to move \$1,500,000 for Employee Benefits – Medicare.

All in favor.

15. Review & Vote Approval of Meeting Minutes

- January 14, 2026
- January 20, 2026

MOTION by S. Smith/R. Dyer to approve the meeting minutes of January 14 2026; and January 20 2026, as amended.

All in favor.

16. Chairman Report

K. Schwegel – there will be a number of items for next week's agenda.

17. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:22pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kristan Patenaude, Recording Secretary