

DRAFT
DURHAM TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET & CIP WORK SESSION
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2025
DURHAM TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Joseph Friedman, Chair Pro Tem Sally Needell, Councilor Darrell Ford, Councilor Curtis Register, 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)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilor Wayne Burton

OTHERS PRESENT: Town Administrator Todd Selig, Conservation Commission Vice Chair Neil Slepian, Land Stewardship Coordinator Veronique Ludington, Public Works Director Richard Reine, Tax Assessor Darcy Freer, Town Clerk Rachel Deane, Parks and Recreation Director Rachel Gasowski, Churchill Ice Rink Manager Bill Page, Information Technology Manager Luke Vincent, Business Manager Gail Jablonski, Library Director Sheryl Bass, Library Assistant Director Audra Lewis, Library Board of Trustees Chair Robin Glasser, Police Chief Rene Kelley, Police Deputy Chief Jack Dalton, Police Capt. John Lavoie, Fire Chief Dave Emanuel, Fire Deputy Chief Robert Atwater

I. Call to Order

Chair Friedman called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

II. Roll Call of Members

Councilor Heather Grant, Councilor Robin Vogt, Chair Joseph Friedman, Chair Pro Tem Sally Needell, Councilor Darrell Ford, Councilor Curtis Register, Councilor Carden Welsh

III. Approval of Agenda

Chair Friedman gave an overview of the meeting's format. He said Councilors will take turns asking questions and talking about the budget with town department heads in attendance. There can be discussion at any point. The public will comment at the Public Hearing scheduled for Monday, Nov. 17.

He asked Councilors if they are thinking of proposing any amendments to the budget to have them ready for the Nov. 17 meeting. He said no amendments will be considered until the public has had a chance to weigh in at the Public Hearing at that meeting. He said there will be no motions about the budget made at this work session.

Depending on the timing of the meeting on Nov. 17, after the Public Hearing is complete, the Council will deliberate and possibly vote on the budget. If more time is needed, the Council will continue deliberations at its Monday, Dec. 1 meeting. Then there must be a 14-day period before the Council approves the budget, which would then take place at the Monday, Dec. 15 meeting. If this does not get done by the Dec. 15th meeting, the

1 Council may decide to hold special sessions, but if not, the default budget, which is the
2 budget the Town Administrator has proposed, will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2026.

3
4 Chair Pro Tem Needell noted the Council could add a meeting on Monday, Dec. 8. Chair
5 Friedman noted the additional meeting may depend on how much feedback is received
6 during the Public Hearing on Nov. 17.

7
8 **IV. Discussion and deliberation on the Administrator's proposed FY 2026 Operating,**
9 **Capital and Special Fund Budgets and the 2026-2033 Capital Improvement Plan.**

10
11 Chair Pro Tem Needell announced an intention to file an amendment on Nov. 17 because
12 the Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee voted to withdraw its request for
13 \$5,000.

14
15 Councilor Friedrichs arrived at the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

16
17 Councilor Welsh said he thought it would be good to begin by noting the parameters of
18 where the town is with this budget, announcing he has seven points to make.

19
20 He said the Council has discussed making Durham more affordable for families, the
21 middle class and the workforce, and that the town has made this much more difficult by
22 increasing the town's property taxes faster than inflation. Since 2022 under that proposed
23 budget, he said the Durham property tax has increased 7.9% each year and inflation has
24 increased 2.9% each year.

25
26 He said adding to the problem is the town is not growing at a rate consistent with its
27 budget so the town is putting more of a tax burden on each of its property owners. He
28 said the town's valuation has increased less than 1% per year. In addition, he said, UNH
29 is shrinking and is down more than 1,000 students on the Durham campus. UNH expects
30 this decline to continue until 2031, he said, and is making significant budget cuts and
31 decreasing program offerings to students. While the impact of this on Durham is
32 uncertain, he said, it's likely not good.

33
34 He said the 2026 proposed budget requests a greater, even more rapid increase in taxes.
35 The taxes that need to be raised are up 18.6% while inflation is predicted to be 2.3%. This
36 increase will impact some homeowners and business owners more than others. The recent
37 reassessment saw the average property go up 21% in valuation, he said, but some went up
38 as high as 65%. He said even if the town doesn't have any increase in expenses or taxes
39 this year, taxpayers will already be hit pretty hard.

40
41 He said this increase is expected to continue in future years: 6% next year, and 12% the
42 year after vs. the expected inflation of 2% to 3%. He said the town tends to bond larger
43 projects and the payments will go up \$2.2 million in 2027 to \$3.7 million in 2028, and if
44 the Council approves all the requested capital, there'll be a huge problem in the future.
45

1 He explained that once something is added to a budget, it is rare for it to be removed
2 later. So, if the Council approves an expense, it's likely approving a long-term cost to the
3 town. He said it's best to add people or programs in a year the town has grown so it can
4 support that growth. He gave an example of the years when a lot of student housing was
5 built downtown and the town was able to create the new town hall, the new police
6 building and the new library, which he said was appropriate because the town had a
7 growing tax base. He said it does not now and Councilors have to be careful about what
8 is added. He said he'd like the town's department heads to take this as a managerial
9 challenge, and think of using resources as efficiently as possible because he feels it's not
10 fair to ask the taxpayers for an 18% increase in taxes.

11
12 Councilor Friedrichs said ze agrees with Councilor Welsh's concerns. Ze said it was
13 estimated for every \$500,000 of assessed value, taxpayers would see a \$535 increase in
14 just the municipal portion of the tax rate. Ze said it is also important for Councilors to
15 understand if the town is facing an increase in the school and county taxes, and how
16 much each would be. Ze said ze's talked with residents and even wealthy ones feel this
17 year's increase is high and tough to manage. Ze said increases like these have landlords
18 writing into leases that increased taxes fall on renters, which results in high rents, and
19 affects the viability of businesses. Ze is concerned the town's population is decreasing
20 and the town needs to consider offering fewer services. With a year-round population of
21 about 6,000 to 6,500, ze said the town offers extraordinary services compared to other
22 towns in the Seacoast.

23
24 Councilor Vogt said he will propose a budget amendment to cut Councilors' pay from
25 \$1,500 annually to \$1,000 annually as he feels Councilors should take part in reducing
26 expenses with the rest of the town.

27
28 Councilor Needell said this has been proposed in the past, but the difficulty of changing
29 the Town Charter, where the amount is designated, has discouraged the Council in the
30 past. Councilor Vogt said if that's what it takes, the Councilors should do it.

31
32 Chair Friedman noted the Councilor pay has never increased and said he believes it is
33 needed to attract younger, diverse residents to serve on the Council, noting some towns
34 pay \$10,000. Councilor Friedrichs said in the past the incentive of offering compensation
35 for dependent care was proposed. Ze said ze agreed with Councilor Vogt's sentiment that
36 Councilors don't serve for personal gain, but is wary of the Statehouse model where so
37 little compensation creates distorted representation because not everyone can afford to
38 serve. Councilor Vogt pushed back on the idea and said state legislators are leaving the
39 Legislature to take on municipal roles because they offer more compensation.

40
41 Councilor Register said this discussion was not appropriate at this time and didn't want to
42 waste the waiting department heads' time with it.

43
44 **Conservation Commission, Neil Slepian, Vice Chair**

45 Councilor Welsh asked about the commission's request to move the part-time land
46 stewardship coordinator position to full-time. He said it's a difficult budget to consider

1 adding anyone, and perhaps the Council should be thinking about subtracting positions.
2 He said he thinks current Coordinator Veronique Ludington does a wonderful job and he
3 is an environmentalist, but it's the wrong time to add hours to this position.
4

5 Mr. Slepian said it's a misconception that the town doesn't have a full-time Land
6 Stewardship Coordinator, it is just not paying for one. He said Ms. Ludington works full-
7 time for part-time pay because of the large workload. Mr. Slepian said 32.5% of town
8 land is preserved public land, twice as much as other towns. He said Durham is unique in
9 that so much land has been given to the town with the understanding it would steward it.
10 He said the town didn't have a Land Stewardship Coordinator until 2017, but since then
11 has added hundreds of acres and miles of trails.
12

13 He said the commission is requesting \$24,900 for 2026 as the new hours begin April 1,
14 which would have a very small impact per resident and doesn't add to the tax burden.
15

16 Councilor Welsh noted land stewardship is a passion for many, and it's their choice how
17 much they work. He said the amount the full-time position will add to the 2027 budget is
18 \$87,000 total.
19

20 Mr. Slepian agreed it is a choice, but the work was done because that is what was needed.
21 He gave the example of a field trip Ms. Ludington coordinated with 70 Oyster River
22 seventh graders visiting a town land to pull invasive species, and how even after three
23 hours of their work, it made such a small dent in the problem at the site. Stewarding land
24 properly means protecting native species and eliminating invasives. He noted the net hit
25 of the position going full-time is about \$50,000 annually.
26

27 Councilor Needell asked if there is potential grant funding for the position to make it
28 more self-sustaining. Mr. Slepian said there are grants available, but making the time for
29 Ms. Ludington to research and apply for grants is a challenge. He estimated it takes 40 to
30 60 hours per grant, but he said he does believe if she had the time, there is enough grant
31 funding available to pay for the salary and even fund projects.
32

33 Councilor Needell observed the coordinator has been asked to do some of the work Land
34 Stewardship Subcommittee members used to do, and that expectations have grown as the
35 town's properties have grown.
36

37 Mr. Slepian said the turnover the part-time coordinator's position has seen is because
38 there's too much to do all the time, and especially in the time they are paid for.
39

40 Councilor Friedrichs asked about overlap between this role and some of what Public
41 Works does, from controlling invasives in town right of ways to infrastructure.
42 Discussion continued about the possibility and how there is a lot of coordination already.
43

44 Councilor Register said he supports the move to full-time, but asked the Conservation
45 Commission to prioritize trail maintenance with the extra time as it oversees the

1 coordinator. Mr. Slepian said he meets with the coordinator weekly or every other week
2 to review a project priority list.

3
4 Councilor Register said well-kept trails attract visitors and residents, encourage people to
5 spend more time in Durham, which helps business. This ties to Council goals 2 through 7,
6 about 90% of its goals. It also encourages families to leave land in trust to the town.

7
8 Councilor Grant said she supports going to full-time because it's not right or legitimate to
9 have an employee work more hours than they are paid for.

10
11 Councilor Vogt raised the issue of public lands being vulnerable and how the federal
12 Department of the Interior is looking at redefining the public lands rule. He asked the
13 subcommittee to look at state and municipal public land rules and thinks having a full-
14 time position might make the town stronger in the face of changes. Mr. Slepian said he
15 didn't know if the coordinator or the subcommittee had time to research the issue, but
16 thanked Councilor Vogt for raising it.

17
18 Administrator Selig said the town is at a point where it has to decide which way to go,
19 and he hears residents wanting more, taking more initiative, wanting more resources and
20 he feels the full-time position is a worthy ask even though it's a tough budget year. He
21 said the changes in several positions this year have resulted in a net decrease in the
22 town's head count of .25 of an FTE or a quarter of an employee.

23
24 **Tax Assessor Darcy Freer**

25 Councilor Welsh asked if Ms. Freer could provide the range of how residential
26 reassessments changed from the highest to the lowest. Ms. Freer said she is working on
27 her presentation to the Council on Nov. 17, which will show the shift of the tax burden
28 due to the market and will include the information requested.

29
30 Councilor Grant asked about \$17,000 for a utility appraiser consultant. Ms. Freer said the
31 contract ends April 1, 2027, and that the town is under appeal so wants to get through that
32 before making a change. She said the RSAs have simplified the methodology on the
33 utilities, and a consultant may not be necessary anymore. When asked, she said the
34 town's total utility assessment is \$114 million in the 2026 budget, up from \$103 million
35 in 2025. Councilors discussed how there are only two utility appraiser vendors in the
36 state, that the utility appeal is expected to be decided in January and the student housing
37 abatement appeals are nearing settlement. Ms. Freer said the funds to pay those are in a
38 holding pattern so they'll be available when the 2026 budget is approved.

39
40 **Code Enforcement, Building Inspector Audrey Cline**

41
42 Administrator Selig reminded the Council that Ms. Cline retired earlier this year and is
43 now working part-time on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and that means fewer hours out
44 inspecting and less availability to respond quickly to requests.

45

1 Councilor Needell asked about the Riverwoods inspection expense of \$15,000, and how
2 for some inspections the town hires a third party and pays, and then Riverwoods
3 reimburses the town. Councilors discussed new laws that apply if the inspection office is
4 backlogged and an applicant wants to move a project along. Ms. Cline said the building
5 code requires certain inspectors outside the scope of a regular town inspector's expertise.
6

7 Administrator Selig said Riverwoods won't begin construction until 2027 so not much of
8 this will affect the 2026 budget. Ms. Cline said earthwork should begin next summer.
9

10 Councilors discussed the difficulty of training a brand new full-time person if
11 construction activity does pick up. Administrator Selig said the town would revisit the
12 timing, but doesn't see activity increasing so part-time should be sufficient.
13

14 **Planning Department, Town Planner Michael Behrendt**

15

16 Administrator Selig noted the town's Master Plan is 10 years old and due for an update.
17 He noted there is no money allocated in the 2026 budget for a Master Plan process or a
18 comprehensive downtown study many residents have said the town needs to do as it tries
19 to revitalize the downtown business district. He said he hopes to kick off a Master Plan
20 process in 2027.
21

22 Mr. Behrendt said he plans to retire in 2027 depending on how projects are going at the
23 time and believes the next planner should oversee the Master Plan process. Administrator
24 Selig said he'd like some overlap with Mr. Behrendt covering the day to day and a new
25 planner working on the Master Plan. Administrator Selig said Mr. Behrendt and he are
26 going to meet with Jen Czynsz, executive director of the Strafford Regional Planning
27 Commission, to talk about the Master Plan process.
28

29 Councilor Friedrichs said ze is wary of paying the existing planner, a new planner and a
30 Master Plan contractor all at once. Councilor Grant cautioned housing needs and
31 conservation will always be in conflict and it's difficult to balance those needs.
32

33 Councilor Friedrichs asked why part-time wages for a college student to do
34 administrative work were added if the town is in a downtick in development.
35 Mr. Behrendt said it is 15 hours per week for the student because Tracey Cutler is one
36 administrative assistant shared between Planning, Building and Assessing, and it's very
37 demanding. Councilor Friedrichs suggested the offices consider closing to the public one
38 day a week as the Town Clerk's Office has. Councilor Welsh asked Ms. Jablonski to look
39 into the travel and mileage reimbursement line items in the budget since they seem high.
40

41 Councilor Friedrichs said the work could also be reprioritized instead of closing.
42 Councilor Welsh said that's true of the whole budget. The town needs to do a
43 reprioritization of how things are done.
44

45 Councilors asked about the cost of the offsite storage of documents, and Administrator
46 Selig said he will look into if there's another appropriate space in a town building.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Rachel Deane

Chair Friedman brought up Ms. Deane's idea from a couple years back of making the Wagon Hill farmhouse and barn a wedding venue and she said she would look into the possibility. Currently, couples have ceremonies on the Wagon Hill property, but the celebration is elsewhere.

Councilor Welsh asked about the increased overtime wages for next year. They're \$700 this year and are budgeted for \$2,000 next year. Ms. Deane responded there are three elections next year, and a lot of changes in voting rules that will require training. When asked about the contract services increase, Ms. Deane said she believes it is the Loomis armored car service which the town uses to make its deposits, and Councilor Welsh asked her to take a look and see if the money can be saved by doing it in-house.

Parks and Recreation, Director Rachel Gasowski

Councilors asked about the \$100,000 cost of resurfacing of the Woodridge tennis and pickleball courts in 2026 and if it can be delayed. Ms. Gasowski said they haven't been done since 2015 and the vendor advised to do it before it got worse and more expensive. Councilor Ford concurred that courts usually need resurfaced every five years. Administrator Selig said he would like to put it off, but doesn't want anyone to get hurt.

Councilor Welsh asked about revenue and expenses. Ms. Gasowski said they are both down from budget projections. She said enrollment in the afterschool program is down.

Administrator Selig said he'd like to see more programming downtown to drive people there. Councilor Friedrichs said it is a priority for the town. Ms. Gasowski said she hopes to do the Rotary entertainment downtown again next summer and will look at new events downtown. She thanked the other departments who helped make these events happen.

Bill Page, manager of the Churchill Ice Rink, said the rink's season is going well and the new Zamboni is much easier to drive in response to Councilor Welsh's question.

He gave a status update on the rink expansion proposal. He said professional work is still being done. Surveyors are working on the final revised survey which will include wetlands delineation and the accurate location of the building. Then it will go back to the civil engineer to finalize the layout of the building, the parking and the playground. Then the plans go to the architect for renderings. He said he feels good progress is being made.

Councilor Friedrichs asked if the building and the fund would still be self-sustaining. Mr. Page said that will be the case once the new building is complete and said he hopes Parks and Recreation could be, too, once they're in the building and utilizing space for off-season programs such as pickleball and roller skating to create revenue. He said the new building would add a community room, which could also generate rental revenue. He said he believes it is a really good plan, it solves the Rec Department facility issue, and he looks forward to sharing it with the Council when it's done.

1 Councilor Welsh said the 2026 budget has \$233,000 in extra cash being generated, with
2 \$150,000 going to the capital projects fund and \$82,000 going to the fund balance. Mr.
3 Page said the budget he works with will end up with a net profit of \$82,000, with
4 expenses at \$330,000 and revenue at \$412,000. Councilor Welsh asked where the
5 \$150,000 comes from. Mr. Page said that is for the potential replacement of the cooling
6 tower if needed and it's moving from the fund balance to the operating budget. Councilor
7 Welsh said that means the fund balance would be down \$68,000. Mr. Page agreed. He
8 said there's a good chance the work he did on the cooling tower will avoid having to
9 replace it before the construction of the new building.

10
11 Administrator Selig said this is the challenge with the rink expansion. The town has a
12 self-sustaining situation now, but if it has to go beyond that with additional debt service,
13 unless the town can raise a lot of private funding or find revenue, then the rink starts to
14 go in the red and the general fund has to subsidize it. Chair Friedman thanked Mr. Page.

15 **Information Technology, Manager Luke Vincent**

16
17
18 Councilor Welsh asked what benefits the town has gotten from the GIS system, which is
19 a computer system that analyzes geographically referenced information. Mr. Vincent and
20 Mr. Reine gave examples of applications that have been developed or are being
21 developed to streamline processes for town staff from records management, trail
22 information, job applications, cemetery management and vehicle speed board information
23 to emergency response and urban planning. They said it streamlines very manual
24 processes and the town decided five years ago to use it to its fullest ability.

25
26 Councilor Welsh said budgets keep going up, expenses keep going up, and the savings
27 people say a software purchase will bring don't seem to materialize. He said he'd hate to
28 see the budgets if the town didn't have the efficiency-producing software, which he said
29 is another way to look at it. Councilor Friedrichs said from 2022 to 2026, the cost of
30 software support and maintenance almost doubles in the budget from \$122,000 to
31 \$229,000 and asked why. Mr. Vincent said much of that is the Office 365 licensing
32 because the town decided to combine separate independent applications into a
33 subscription price. He said there have also been significant increases in support for aging
34 products because reductions in support staff drive the cost up. He said they are starting to
35 move away from some of these aging systems.

36
37 Councilor Friedrichs said full-time wages in 2022 were \$101,000 and will more than
38 double in 2026 at \$217,000. Mr. Vincent said they added an assistant IT director in that
39 time to back up the director and avoid institutional knowledge loss if that person left. He
40 said they help with daily help desk requests and security needs.

41
42 Administrator Selig said in addition to full-time staff, the IT department benefits from
43 volunteer Jay Gooze and when he decides to stop volunteering, that will create a void for
44 the department to keep up with demand.

45

1 Councilor Welsh asked how he feels about the town's cybersecurity and Mr. Vincent said
2 he feels pretty good about it. He said IT has implemented four new policies that the
3 financial auditor identified to ensure the town is doing everything it can to be secure.
4

5 **Business Office, Business Manager Gail Jablonski**

6 Ms. Jablonski said her budget for 2026 is status quo. Administrator Selig asked what the
7 status of the software program the town uses for the budget is. She said it is very old and
8 town accountant Dina Gosselin has been assigned to search for a new software option,
9 which the department will propose for the 2027 budget, and will take one to two years to
10 implement. The current system was bought in 2006 and the vendor has stopped upgrading
11 and only has one employee who can support it. She said other than her retirement she is
12 not proposing any staffing change. Councilors discussed the increase in health and dental
13 premiums, which is 15 percent, far beyond the 3 percent increase for salaries. Councilor
14 Welsh said he hopes GIS and IT help prevent the need to hire any more staff.
15

16 **Public Library, Library Director Sheryl Bass, Library Assistant Director Audra
17 Lewis, Library Board of Trustees Chair Robin Glasser**

18 Councilor Welsh asked if the library needs to be cleaned five days per week at a cost of
19 \$22,000 in 2025 and going up to \$25,000 next year. Ms. Bass said the library gets 69,000
20 visits annually, which is a lot of use. She said cleaning and maintenance is contracted
21 through DPW and library staff are flexible and willing to help. Mr. Reine said it's a new
22 cleaner this year who is doing a much better job. He said he has tracked this and found
23 five days are really needed. Administrator Selig said the Town Hall gets much less use
24 than the library and gets very dirty. Mr. Reine said the library's HVAC system is
25 advanced and the building has a very lean maintenance budget. Councilor Welsh asked
26 about the appeals for donations the library sends out, and Ms. Glasser explained the
27 Trustees have a commitment of \$20,000 annually to the town's operating budget and the
28 appeals raise money for that and the money is also used for unanticipated expenses at the
29 library. She said the Friends of the Library raise money from membership, the book sale
30 and cookie sales for nice-to-have expenses and programs.
31

32 **Department of Public Works, Director Richard Reine**

33 Councilor Needell asked if the cleaning services for 2026 for the Wagon Hill Farmhouse,
34 which are budgeted for \$19,000 starting Jan.1, could be delayed if the project is not done.
35 Mr. Reine said the public restrooms will be ready, but the opening is flexible depending
36 on what the town decides. Administrator Selig said discussion is needed about the
37 farmhouse operations, how the space will be used, when restrooms will be open, the role
38 of the caretaker and how to structure the apartment's lease. Discussion continued about
39 possible rent, and other revenue possibilities to offset costs. Administrator Selig said
40 Caroline Singer is pulling together a group to manage the farmhouse exhibit space.
41 Councilor Grant encouraged the town to think outside the box because the venue could
42 pay for itself. Councilor Welsh asked Ms. Jablonski to draw up a potential income
43 statement for Wagon Hill. Councilor Needell said the annual expense for Wagon Hill is
44 \$40,000, which is significant, and any revenue it could bring in would help.
45

1 Mr. Reine said he got two estimates for curbside collection services for solid waste and
2 recycling, one from Waste Management and the other from Casella Waste, which was
3 significantly less when it came in last week and is not reflected in the projected budget.
4 He said the service would start July 1. The town already has signed the contracts for the
5 toters, which will be distributed to residents. The first six months of the year, he said,
6 they will continue to maintain the aging trucks and that's why there's a high diesel fuel
7 item. He said he does have a contingency truck rental plan and quotes if a town truck
8 breaks down. He said the department has struggled with vacancies and staff absence due
9 to worker's comp issues. He feels the budget has some flexibility because of the positions
10 being left open. Councilor Needell asked if the Town Council would need to vote on the
11 curbside collection contract before Jan. 1. Administrator Selig said that is his
12 recommendation and if there is opposition to it, he'd appreciate knowing early. He said in
13 the past the town thought in-house collection was more cost-effective, but now the cost
14 and the ability of the town to attract staff to do the work makes that not the case. Mr.
15 Reine said the toter program is all set and the vendor encouraged the town to go with
16 larger 96-gallon recycling container, which can handle bulkier items, for an every-other-
17 week single stream recycling pickup. He said if the town goes with outsourcing the
18 collection, it won't move ahead with the EV trucks, will get rid of its trucks, will
19 reorganize the maintenance, solid waste and highway division staff, and not fill two open
20 positions. It was noted the solid waste ordinance may need to be rewritten.

21
22 Councilors discussed outsourcing the collection and how when there's only two vendors
23 costs often rise year over year. Mr. Rein said it's a five-year contract, with a year over
24 year increase tied to CPI with a ceiling of 5% and floor of 3% so he feels the town's
25 exposure is limited. Some disagreed with increasing the days that the transfer station is
26 open to not add cost. Councilors asked about several line items including an increase in
27 printing costs from \$900 in 2025 to \$2,600 in 2026. Mr. Reine and Administrator Selig
28 explained the education around the curbside pick-up process will require mailings to
29 residents so printing will increase. They asked if the town is losing money on the Mr. Fox
30 contract for compost pick-up from the transfer station and Mr. Reine said it is, but that
31 being able to bring compost to the transfer station is popular with many residents and it
32 would be missed. He said he would get information for Councilors about how much
33 weight composting removes from the waste stream and how much that saves the town.

34
35 Administrator Selig said Mr. Reine will be at the Council's next meeting to discuss CIP
36 requests.

37
38 **Police Department, Chief Rene Kelley, Deputy Chief Jack Dalton, Capt. John**
39 **Lavoie**

40 Councilor Needell asked about the sidearm replacement planned for 2027, and wondered
41 why it was delayed. Chief Kelley said the weapons are five years old, but he felt it was
42 OK to wait until 2027. Councilor Welsh asked about the new hire in the budget and if
43 they could wait to have them start in September instead of July to save \$8,000. Chief
44 Kelley said that would work. Councilor Welsh noted he is the first department head to
45 agree to a cut at this meeting. Councilor Welsh said training is at \$22,000 this year, is
46 slated for \$38,000 next year, and asked if that could be cut. Chief Kelley said the

1 mandated training hours per officer has increased to 24 from 16 and with new hires, it's
2 needed, and there is additional cost of officer time to do the training. Councilor Welsh
3 asked him to review and shuffle what he could to 2027, and he said he would. Councilor
4 Welsh asked him to reduce the amount of money budgeted for fuel by \$5,000 because the
5 cost of gas is declining, and Chief Kelley agreed noting purchasing hybrids helps with
6 much better gas mileage. Councilor Welsh then asked if the department's dog program
7 could be cut. Chief Kelley said an officer took the initiative and footed the cost of starting
8 the program this year, but next year is the first time the cost is being added to the
9 department's budget and declined to eliminate the program. Councilor Friedrichs asked
10 about the cost of cable TV and Capt. Lavoie explained there is cable in the community
11 room, which is used by the department and groups, and in an employee breakroom. He
12 said the cable is used during emergency operations as a link to the outside world for
13 information about weather and news. Chair Friedman asked about extra telephone lines
14 that were being researched and they said Mr. Vincent had identified an additional four
15 lines recently and that there would be savings from discontinuing those and lines
16 identified earlier. Administrator Selig asked him to capture those savings for the budget.
17

18 **Fire Department, Chief Dave Emanuel, Assistant Chief Robert Atwater**

19 Councilor Grant asked if education training seminars budgeted for \$5,800 last year,
20 which was not used, could be reduced. Chief Emanuel said it's uncertain how much of it
21 they will need and that online class fees have increased exponentially. Councilor Register
22 noted his concern that training fees were used to cover overtime last year.
23

24 Councilor Needell asked about personnel shifts and openings. Chief Emanuel said the
25 assistant chief retired this past month and the position was reworked to become a deputy
26 of safety and risk. He said candidates are being reviewed. He said the plan is to rewrite
27 the assistant chief position to be an assistant chief of operations and training, which
28 Assistant Chief Atwater is doing now. The goal is to move third in command up to
29 second, and hire a third. He said hiring will probably be from outside the department.
30

31 Councilor Grant asked about the contingency for fire administration. She said the
32 department head proposed \$52,000 and it's in the budget for \$152,000. Administrator
33 Selig said that money is set aside in the case of an agreement on a contract with the
34 Firefighters Association and the Middle Managers Association. Councilor Friedrichs
35 asked when negotiations would be final and Administrator Selig said the first part of next
36 year. Chair Friedman said the likely fundamental difference on both sides is how much
37 wages are going up. Chair Friedman asked if there's no agreement by the end of this year,
38 will this be in the budget or if an agreement happens, can the Council make an
39 amendment to reduce this amount. Administrator Selig said it would come back to the
40 Council and could be reduced. He said this is what management feels is a reasonable
41 number to allocate for the fire department though it's still to be determined.
42

43 Councilor Welsh said overtime is running at \$463,000 this year and with hiring two new
44 positions that should save OT so could the \$500,000 for next year be reduced to
45 \$465,000, and Chief Emanuel said he would look at it. Administrator Selig said a new

1 contract will also affect OT. Chief Emanuel said he had reduced it taking these factors
2 into consideration, but would review.

3
4 Councilor Welsh also asked about the overtime wages for training and safety. This year
5 \$90,000 was budgeted, he said, and it's running about \$38,000. Next year is budgeted for
6 \$84,000. He asked if it could be reduced to \$44,000 to save \$40,000, which would be the
7 highest the department has spent on training. He asked Chief Emanuel to look into it. He
8 said he would and noted this is where it took money from to pay overtime wages in 2024.

9
10 ***Councilor Register MOVED to extend the meeting by 15 minutes to 10:45 p.m.***
11 ***Councilor Vogt SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED on a unanimous roll***
12 ***call vote of 8-0.***

13
14 Councilor Welsh reiterated it's a tough budget year and the Council is looking to make
15 cuts to anything that's not mandated. Chief Emanuel said when the department ran the
16 numbers on the two hires, it is not net zero and it does cost money.

17
18 Councilor Grant asked about contracted services and said the administrator knocked the
19 amount down to \$25,000, but last year \$11,000 was approved, but it's now at \$7,800. She
20 asked if it could be reduced further for 2026. Assistant Chief Atwater said the department
21 lost some very experienced people and this is to train the new hires bringing in trainers
22 and inspectors. He said the Fire Academy is no longer supplying the level of training the
23 department needs so a contracted company is being hired to come in and train. Councilor
24 Grant asked if they had 2026 quotes yet or if it was a guesstimate, and he said they do not
25 have quotes for next year yet. Chief Emanuel said the lack of training impacts the
26 department on multiple levels and is needed.

27
28 Chair Friedman thanked the chief and assistant chief, and said there will be some changes
29 to this budget, and Administrator Selig agreed.

30
31 Chair Friedman invited last comments and questions about the process.

32
33 Councilor Welsh said he has a lot of smaller suggestions for cuts, as Councilor Grant also
34 does. He said in the past the Council compiled a long list of all the cuts and town staff
35 reviewed it to agree or not. Councilor Welsh said he would like to get the budget down to
36 where taxes increase by 10 percent, not 18 percent, and that would require a decrease in
37 the budget of \$965,000. He said he thinks the Council should try to make that number.

38
39 Councilor Friedrichs said with health care and technology fees rising, ze wondered if
40 departments could liquidate underused assets and if that money would go back to the
41 general fund? Administrator Selig said typically it would go into the general fund and not
42 stay with the department, but if done during the budget process it could be allocated for
43 something else within that department. Ze said everyone needs to take a hard look at their
44 department for anything underutilized in the next year.

45

1 Administrator Selig said that would be a one-time reduction, but if the cost remains it
2 ricochets back. He said another way to be effective is to identify services that the town
3 doesn't need to provide and eliminate those, such as curbside collection. He said the town
4 could say as of July 1, no more curbside collection and residents could either contract
5 individually or take trash to the transfer station on Tuesday or Saturday. Councilor
6 Needell noted another day may need to be added if that's the case. He said some moved
7 here because they wanted a town with it, some may not have cars that are big enough to
8 transport trash and that probably increases the town's carbon footprint with everyone
9 driving individually instead of one truck, but you'd have to balance that. He asked if
10 there are services the town can jettison and save money.

11
12 Councilor Welsh said he thinks that's a bad example because residents think of trash
13 collection as a basic service like police and fire protection that can't be cut. He said
14 there's a lot the town provides that aren't a basic service. Councilor Friedrichs said the
15 degree of excellence provided could be less, saying no town has roads as well maintained
16 as Durham. Councilor Register said in coming years this is not going to get any easier,
17 the town can't cut its way out of this problem and it needs growth in the tax base.

18
19 Chair Friedman said Councilors should come to the meeting next Monday with their
20 amendments to the budget ready to propose after the Public Hearing.

21
22 **IV. Adjourn (NLT 10:30 PM)**

23
24 ***Councilor Ford MOVED to adjourn the meeting. Councilor Friedrichs SECONDED***
25 ***the motion. The motion PASSED on a unanimous roll call vote of 8-0.***

26
27 The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 p.m.

28
29 - Jane Murphy, Minutes Taker