

Wednesday, January 7, 2026
Advisory Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
Juliani Room
Town Hall
525 Washington Street
Wellesley, MA

Madison Riley, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

The meeting was livestreamed on Wellesley Media at www.wellesleymedia.org and broadcast live on local cable channels Comcast 8/Verizon 40.

Those present from Advisory Committee: Madison Riley, Chair; Mark Benjamin, Vice Chair; Jay Prosnitz, Vice Chair; Doug Wilkins, Secretary; Susan Clapham; Lucienne Ronco; Jay Bock; Rani Elwy; Penny Rossano; Paul Barnhill; Mariana Vinacur; Dan Weinger; Aaron Williams; Phil Jameson (joined at 7:25 p.m.)

Absent: Doug Smith

Also present: Marcia Testa Simonson, Chair, Board of Health (BOH); Lenny Izzo, Director, Health Department; Linda Grape, BOH.

Citizen Speak

There was no one present for Citizen Speak.

Overview Board of Health and FY27 Budget Requests

An overview of the Board of Health/Health Department operations and FY27 budget request was provided. It was explained that the BOH derives authority from Massachusetts General laws, which incorporate federal regulations such as FDA food codes. The BOH is responsible for enforcing state, federal, and local regulations, and has the authority to create town bylaws and regulations.

The Board is organized into five functional units:

- Nursing
- Social Services
- Mental Health
- Environmental Health
- Administrative/Central Operations

The department has 12 full-time staff plus additional public health nurses and temporary help. The FY27 budget request shows a 2.78% increase over FY26, with personal services increasing 2.6%, expenses increasing 3.5%, and the mental health budget (contracted services) increasing 3%.

Key strategic priorities for FY27 include:

- Strengthening workforce capacity
- Meeting SAFE 2 and public health excellence standards
- Enhancing tobacco and vaping enforcement
- Emergency preparedness
- Utilizing opioid settlement funds for harm reduction and recovery

Two new initiatives were highlighted:

- Opioid Addiction Services: Utilizing settlement funds (over \$500,000 total for Wellesley) for prevention and recovery programs.
- New Parent and Newborn Support Services: Providing prenatal education, postpartum care, and home visits.

Questions/Discussion

- With the childhood vaccination schedule changing at the federal level while Massachusetts is maintaining the old schedule, will additional funds be needed for information campaigns?
 - Health risk communication is important. Vaccine hesitancy is real and growing. Wellesley schools had a 97% vaccination rate, which the department monitors closely.
- How has the BOH aligned its budget with priorities like enhancing tobacco and vaping enforcement?
 - Regulations for tobacco and nicotine delivery are being revised. The BOH is also working to reduce the number of permits in town and is partnering with regional efforts for compliance checks. The BOH hopes to use some opioid settlement funds for prevention, as addiction often begins with tobacco or vaping.
- How are you working with schools on behavioral modification and education programs?
 - The BOH conducted community health needs assessments using opioid funds and will be conducting community forums. A staff position is dedicated to public health education and outreach.
- What percentage of staff and hours are dedicated to Schools versus broader public health?
 - This is relatively small now. The Schools have about 0.5-0.6 FTE through Human Relations Services for the middle school, but the schools have built their own infrastructure of social workers in recent years.
- Why was there a big increase in the "Other Professionals" budget line while FTEs remained the same?
 - FTEs reflect the actual position whether they are filled or vacant so it's the total number of actual positions in the department. The actual personal services expense is the amount that was spent and if a position is vacant, it is not paid. However, follow up and clarification will be provided on this.
- How long would it take to see trends if people started following federal rather than state vaccination guidelines?
 - About 3 years of data would be needed to identify a statistically significant trend. Massachusetts has good vaccine tracking data.
- What is the source of your revenue, and should permit fees be revisited?
 - The fees could potentially be increased, though we try to stay consistent with the region.
- What percentage of the community uses your services? Is your outreach meeting expectations?
 - Public health protects everyone through food inspections, water safety, etc. For special programs, the Health Department tries to reach the most vulnerable 25% of the population through newsletters, social media, and partnerships with other departments.
- Regarding the fluctuations in temporary help expenses, what drives these changes?
 - This is an as-needed expense that fluctuates based on public health needs, such as during COVID. The Health Department spends only what is needed and the remainder is returned to the Town.
- How do you ensure you're not duplicating services provided by hospitals with your new parent support program?
 - The program will focus on filling gaps between hospital discharge and regular pediatric visits, providing reassurance and social support.

Madison Riley, Chair of Advisory, presented an analysis of Wellesley Public Schools budget and enrollment trends from 2016 to 2025. He noted that the analysis was conducted with Patti Quigley and Gail Sullivan, both of whom were present. He clarified that this was his report as chair, not an Advisory Committee report.

The purpose was to provide information to shed light on the continuing discussion of why school costs continue to increase despite declining enrollment. However, the report focused on "what" is happening, rather "why" the increase is happening. Key findings showed the school budget grew from \$67 million in 2016 to \$91 million in 2025 (37% increase, slightly above inflation of 35%), while enrollment declined from 4,972 to 3,896 students (22% decrease).

Six core drivers of cost increases were identified:

- Teacher salaries (47% of budget).
- Rising FTEs for student support (counselors, therapists, and specialists increased while teacher FTEs decreased).
- Low teacher-to-student ratios (class sizes below guidelines).
- Increasing in-district special education spending.
- Increasing transportation costs (145% increase over 10 years).
- Compounding effect of strategic priorities and critical needs.

The Chair stated that his peer town comparisons revealed that Wellesley's per-pupil cost is approximately \$10,000 more than similar-sized communities like Winchester and Belmont, and about \$5,000 more than two of three neighbors (Needham and Natick) and was less than Weston).

Questions/Discussion

- Was the data normalized?
 - The data were not normalized.
- How are savings from investments like special education accounted for?
 - Education investments may prevent higher downstream costs, but that analysis wasn't part of the scope.
- Is it being suggested that teacher salaries are too high?
 - Teacher salaries are competitive and in line with peer communities. The report did not suggest cutting salaries; rather, it noted that their large share of the budget makes them a significant cost driver.
- What do other school systems have as their average class sizes, and how do they handle this issue?
 - This wasn't researched in the report but could be a good question for the School Committee.
- Why did the Schools hire additional specialists, therapists, and counselors? It was noted that job descriptions had been requested but have not been received. It was felt there was a discrepancy in the budget data regarding personal services costs versus FTEs.
 - This wasn't part of the report scope but would be a good question for the School Committee when they present their budget.
- Concern was expressed about the increase in administrative and instructional leadership costs which grew from \$6.2 million to over \$10 million between 2016-2025. It was questioned whether there was "fat that could be trimmed" in this area. A question was also asked about the cost of the METCO program to Wellesley as it was previously believed the Commonwealth fully funded the program.
 - This wasn't a major focus of the report, but the School Committee has been asked to develop an organizational chart with position descriptions.
- Have you considered looking at fixed versus variable costs?

- This question was asked of the Schools, but it's difficult to clearly define what is fixed versus variable in a school context.
- What was the process for obtaining and analyzing the data?
 - All data came from publicly available sources and was input into the spreadsheets and analyzed.
- The transportation strategy was questioned, and it was noted that lowering bus fees did not increase ridership as intended
- Concerns were raised about performance metrics, and it was asked how the Town measures educational quality, particularly given Wellesley's declining rankings.
 - The report focused on costs and enrollment trends rather than performance metrics.
- There was also discussion about special education services, neighborhood schools versus centralized facilities, teacher salaries, and how the findings should be incorporated into the Advisory Committee's Report to Town Meeting.

The presentation was intended to be informational and to help frame questions for when the School Committee presents its FY27 budget to the Advisory Committee.

Minutes Approval

Mariana Vinacur made and Jay Bock seconded a motion to approve the December 17, 2025 minutes.

Vote: The motion passed 10 to 0, with 3 abstentions.

Administrative

The survey sent to Town Meeting members after Special Town Meeting received 129 responses (54% response rate). The feedback was generally positive, with Town Meeting members indicating they read and use the Advisory Committee report. Vice Chair Jay Prosnitz's summary of the survey will be distributed to the Committee and later posted on the Advisory website. Moderator, Mark Kaplan, asked for the Committee's opinion on how microphones are used at Town Meeting.

Assignments for the first pass on Annual Town Meeting warrant articles have been distributed via the Google Sheet.

Liaison Reports

Council on Aging/Susan Clapham- the COA interviewed one finalist for the Director position but postponed the second interview.

Schools/Jay Bock - the Wellesley Public Schools' two-day budget session took place three weeks prior was productive and both the administration and school committee seemed satisfied with the proposed budget.

Adjourn

Paul Barnhill made and Rani Elwy seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:19 p.m. 13 to 0.

Meeting video [January 7, 2026](#)

Meeting Documents

- BOH Advisory Committee 2026 Fin2
- BOH Approved 11-13-25 510 Health FY27 OpRequest2
- 510 BOARD OF HEALTH FY_27_Beudent Narrative 2025 12_0_8
- WPS Trend Analysis Report and Spreadsheets 010226

Approved January 14, 2026

- 200
- Advisory PowerPoint Presentation v3 1-6-2026