

DRAFT
DURHAM TOWN COUNCIL
MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2025
DURHAM TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Joseph Friedman, Chair Pro Tem Sally Needell, Councilor Wayne Burton, Councilor Darrell Ford, Councilor Carden Welsh, Councilor Heather Grant, Councilor Robin Vogt, Councilor Em Friedrichs (who uses the pronouns ze/zir/zirs/zirself and the title Mx. Friedrichs), Councilor Curtis Register

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Town Administrator Todd Selig, Conservation Commission Chair Dwight Trueblood and Vice Chair Neil Slepian

I. Call to Order

Chair Friedman called the meeting to order at 7 P.M.

II. Town Council grants permission for fewer than a majority of Councilors to participate remotely. Not needed.

III. Roll Call of Members

Councilor Carden Welsh, Councilor Curtis Register, Councilor Darrell Ford, Councilor Wayne Burton, Chair Pro Tem Sally Needell, Chair Joseph Friedman, Councilor Em Friedrichs, Councilor Robin Vogt, Councilor Heather Grant.

IV. Approval of Agenda

Chair Pro Tem Sally Needell MOVED to approve the agenda. Councilor Register SECONDED the motion. The agenda was APPROVED on a show of hands vote of 9-0.

V. Special Announcements - None

VI. Approval of Minutes - Dec. 1, 2025

Councilor Friedrichs MOVED to approve the minutes for the Town Council meeting of Dec. 1, 2025 with minor corrections. Councilor Welsh SECONDED the motion. The minutes were APPROVED on a unanimous roll call vote of 8-0. Councilor Register abstained because he was not present at the Dec. 1 meeting.

VII. Report from the UNH Student Senate External Affairs Chair or Designee

UNH Student Senate External Affairs Chair Caroline Bishop was not present.

VIII. Public Comments

1 **Sheryl Bass, a resident of Dover and director of the Durham Public Library,**
2 commented on the reduction in the adult and children's print collections budget, which
3 was proposed and approved at the Town Council's Budget Work Session last week
4 before she could join the meeting and give her input. She wanted to respond to comments
5 and clarify some misconceptions for the record. She said the print materials budget is one
6 of the most essential to the library's service. She said a cut of \$18,795 directly affects
7 children, older adults and other vulnerable residents who rely on the library most. She
8 said one large print book can cost up to \$40, and children's books continue to rise in
9 price. She said many patrons cannot afford to purchase books so the library is their
10 primary access to reading and learning. Restricting library access reduces equity, limits
11 the community's ability to stay informed, and undermines lifelong learning and
12 democratic engagement. Limiting the purchase of new books limits the number and
13 quality of books at the library. Library collections operate on a physical life cycle; as new
14 items are added, outdated and worn items are removed. Without the ability to purchase
15 new books, the collection shrinks and becomes less accurate and less relevant. Long-term
16 recovery from slow purchasing is more expensive, creates gaps in coverage areas and
17 weakened replacement cycles. She said relying on the Inter Library Loan program isn't a
18 replacement for new materials. Each ILL item requires staff time to process it for a
19 patron, and the staff that manage this service is already at capacity. Increased reliance on
20 ILL would require additional staffing and new items aren't available through ILL for at
21 least six months. She said ILL simply can't replace a robust, local collection. She said the
22 library budget presented to the Council was lean, responsible, and a true maintenance of
23 service request. She said the library operates efficiently and stretches every dollar, and a
24 reduction of this magnitude will have an immediate effect on the library's ability to serve
25 the community. She said the library remains committed to providing equitable access to
26 all residents and maintaining the collection as an up-to-date resource is essential to doing
27 that. She asked the Council to integrate this clarification into any future considerations.

28
29 **Robyn Glasser, 1 Roysann Way, chair of the Durham Public Library Trustees,** said
30 she is a 70-year library cardholder and knows the library is not immune to cuts. She said
31 she attended two Council budget sessions to be available for questions about cuts and was
32 only asked about the frequency of custodial services, and the decision on the print
33 collections was made without input. She said the budget request the library submitted was
34 a level service budget with the increase only in contractual services and for inflation. She
35 said the Trustees hold an annual appeal and commit \$20,000 to the operating budget
36 annually. The Trustees also fund programs and services above the operating budget and
37 their commitment of \$20,000 to it, and over the last four years have contributed \$110,000
38 to library operation. The reduction of \$18,795 to the print budget, which is still the heart
39 and soul of the library, will cut back on the collection's development and take years to
40 recover from. She said the Inter Library Loan program is dependent on staff time to
41 process materials and the library's ILL staff person is already operating at capacity. She
42 said the ILL delivery service has lost its federal funding effective 2027 and will probably
43 need help from each library to keep it going. She said she hopes the Council and library
44 can work together to provide the very best library services for Durham residents.

1 **Catherine Gatcom, 22A Simons Lane**, thanked the Council for the opportunity to
2 speak, noting she is a member of the Library Trustees, but is speaking with her family
3 because the library is important to all three of them. She said the library is one of her 2-
4 year-old's favorite places and she often pretends to be Children's Librarian Ms. Kelly and
5 reads to them. She said the library is a vital resource for checking out books to help her
6 understand the world around her and they wouldn't be able to purchase these books to
7 own. She said it is also a community hub to connect with other families with children.
8 She said the library's collection and its services are really crucial to the community and
9 asked the Council to keep funding as proposed.

10
11 **Judy Blanchard, 14 Stone Quarry Drive**, said she was a professional librarian for over
12 50 years, mostly in public libraries, and when she moved to town five years ago she was
13 so impressed with the town's library. She outlined the outreach to Riverwoods residents
14 the library does, bringing a large selection of books to Riverwoods for those residents
15 who no longer can drive or who don't see well, including many large print books, which
16 are extremely expensive. She said staff members deliver books to Riverwoods if
17 requested, find books for the facility's five reading groups and assist in using online
18 sources for books and audiobooks. She said on behalf of her fellow residents at
19 Riverwoods that they love the library and asked the Council to support it.

20
21 **Linda Johnson, 4 Bucks Hill Road**, a retired university librarian and active member of
22 the Friends of the Library, has noticed many mothers bringing children to programs and
23 checking out books; middle schoolers pouring in after school; and the parking lot filled to
24 capacity for a program, or for groups using the meeting rooms. She thanked the Council
25 and asked them to reconsider cuts to the library, which she said is an excellent resource.

26
27 **Susan Wagner, 10 Edendale Lane**, a retired librarian who in 2019 served as DPL's
28 interim director during the search for a new director and a member of the Library
29 Trustees since 2021, said residents are fortunate to live in a community that values
30 education, that is well read and has an educated retirement community that lives on fixed
31 incomes. She said residents are challenged by tax increases, but the town is also
32 challenged and the library submitted a very modest proposed budget. She said the cut was
33 made without input from the library and it's unrealistic to cut line items. She said recently
34 published print items are the library's most circulated items and the Inter Library Loan
35 program won't loan new items until at least six months after publication. She respectfully
36 requested the Council restore the funds because it's a slippery slope when you begin
37 inadequately funding a prime resource.

38
39 **William De Brese, 10 Edendale Lane**, said he was raised on a weekly visit to the
40 library, and at one point his family moved to the largest town without a public library,
41 and that impressed the importance of a library on him. He said when a town starts cutting
42 the heart of the library, what message is sent to the world? He said people and businesses
43 who might want to move here look at the library to see what Durham cares about.

44
45 **Beth Newkirk, 40 Mill Pond Road**, said she is a Library Trustee, but spoke as a resident
46 who loves the library. She said over the last several years the library has moved from

1 good to an exceptional town library. She said it is well respected and has become a real
2 center in this community that lacks a lot of centers for people. She said she watched the
3 budget work session and saw a lot of care for essential services like fire, police and
4 public works, and argued that the library is an essential service for feeling a part of the
5 community and enriching residents' lives. She said she hopes the Council will put the
6 money back in the budget to do that work.

7
8 **Marty Gooze, 9 Meadow Road**, said she's lived here over 40 years and has never seen a
9 more well-run, practical, well thought-out and frugal maintenance of the quality of a
10 library. She has served on the school board and knows how hard budgets are to balance.
11 She said the town has many generous givers, but not enough to cover the reduction, and it
12 would be a shame to have to cut services. She asked Councilors to reconsider.

13
14 **Joe Worzin, 102 Madbury Road**, a Library Trustee, said the town's lucky to have the
15 wealth of experience it has, his young children are heavy library users and the library
16 makes Durham very attractive to people next to the school system.

17
18 **John Oitman, 22 Deer Meadow Road**, a resident since 2020, said his taxes have
19 increased 56 percent in that time. He is a shoreline owner and understands the process,
20 but it troubles him that he can't find correlating data to how his property was assessed.
21 He said professionally he oversaw organizations of \$50 million to \$250 million, and was
22 asked to cut 10 percent every year, and did it even though it was painful. He asked how
23 the town does not have reasonable taxation that provides good services and how it can
24 figure out having legitimate taxation that drives value in the community.

25
26 **Colin Naples, 17 Orchard Drive**, said it was his first time to comment at a Council
27 meeting and said he is concerned about tax increases. He moved here in 2019, thinking it
28 was a great place to live. He grew up in Hanover where Dartmouth is, which he said has a
29 lot of similarities to Durham. He said the town's taxation is unsustainable, has tax base
30 stagnation, neglected tax base growth and needs to focus on attracting businesses. He said
31 the state education funding and lack of support affects all towns, and the Council needs to
32 adopt that reality. Continuous tax hikes are unsustainable and risk lowering property
33 values over time. He said homebuyer priorities vary in choosing where to live from
34 schools to recreation, and these don't justify unchecked tax increases. He said the town
35 needs to focus on expense management, target increases to be in line with inflation, look
36 at cost-saving opportunities, and drive more efficient spending.

37
38 **Steve Ek, 16 Cedar Point Road**, displayed a graphic representing his tax increase of 38
39 percent, which he said shows a radical step change and needs investigation, but he
40 doesn't believe the town has enough transparency to be able to research the reasons for
41 the increase. He said he has a waterfront property, but doesn't use town water or sewer,
42 and that a material part of the town's budget is water and sewer. He said he read this is a
43 multi-year program, which means he will have to move to another town. Councilor
44 Friedrichs explained how town water and sewer users pay for these uses and other
45 residents don't.

1 **Dave Kjendal, 8 Willey Creek Road**, said he moved here 10 years ago for the quality of
2 life and access to the university. He said he is a chief technology officer at a startup in
3 Portsmouth. He said his taxes went up 65%. He said he also has a second, small lot,
4 which may be unbuildable under the Conservation Commission's new proposed
5 regulations, and that went up 2,000%. He said he would like to see some transparency
6 around where those numbers come from and it's unsustainable to have taxes go up
7 another 25% over the next two years. That means he will need to move though he loves
8 living here. He lives in the Colony Cove neighborhood, has many neighbors who are
9 retired, and the increase is having a dramatic impact on them. He said the tax increases
10 will change the nature of the town if people are forced to move out. He said the
11 Conservation Commission has received strong negative feedback about the proposed
12 shoreline regulations that are not reasonable, that science was not applied to them, and
13 are out of line with neighboring communities. He said the town needs to understand the
14 negative impact of these decisions on those looking to move here and stay here.

15
16 **James Rogers, 21 Deer Meadow Road**, said he moved here in 2021, has three young
17 boys and he and his wife chose to raise their children here and to make this their forever
18 home. He said the taxes on the property were \$34,000 and were quite stable for more than
19 10 years prior to the purchase so he felt he was making an informed decision. He
20 accepted the cost because his family believed in the town. He said his taxes are now
21 \$48,000, a 39 percent increase in less than five years, is \$4,000 per month, and headed
22 much higher. He said while neighboring towns are thriving as places to shop and eat,
23 Durham feels stagnant. He said almost everyone he knows talks about spending their
24 money elsewhere, how the town has lost basic services, and there are few non-college-
25 oriented businesses, which is not just a quality of life issue, but is a tax base problem. He
26 said many of his neighbors are considering leaving because of the growing cost burden
27 while they feel they're getting little in return. He said this becomes a question of
28 manageability and that household incomes are not growing at the same rate as the town
29 budget is growing. He said the town has been restricting development while expanding
30 long-term spending commitments and that math won't work. He said he's not asking the
31 town to abandon its values, but to slow spending growth, defer non-essential projects, and
32 seriously consider how fiscal sustainability and economic vitality fit into Durham's future
33 so families can afford to stay here.

34
35 **Bruce Fenton, Durham Point Road**, said it's important to remember taxes are not
36 voluntary, and are collected by force, but it's not the town's money. He said Councilors
37 have the power of government to force residents to pay taxes or go to jail or leave town.
38 He noted four people who spoke before him talked about leaving. He said it's important
39 to remember that moral point, and that taxes are not collected voluntarily. He said he
40 opposes many forms of spending and sees a town addicted to spending. He said his taxes
41 are \$5,800 per month, \$70,000 per year. He said he worked all his life to buy his
42 property, which he said he is blessed to have a beautiful home, and over eight years he's
43 paid \$510,000 to the town. He said he's fortunate to be able to do that, but others can't.
44 He said the town's taxes are well above average for the country, and the state, and that
45 other towns do it for much, much less. He said he cares about those who can't pay the
46 taxes and hope the Council cares about them, too, because it's not voluntary. He said

1 from an economic standpoint, it doesn't help growth, causes people to leave, and heavy-
2 handed zoning and planning hurt everyone because it discourages people from doing
3 business here. He said the best thing economically is to let citizens have the money, trust
4 them and let them vote with their own money. He said if the town gives more power to
5 the people, it'll have a better economic situation, and it's the moral high ground.
6

7 **Rita Mason, 6 Denbow Road**, a resident for 15 years, said she became unemployed this
8 year and if they don't pay their taxes the home they've built for 15 years could be taken
9 away from them. The tax increases are a growing concern because in a couple of years
10 people will be losing their homes, and she wondered who can afford to buy them. She
11 said she was an executive at the business, which saw sales drop 90% during the
12 pandemic, they laid off half the team and those remaining took a 10% to 20% pay cut.
13 She noted the \$18,000 library budget gap is 10% of the town administrator's annual
14 compensation. She wondered if the town is being really judicious with residents' money,
15 is glad its salaries are competitive, but shares concerns about the town's transparency.
16

17 **Joe Ahlman, 23 Cedar Point Road**, said he was dismayed and outraged at the 14%
18 increase in his taxes. He said he had no doubt they were going to go up. He said after
19 moving here in 2016 from Maine, it worked in his advantage when he was working, but
20 he is now retired. He said his taxes were \$10,000 when he moved here, and are now
21 \$15,000, a 45% increase, which is nothing compared to what he's hearing from other
22 residents at this meeting. He said this is getting close to the last straw and that he feels it
23 shows contempt for taxpayers. He noted the minutes of the last Council meeting showed
24 a proposal for a salaried, benefited land stewardship position to bring tourists to town,
25 which he feels is inappropriate when families are facing cost increases in all areas and
26 neighbors may be forced to move because they can't afford the taxes. He said he is going
27 to tolerate as long as he can, but others will have to move and Durham will languish. He
28 said all residents need are basic services. He said everyone in his neighborhood is livid
29 about the tax increase, and everyone is making do with less, and the town needs to, too.
30 He said the spending was nice while it lasted, but the spigot is drying up.
31

32 **Baron Miles, 9 Mathes Cove Road**, said he moved here in 2021 from Dover, drawn by
33 the schools for his two young children. He said Dover had seen tax increases but more
34 manageable ones in the range of 5% and the services were comparable except for the
35 schools. He said he is opposed and heard the Council needed to hear from more people
36 that feel this way. He said his taxes have increased 50%, from \$9,000 annually to
37 \$14,000. He said he knows the town budget is just part of that bill, but he wants to work
38 together on what residents and the town can control. He urged the Council to evaluate
39 meaningful ways to reduce spending, welcome commercial businesses to town, which
40 starts with planning and zoning, and look at things that haven't been explored before. He
41 said the town is too reliant on residential property taxes to fund services and he believes
42 increases shouldn't be more than 3% or 4% and the budget should maintain a flatter
43 structure, and elective projects and spending increases should be delayed until the tax
44 base can be expanded. He encouraged more surveying and more people should speak out
45 because it sounds like what people are talking with each other about is not being

1 conveyed to the Council and town staff. He suggested generating a digital survey to reach
2 people who can't attend meetings.

3
4 **Aaron Grueter, 22 Cedar Point Road**, said he moved here in 2020, his taxes were
5 \$18,000, and are now \$41,000. He said he did do some property improvement, which
6 drove some of the increase, but it's still a big jump and is not sustainable. He said he
7 listened to the last meeting and someone said taxes increase as property values increase,
8 which he said residents understand and signed up for that when they decided to live in
9 New Hampshire, but that value is still an unrealized gain, market value is not liquid
10 assets available to people to pay taxes. He asked the Council to consider that and how
11 many residents are looking to move to another town because of what is happening here.

12
13 **Tom Daly, 190 Piscataqua Road**, said the weekly updates from the town said residents'
14 property valuations would be going up and the tax rate would be going down. He shared
15 data from Assessor Darcy Freer that there are 2,045 single family residences in town, 43
16 had their tax bills go down more than 3 percent, 75 had flat tax bills, which is a change
17 between -3% and +3%, and 1,927 had their tax bills increase more than 3%. He said he
18 doesn't think this is sustainable.

19
20 **Matt Carrico, 36 Dover Road**, said he is a lifelong town resident, grew up here and
21 graduated from Oyster River High School in 1988, listed the addresses where he's lived
22 and moved his family back here after college. He said his tax bill went up 100% in the
23 last two years. He said it is absolutely unsustainable. He said after having lived here his
24 entire life, he can't live here anymore and this tax bill is going to send him out of town.
25 He said it pains him greatly to say that, but it is a fact. He doesn't have the money and
26 then take another hit of 18% next. He said these are the very real consequences of all the
27 spending that's going on. He asked about the valuation not going up for rental properties
28 in town and how it's not fair to homeowners.

29
30 Discussion continued how the state's tax structure mandates town's assessing taxes based
31 on property value. Mr. Carrico said his property hasn't changed and the river was there
32 two years ago, and he doesn't understand how the town assessed him for such an
33 increase. He said his house did not go up 100 percent in value.

34
35 Administrator Selig explained the abatement process triggers a review locally and then at
36 the state level if a homeowner doesn't agree with their property assessment. He said the
37 town is required to assess properties equally according to fair market value. He said
38 different classifications of properties have seen increases in their valuations over the
39 years. He said waterfront property owners and especially those along the saltwater
40 portion of the Oyster River saw the greatest increase in taxes in this cycle, and that the
41 reassessment was based on data of fair market values and it's a redistribution of the tax
42 burden based on prevailing market conditions.

43
44 **Michael Morneault, 55 Adams Point Road**, said he has written emails to Councilors,
45 reminding them of their fiduciary duty to the taxpayers. He said they need to be
46 thoughtful with the budget because that's what the town can control, and determines the

1 mill rate. The Council decides what stays in the budget, what doesn't and what the
2 tradeoffs will be. He said all this is really in the Councilors' hands.
3

4 **Justin Zimitz, 26 Mathes Cove Road**, said his family just moved here and his taxes
5 went up 70% this year, and he shares everyone's concerns. He said he thinks the long-
6 term problem is a stagnant taxbase driven by limited new construction and the need for
7 more than annual budget adjustments. He thinks it requires examining zoning,
8 regulations, building standards that affect housing feasibility and taxbase growth over
9 time. He said Durham has adopted the most stringent building and energy codes in the
10 state. He said it's also advancing the most restrictive shoreline setback regulations in the
11 state. He said he believes this is well -intentioned, but increases development costs and
12 housing feasibility and constrains investment. He said Durham prides itself on the value
13 of inclusiveness, but is losing that, and increasing exclusivity. The town's taxation favors
14 only those with the highest financial capacity. He said the pressure is being seen in this
15 year's budget and the town must balance and successfully manage that tax pressure, and
16 closely examine zoning, regulatory and code related levers that affect housing production
17 and building, and matter just as much in changing the trajectory the town is on..
18

19 **Ben Bulkley, 569 Bay Road**, said he built his home in 2011-12, and has been very happy
20 with it. He wondered what kind of people will move into town that can write a \$44,000 or
21 \$70,000 or a \$100,000 check each year for taxes. He pointed out the \$1.5 million the
22 Council is voting on at this meeting for the restoration of the farmhouse at Wagon Hill
23 juxtaposed with the \$18,000 reduction for the library. Councilors corrected him that the
24 decision on the Wagon Hill farmhouse restoration was made last year. He compared that
25 decision to the \$18,000 cut at the library and said he would rather spend that money on
26 the library. He said the \$1.5 million decisions are creating the crowding-out problem the
27 Council is seeing at this meeting, and asked why the town is talking about \$18,000
28 problems and not talking about generating new growth.
29

30 **Mike Lehremann, 20 Cedar Point Road**, said the state pushes this tax burden down on
31 towns, but the town is not unique in dealing with that problem. He said the Council's
32 fiscal responsibility is to manage what you can. He said the Council is finally hearing
33 from people. He pointed out most budget activity takes place between Thanksgiving and
34 Christmas, when people are distracted and don't truly know and understand what's going
35 on with the budget process until they get their tax bill. He said the school board doesn't
36 do its Public Hearing on their budget until mid-January. He said the Council does have
37 the time to reconsider the budget. He said the Council can control spending and
38 development. He said he sent a letter last spring urging the Council to make increasing
39 the tax base its highest priority. He said the Councilors as leaders can express this town
40 needs to develop. He said Durham needs to tone down spending and doesn't need to have
41 the best of everything. Of those 1,927 homes whose tax bills went up more than 3
42 percent, the average increase was 12-plus %. That increase applies across a broad swath
43 of residents, he asked the Council to reconsider how many are affected. He said his best
44 estimate for next year is an 8% increase. He said he thinks there are opportunities to
45 delay, trim and reconsider some bigger items, and that he thinks the Council should not
46 feel like it has to pass the budget at this meeting.

1 **Heather Smith, 195 Piscataqua Road**, thanked all who came out to speak, saying it's a
2 lot of numbers and emotion, tugging at the heart strings. She said her family is the fourth
3 generation on the property at Little Bay Farm. She said these increases are so difficult
4 and the minute she saw the bill she thought she was not going to be able to leave the
5 property to the grandkids. She said her family tries to be a really good neighbor, keeping
6 the property open to the public, creating a path down to the bay, keeping it mowed,
7 wanting people to enjoy the property. She asked who will the town be bringing in if
8 people like them can't stay. She said they don't have the money for the taxes. She said
9 she wants the town to think about properties like hers, asking how many farms will the
10 town lose, because farmers are property rich, but financially poor. She said the increases
11 are not sustainable.

12
13 **Larry Brown, 112 Piscataqua Road**, said he feels like the town is hearing from two
14 groups: long-term residents and a group that moved in around 2019 and 2020. He said
15 he's in the second group. He said his relatives don't want to move to town because the
16 taxes are going to be crazy. He said his taxes had been stable when he bought the house,
17 but he has seen a 60% increase. He said the town's welcoming nature, which he imagined
18 when he moved here, hasn't turned out to be the case except at the dump. He said the
19 constant increases, projects, buffer regulations and serious government overreach into
20 what a property owner can or can't do with a property has him rethinking his
21 commitment to stay in Durham. He's retired, volunteers for Gather and other
22 organizations, and has made important community commitments, but now is making no
23 commitment to staying here. He said he just doesn't know if it's worth it, and said that's
24 what the situation is doing to new people in town.

25
26 Chair Friedman said he appreciated all the comments from the public and the Council
27 will take them seriously. Chair Pro Tem Needell noted the Town Charter dictates the
28 Council has to vote on a budget by Dec. 31 or the budget that the Administrator proposed
29 on Oct. 31 goes into effect. Councilor Burton noted there is an election coming up next
30 year with four seats open on the Council and encouraged residents to get involved in
31 town government.

32 33 **IX. Unanimous Consent Agenda**

- 34
35 A. Shall the Town Council, upon Recommendation of the Town Assessor and Administrator,
36 Approve FY2026 Property Tax Abatements at the Local Level or for Outstanding Appeals
37 Before the New Hampshire Superior Court For Tax Years 2023 and 2024, Totaling
38 \$460,318.44?
- 39 B. Shall the Town Council adopt **Resolution #2025-21** approving a new site lease agreement
40 with T-Mobile Northeast LLC for 100 Durham Point Road and authorize the
41 Administrator to sign all relevant documents?
- 42 C. Shall the Town Council, Upon Recommendation of the Administrator, Award a Contract to
43 T-Ford Construction of Georgetown MA in an amount not to exceed \$1,517,099 for
44 Construction Improvements of the Phase 2 Wagon Hill Farm Living Shoreline Project?
- 45 D. Shall the Town Council, Upon Recommendation of the Administrator, Award a Contract
46 to Streamworks of Madbury, NH in an amount not to exceed \$461,570 for Engineering

1 Services, Monitoring and Inspection Related to the Phase 2 Wagon Hill Farm Living
2 Shoreline Project?

3 E. Shall the Town Council provide its advice and consent to the Administrator for the
4 changing of all construction related permit fees and placement of said fees in the Town-
5 wide Master Fee Schedule?

6 F. Shall the Town Council Adopt **Resolution #2025-22** approving the Administrator's
7 proposed FY 2026 Operating, Capital, and Special Fund Budgets, and the 2026-2035
8 Capital Improvement Plan, as amended.

9
10 Chair Pro Tem Needell asked to pull Item F from the Unanimous Consent Agenda.
11 Councilor Ford asked to pull Item E. Councilor Welsh asked to pull Item B.

12
13 ***Chair Friedman MOVED that the Town Council approve Items A, C and D.*** He read
14 the items. ***Chair Pro Tem Needell SECONDED the motion.***

15
16 ***The motion PASSED on a unanimous roll call vote of 9-0.***

17
18 Councilor Friedrichs clarified that the money just voted on for the Wagon Hill Farm
19 Living Shoreline Project is covered by grant money, except for \$15,000 in town funds,
20 and is not coming out of the town's budget. Administrator Selig confirmed that is the
21 case.

22
23 Chair Friedman recommended the Town Council take no action on Item B so the town
24 can have additional negotiations and get more information on the matter so there will be
25 no motion and no vote. Councilors agreed with him.

26
27 On Item E, Councilor Ford had a question on the new permit fees. He asked for an
28 explanation. Code Enforcement Officer Audrey Cline joined the meeting on Zoom and
29 explained the fine for work without a permit was 200 percent of the expected permit fee
30 in addition to the cost of the permit fee. Many other towns have a base amount that is
31 charged. She said she is proposing a minimum fine of \$100 for work done without a
32 permit. They discussed the wording of the existing fine and decided it should be "\$100 or
33 200 percent of the construction permit fee whichever is greater."

34
35 ***Councilor Ford MOVED the Town Council adopt Item E, amended for the wording***
36 ***change, and read the motion. Councilor Grant SECONDED the motion. The motion***
37 ***PASSED on a unanimous roll call vote of 9-0.***

38
39 Councilor Friedrichs thanked Ms. Cline for finding ways to increase revenue.

40
41 Chair Pro Tem Needell addressed Item F. She said she will vote no on the budget as it is
42 written because at last week's meeting the Council reduced the funding for the public
43 library's adult and children's print collections by half. That is a reduction of \$7,575 out
44 of \$15,150, which is just \$3 more than what was approved in its 2025 budget.
45

1 She read a statement of her reasons including that tactile physical book use is important
2 for children especially picture books. She said children choose books by holding them,
3 literally judging them by their cover. She said the use of digital platforms for reading
4 increases screen time, and brings up the question of access equity. Digital reading
5 requires tablets, phones, or computers, and stable internet access. Some families can't
6 afford these, leading to inequity. She said Ms. Bass has said there has been no decline in
7 requests for physical books despite digital formats. Library visits increased from 63,000
8 in 2022 to 69,000 in 2024. The Inter Library Loan program isn't a substitute because
9 books don't circulate until six months after publication.

10
11 She understands the need to make budget cuts but can't support reducing the children's
12 book budget by half. She is only defending the children, and not speaking about the cut
13 to the adults' book budget as they can speak for themselves against the cut. She would be
14 making a motion to reconsider the cut to the children's budget; however, the motion must
15 be made by a Councilor that voted in the affirmative for that amendment. She said she
16 hopes one of them will make a motion to reconsider.

17
18 Councilor Welsh said the Council cut line items in the budget but it's up to the
19 department head to decide where the cut is made. He said after hearing that people will
20 lose their homes because of taxes, it doesn't seem appropriate to add items back into the
21 budget. Councilors discussed options that perhaps Needell could support. They discussed
22 how they made cuts to every department, and some proposed cuts weren't made.
23 Hardships people are experiencing were discussed, and the question whether cuts can be
24 restored in subsequent budgets. Councilor Welsh made the point that taxpayers haven't
25 seen the effect of this 2026 budget on their bill yet and won't until December 2026 and
26 the town cannot add new things into the budget.

27
28 Administrator Selig found the vote on the library: Councilors Welsh, Friedman,
29 Friedrichs and Vogt voted aye last week. Councilor Needell said she is looking only for
30 \$5,775 to be restored.

31
32 Chair Friedman spoke about how the Council has been working and continues to work on
33 increasing development downtown and elsewhere in town. He said the town is seeing
34 signs that are those that would like to come to town with the West Edge project and the
35 121 Tech Center. He said many members of the Council are definitely focused on
36 revenue and lessening the burden on existing property owners.

37
38 Council Register said the budget fails to consider the third Town Council goal of
39 investing in new growth downtown. He said the town needs to create a new plan to
40 improve the viability and attractiveness of the town's downtown.

41
42 ***Councilor Register MOVED the Town Council add an ad hoc budget line item for***
43 ***funding a study to revise and update Durham's plan for downtown. Councilor Vogt***
44 ***SECONDED the motion.*** Councilor Register proposed using the \$1,200 per councilor
45 stipend for 2026 to fund the study.
46

1 The Council discussed how this is outside of the town's planning process, the absence of
2 a proposal, doesn't include an amount of money or a deadline. Councilor Register said
3 this would be packaged charette, which he's mentioned before. Councilor Friedrichs said
4 ze appreciates the intent, but is concerned the cost would be \$25,000 to \$100,000 budget
5 item, and that the Town Planner has spoken against it, more consensus and details are
6 needed. They discussed how a plan process can delay changes, and how a commonsense
7 position on zoning is needed quickly, and how it may conflict with the Master Plan
8 process. Some recent improvements have occurred and more can happen soon; they
9 reviewed new developments that are coming online. They discussed the need for an
10 economic development position or creating an economic development group.

11
12 ***The motion FAILED on a roll call vote of 2-7.***

13
14 ***Councilor Friedrichs - nay, Councilor Vogt - aye, Councilor Grant - nay, Councilor***
15 ***Welsh - nay, Councilor Register - aye, Councilor Ford - nay, Councilor Burton - nay,***
16 ***Chair Pro Tem Needell - nay, Chair Friedman - nay.***

17
18 It was decided the Economic Development Council would be discussed during the
19 Roundtable.

20
21 Councilor Welsh asked if there was support among any of the Councilors to make further
22 cuts to the budget. Councilors had a mixed response.

23
24 Councilor Welsh asked if there was any support for asking Administrator Selig to take
25 \$50,000 more out of the budget. Friedrichs said ze would support that.

26
27 ***Council Welsh MOVED to have Administrator Selig cut another \$50,000 out of the***
28 ***budget given what the Councilors have heard from residents. Councilor Friedrichs***
29 ***SECONDED the motion.***

30
31 Councilors discussed the merits of making cuts this way and the difficulty of saying cut
32 an amount with no guidance from the Council. Councilor Burton said he will vote against
33 the budget because the library should not be cut, but he can't make a motion because he
34 didn't vote in the affirmative. Councilor Needell asked if people would support cutting
35 the curbside pickup of trash. Councilor Welsh said he thought they wouldn't and that it is
36 a basic service that the town needs to provide. She said she suggested it because it's very
37 specific and it would give guidance for the cuts. Councilor Friedrichs there would be a lot
38 of costs to dropping curbside pickup. Councilor Friedrichs suggested decommissioning
39 streetlights to save electricity and moving \$50,000 out of the IT budget, which affects
40 departments equally.

41
42 Administrator Selig asked if under the open motion he would have the flexibility to
43 revisit items proposed and rejected for cuts. They agreed everything is on the table to
44 look at.

45
46 ***The motion PASSED on a roll call vote of 5-4.***

1
2 *Chair Pro Tem Needell - nay; Councilor Burton - nay; Councilor Ford - aye;*
3 *Councilor Register - nay; Councilor Welsh - aye; Councilor Grant - aye; Councilor*
4 *Vogt - nay; Councilor Friedrichs - aye; Chair Friedman - aye.*

5
6 *Chair Friedman MOVED to adopt Item F as amended tonight. Councilor Friedrichs*
7 *SECONDED the motion.*
8

9 Chair Friedman asked if there was any further discussion and there was none.

10
11 **The motion PASSED on a roll call vote of 5-4.**

12
13 *Councilor Welsh - aye, Councilor Register - nay; Councilor Ford - aye; Councilor*
14 *Burton - nay; Chair Pro Tem Needell - nay; Chair Friedman - aye; Councilor*
15 *Friedrichs - aye; Councilor Vogt - nay; Councilor Grant - aye.*
16

17 Administrator Selig said he will revisit the budget line items, find \$50,000 and
18 incorporate it into the adopted budget.
19

20 **X. Committee Appointments - None**

21
22 Councilors took a five-minute recess.
23

24 **XI. Presentation Items**

25 **A. Presentation by Dwight Trueblood and Neil Slepian on the Conservation**
26 **Commission's work on making changes to the Wetland Conservation and Shoreland**
27 **Protection Overlay District Ordinances.**
28

29 Mr. Slepian and Mr. Trueblood gave an overview presentation of a proposed shoreland
30 protection overlay district, which if approved will replace two current ordinances
31 regulating the wetland conservation district and the shoreland protection district.
32

33 Mr. Slepian said the proposal is a work in progress and the commission continues to
34 gather feedback. He said the mission of the Conservation Commission by state mandate
35 is to inventory, manage and protect the town's natural resources.
36

37 He asked why update the two ordinances? He said they are redundant with a 75 percent
38 overlap, have been in place since 2006, their language is ambiguous and confusing, they
39 don't reflect the gains in the understanding of climate science and environmental research
40 since then, and they don't address the Natural Resources Master Plan.
41

42 He said the purpose of the new ordinance is to provide guidance to residents and the
43 town, to protect and improve water quality, to improve the breeding habitat of
44 amphibious wildlife, to increase quality and viability of wildlife corridors, and to
45 anticipate and mitigate the effects of sea level rise.
46

1 He said the subcommittee who worked on the proposed overly district included Paul
2 Rasmussen, Councilor Friedrichs, Chair Pro Tem Needell, Chair Trueblood and Vice
3 Chair Slepian and Town Planner Michael Behrendt who worked on it over 15 months and
4 then the Conservation Commission reviews and edited it for 14 months. Mr. Slepian said
5 the expertise involved PHDs in marine science, surface water ecology, experts in
6 forestry, education, engineering, management, fish and wildlife conservation, and he
7 listed the resources they used over the two and a half years.

8
9 He said the new proposal addresses the Natural Resources Master Plan 2015, which said
10 the shoreland and wetland buffers may be inadequate to protect water quality, keeping
11 people informed and educating them, ensure adequate protection from climate change
12 impacts, and the town's lack of an interconnected greenway network and the new
13 ordinance promotes that. He said the ordinance covers from definitions and acronyms to
14 general buffer requirements to enforcement and everything in between. He said all the
15 area's waterways are interconnected. What the town does affects other towns so the town
16 is trying to do its part to keep the waterways clean.

17
18 Mr. Trueblood said The Piscataqua Regional Estuaries State of the Estuaries 2023 report
19 included 22 indicators of environmental health and concluded Great Bay continues to
20 deteriorate with warmer waters, murkier water, rising water, land runoff issues, and
21 increased nitrogen from fertilizers and runoff. He said a way to mitigate these is to
22 increase buffers along the shore and wetlands. He showed an illustration of buffers from
23 30 feet to 330 feet and the varying effects. Durham's current buffer is 125 feet and
24 removes pollutants and lowers water temps, and at 164 feet, it reduces runoff and
25 stabilizes the channel bank. Extending a buffer to 330 feet provides additional habitat for
26 terrestrial wildlife.

27
28 The Conservation Commission after studying this is recommending that the town's
29 buffers be extended for these benefits. He showed a comparison of the proposed new
30 buffers in Durham with the range of buffers in seven towns around Great Bay. They are
31 as follows:

32
33 NHDES buffer 250
34 Tidal Waters: 330 (100 to 300 feet)
35 Surface Waters: 150 to 200 feet (25 to 150 feet)
36 Tidal Wetlands: 330 feet (50 to 150 feet)
37 Inland Wetlands 30 to 200 feet (50 to 100 feet)

38
39 He said flooding issues as water rises don't prevent building, but the ordinance requires
40 the applicant to use a higher level of practices to protect the environment. He showed an
41 illustration of how the areas of Cedar Point, Durham Point, Colony Cove area and the
42 Lamprey River near Doe Farm would be affected.

43
44 He reviewed the uses that would be permitted outright or would need some level of
45 review by the Conservation Commission and Planning Board. Single family homes

1 would be permitted as a conditional use in the buffer, but set back 150 feet the from
2 reference line or beyond the buffer whichever is less.

3
4 He said they are now addressing public feedback, and then will hand the proposal off to
5 the Planning Board for review and approval. After that, it will move to the Town Council.
6 He said they're received a lot of feedback and have created three small working groups to
7 address three parts of the ordinance.

8
9 Mr. Trueblood said many property owners are worried the ability to do things on their
10 own property is being hindered in the proposal. He said not everyone is convinced wider
11 buffers work better. He said the science isn't as rigorous as they expected. He said a lot
12 of science has found the nitrogen in the bay is mostly runoff from the land, not
13 wastewater treatment. He said people don't like the vegetation management rules, and the
14 prevention of mowing that impairs the view. He said they've had really good
15 conversations with people from the public and who have submitted written comments,
16 and the effect of the ordinance on property values. He said he hopes to have the
17 Conservation Commission meetings done by mid-January, to have the ordinance revised,
18 and to provide the new version to the Planning Board by spring.

19
20 Councilors discussed the current ordinance and the proposed, and why is Durham doing
21 this first. Mr. Trueblood said Durham has been proud to be in a leadership role on
22 environmental protection. He said if the bay continues to deteriorate, properties will
23 deteriorate, too, and it's important to protect that resource as much as the town can. He
24 said it creates wider buffers, but residents feel the town is being heavy handed. Some
25 changes they're looking at is to be more flexible in the management of lawns.

26
27 They discussed how Exeter has a good plan and they are studying to see if there's
28 anything they can adopt, and other examples of feedback received and concerns.

29
30 Chair Friedman thanked Mr. Trueblood and Mr. Slepian for their report.

31
32 **XII. Unfinished Business - None**

33
34 **XIII. Councilor and Town Administrator Roundtable**

35
36 **Councilor Register - Oyster River School Board**

37 He said the school board met Dec. 3, and has been working on the budget, which is
38 predicted to increase by 5 percent. He said there is contention with cuts under
39 consideration, and the next meeting is Wednesday, Dec. 17.

40
41 **Councilor Register - Durham Business Association**

42 He said the DBA met Dec. 10 and held a holiday window decoration contest. The
43 business winners were third place, Amy's Frame Shop; second place, The Works; and
44 first place was Durham House of Pizza. It will meet Jan. 14 at 5:15 p.m. at Clark's. He
45 said they are gaining momentum in the organization's structure.

46

1 **Councilor Register - Agricultural Commission**

2 The Agricultural Commission has met since the last Council meeting.

3
4 **Councilor Register - Strafford County Commissioners**

5 Council Register was out of the country and has nothing to report.

6
7 **Councilor Register - Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast**

8 He said the organization is recognizing the Durham Housing Task Force with an award
9 for its efforts in increasing density and development. He said he attended a Carsey
10 Institute policy hour and the director also gave kudos to Durham for its efforts.

11
12 **Councilor Register**

13 He displayed a drone which he acquired during his recent trip to Ukraine and talked
14 about the role of drones and their use in the conflict there.

15
16 **Councilor Welsh - Land Stewardship Subcommittee**

17 He reported the subcommittee met on Dec. 10, and discussed what the kiosk signs at
18 town lands need to include, an accessibility study for Jackson's Landing, setting
19 deadlines for projects, and the priorities for the next year.

20
21 **Councilor Grant - Planning Board**

22 She reported the Planning Board met Dec. 10th and approved a subdivision on Jenkins
23 Court, Nos. 12, 14, and 16, one lot was split in half and one across the street. She said
24 there was a lot and Dame Road and Durham Point Road, which was subdivided into
25 three. She said the Planning Board reviewed the building height limit proposal and the
26 guidance from the Town Council. She said there will be modifications from the Town
27 Council version, a Public Hearing, and it will come back to the Town Council on Jan. 14.

28
29 **Councilor Vogt - Energy Committee**

30 He reported the committee will meet Jan. 6 at 7 p.m. He invited the public to attend.

31
32 **Councilor Vogt - Human Rights Commission**

33 He said the Human Rights Commission will next meet Feb. 12 at 3:30 p.m.

34
35 **Councilor Friedrichs**

36 Ze addressed a few things that came up during the Public Comments. If a resident
37 believes their assessment is incorrect, ze said they should request an abatement, and bring
38 data and evidence including comparable property sales that support their case, showing
39 what makes their property different or hiring a realtor to attest to its market value.

40
41 Ze recalled a 26 Mathes Cove Road resident who spoke during Public Comment and said
42 Durham has the strictest building and energy zone coding. Ze said since the State
43 Legislature changed the law Durham is not allowed to have a different energy zoning
44 code than the rest of the state so that is not true. According to the Durham Landowners
45 Association, that energy zone code requirements actually saved them money so it is not
46 something driving up the cost of development in Durham.

1
2 Ze said in terms of the shoreland protection overlay district, Exeter has had a 300 foot set
3 back from tidal waters since 1998 and it hasn't discouraged development in other areas of
4 town so that is not one of the factors creating a problem in Durham.

5
6 Ze said ze was glad to see the public engaged and raising these questions about the tax
7 increase. Ze said development isn't the only form of revenue, and cited several creative
8 ideas the departments have had to create more revenue such as sharing positions with
9 Madbury, permitting overnight parking, donations and fundraising for services. They also
10 have been successful in finding grant funding, which is more difficult right now.

11
12 Ze said ze disagrees that the town has not been transparent during the budget process, and
13 there could be different and better ways of presenting the information for residents so it is
14 communicated and understood more easily. Ze encouraged residents to bring questions
15 and ask for answers from town staff.

16
17 Ze said town's 2026 budget has a 15 to 16 percent increase over 2025's budget. Ze said
18 the best estimate for next year's increase in the tax bill is 9 percent, which would be
19 represented in the December 2026 bill.

20
21 Councilors discussed how Exeter has frontage on the Swampscott River and not the Great
22 Bay, and has many public developments along the river, not individual residences.
23 Durham has many more individual waterfront homeowners so the proposed buffer affects
24 more individual taxpayers.

25
26 Chair Friedman asked Administrator Selig how an economic development group, which
27 was brought up earlier in the meeting, would work. Administrator Selig said it is
28 something that can be considered going into 2026. He said the town did have one in the
29 past, which went into an inactive phase because there wasn't a lot of work for it, and a
30 part-time economic development director who was doing what the committee had been
31 doing. The position was eliminated for cost savings and opportunity reasons. He said he
32 thinks it's time to revisit the committee. He said they would need to take some time to
33 research how the committee was moved to inactive and activate it again, and he said he
34 would bring the information to a Council meeting. Councilor Burton said it's crucial to
35 have a person who is not official that business people can pitch ideas to and be an
36 advocate for them going into the official process.

37
38 **Chair Friedman - Parks and Recreation Committee**

39
40 He said the Parks and Recreation Committee meets Dec. 16.

41
42 **Chair Pro Tem Needell - Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee**

43 She reported the committee hasn't met since the last Town Council meeting, but will
44 meet Dec. 17.

45
46 **Councilor Burton**

1 He said the Legislature takes up the governor's vetoes on Dec. 17. He said the Education
2 Committee will be taking up how the governor will comply with two Supreme Court
3 decisions about funding.

4
5 **Councilor Ford**

6 He reported his subcommittee of the Conservation Commission will meet Wednesday,
7 Dec. 17 at 10:30 a.m. and is working on the public comments it has received.

8
9 He added that Durham would not utilize force and violence to collect taxes and noted it is
10 done with a tax lien.

11
12 **Administrator Selig**

13 He said he's been spending a lot of time on the budget and not other things. He said he
14 feels it's important when the Town Council gets into goal-setting season next year that it
15 establishes a firm budget goal and he will bring back a budget that meets that goal with
16 all the consequences. He feels that will be a more streamlined process.

17
18 He thanked everyone for all their time during the budget process. He said the budget is a
19 statement of values, not everyone agrees on those, but he respects the time and the
20 process, and he thanked the public for all the feedback it provided. He said it's important
21 to hear from voices the town doesn't often hear from. He thanked Business Manager Gail
22 Jablonski and the business office, the department heads, and all the committee and
23 commission members, saying he appreciates the time they've spent on the budget. He
24 said the need to work on economic development, which he's talked about for years, hit
25 this year. He said it's important for everyone to take a step back and evaluate what
26 decisions need to be made to ensure the town has all the characteristics of a town
27 residents agree on and is a town everyone can afford to live in. It will be a process of give
28 and take, and it's important for people to approach it with that give and not a "my way or
29 the highway" attitude. Residents and town staff need to listen and find common ground.
30 He said he felt during the budget process that that was achieved.

31
32 **XIV. New Business - None**

33
34 **XV. Nonpublic Session (if required)**

35
36 **XVI. Adjourn (NLT 10:30 PM)**

37
38 ***Councilor Welsh MOVED to adjourn the meeting. Councilor Grant SECONDED***
39 ***the motion. The motion PASSED on a unanimous roll call vote of 9-0.***

40
41 The meeting was adjourned at 10:26 p.m.

42
43 *- Jane Murphy, Minutes Taker*