

Wednesday, January 14, 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; Rani Elwy; Penny Rossano; Mariana Vinacur; Phil Jameson (joined at 7:16 p.m.)

Advisory Committee members participating remotely: Paul Barnhill, Jay Bock, Dan Weinger

Absent: Lucienne Ronco; Doug Smith; Aaron Williams

Also present: Dave Cohen, Director, Department of Public Works (DPW); Jeff Azano Brown, Assistant Director, DPW; Dave Hickey, Town Engineer, DPW; Michael McManus, Board of Public Works (BPW); Tom Hammond, Natural Resources Commission (NRC).

Citizen Speak

There was no one present for Citizen Speak.

DPW FY27 Tax Impact and Enterprise Budget Requests

Overview of the FY27 budget requests:

- The DPW tax impact budget showed a 2.2% increase (\$186,000 over FY26).
- Water enterprise fund: 3.5% increase.
- Sewer enterprise fund: 3.2% increase.
- Stormwater enterprise fund: 0.7% increase

Budget highlights included:

- 2% merit pay increases for merit pay plan and Group 40 employees.
- No wage increases are included for the production unit and supervisor units as their contracts expire at the end of the year.
- Regrade of foreman-level positions to Group 21 per the last collective bargaining agreement.
- RDF expense budget increase of \$64,000 due to contractual trash disposal costs in the final year of a 5-year contract.
- An additional \$11,488 to replenish the baler replacement fund.
- Highway budget increase of \$21,000 for additional traffic and parking signs.
- MWRA sewer assessment increase of \$236,000.
- MWRA water assessment increase of \$339,000.

For capital budgets:

- Overall increase of \$11.5 million requested.
- DPW cash capital budget decreased by \$239,000 from FY26, reflecting \$532,000 in deferred projects.

- Largest capital increase is in the water enterprise fund: \$15 million primarily for PFAS-related projects.
- Water capital budget includes \$13.4 million for PFAS treatment, with \$10 million for a permanent treatment at Morse's Pond and \$3.4 million for interim treatment at other facilities.
- Additional funding for a potential second connection to MWRA water supply.

A benchmarking slide was provided showing Wellesley's water, sewer, and stormwater rates compared to surrounding communities. Even with projected increases, Wellesley's rates remain competitive. The Water enterprise fund would require approximately a 20% rate increase, while sewer would need about a 6% increase.

Director Cohen explained that RDF operations generate approximately \$865,000 in revenue through recycled material sales and commercial tipping fees, which helps offset costs.

Questions/Discussion

- Clarification of the funding sources for street permit program, work for others, and enterprise fund support was requested.
 - These represent different funding mechanisms. The street permit program is fee-supported, where utilities pay for street cuts. "Work for others" represents work DPW does for other departments who have their own budget allocations. Enterprise funds and capital programs also fund DPW staff time allocated to those projects.
- A calculation error on slide 5 regarding street rehabilitation was noted and a question asked about asterisks on benchmarking slide 10.
 - The asterisks indicated that some communities fund portions of their stormwater programs differently which makes direct comparisons challenging.
- Would the new water rates include debt service for the \$13.4 million PFAS project and the MWRA connection?
 - It was confirmed the rates include projected debt service costs for all proposed borrowing, with the department taking a multi-year approach to rate projections to avoid sudden large increases.
- The "tentative" status of the second MWRA connection project was questioned.
 - It was explained this would enhance reliability and resiliency of water access. The project is being coordinated with MWRA and surrounding communities as a potential regional solution, but commitments from partners aren't yet finalized.
- What would happen if Town Meeting rejected the \$13.4 million PFAS treatment.
 - The Town would be out of compliance with state and federal regulations by 2027, likely resulting in enforcement orders. The Town would potentially need to shut down some treatment plants and rely more heavily on more expensive MWRA water.
- Concern was expressed about the 20% water rate increase and whether a lower increase was possible. A request for a historical rate table was also made.
 - It was noted that water rates had previously remained unchanged for about 10 years before a 50% increase when PFAS treatment began at Morses Pond. Despite increases, Wellesley's rates remain among the lowest in the area. Reducing the increase to 6% would require significant cuts to the capital program, which would be challenging given PFAS treatment requirements.
- A question was asked about PFAS litigation settlement funds.
 - It was confirmed that approximately \$1 million has been received so far from settlements with 3M, DuPont and others, with potentially \$2-2.5 million total expected. These funds are incorporated in the budget to offset PFAS treatment costs.

- A question was asked about the distinction between "improvements" versus maintenance in various budget items.
 - It was explained that when the department performs capital maintenance, they typically incorporate improvements that enhance efficiency or effectiveness, such as using more efficient pumps or materials that increase yields.
- A question was asked about the procurement process for "work for others."
 - It was clarified that DPW typically provides estimates to other departments, who then decide if they want to use DPW services. DPW doesn't build profit into these estimates, just covers actual costs.
- A question was asked about the \$532,000 in deferred projects.
 - The deferred projects include \$60,000 for street resurfacing, \$200,000 for sidewalks, \$200,000 for a sidewalk plow replacement, \$25,000 for a mini paver, and funds from their invasive insect program.
- Post-PFAS treatment will the water usage balance between municipal and MWRA water return to pre-PFAS levels?
 - Optimism was expressed that better yields would be achieved from treatment plants after permanent solutions are in place, although MWRA water will still be needed for peak usage periods, particularly for irrigation needs.
- A question was asked whether using just two wells instead of three for PFAS treatment might be more cost-effective.
 - It was explained that while DPW is positioning to address all three treatment plants, a final decision does not need to be made immediately. The current proposal includes design and pilot testing for all facilities, but construction decisions can be phased, allowing exploration of new technologies and potentially more cost-effective solutions.
- A question was asked if MWRA water would still be needed after the PFAS treatment investment.
 - MWRA water would still be necessary, particularly during high-demand periods. Local wells could potentially meet drinking water needs without MWRA in an emergency, but not irrigation needs.

DPW 2026 ATM Warrant Articles

Article 10 Special Purpose Baler Stabilization Fund Contribution: A \$23,000 transfer, which includes \$11,512 (consistent with past years) plus an additional \$11,488 to begin replenishing the fund after purchasing a new baler for \$1.2 million.

Article 16 High School/Hunnewell Field Irrigation Improvements: \$500,000 to replace the 40-year-old irrigation system that uses stormwater from the aqueduct to irrigate approximately 5 acres of fields. The system is leaking and past its service life.

Article 17 Playground Reconstruction: \$500,000 for the final phase of a three-year playground improvement program, focusing on Perrin Park, minor improvements at Upham, and upgraded play surfaces at the Sprague playground.

Article 18 Great Plain Avenue Reconstruction: \$4,500,000 to reconstruct Great Plain Avenue from Brook Street to the Needham town line. Last reconstructed in 1988, with a temporary chip seal applied in 2022.

Article 19 Weston/Linden Intersection: Design funds to improve the challenging intersection with safety issues. The project would involve property taking, adding a left turn lane, redoing traffic signals, and updating related infrastructure.

Article 20 DPW Campus Feasibility Study: \$1,000,000 for a feasibility study to examine options for the DPW campus. The existing Park Highway building, approximately 78 years old, has \$13 million in identified deficiencies. Rather than simply renovating, the department wants to explore a comprehensive solution that could potentially accommodate land use departments currently renting space elsewhere.

Article 24, Motion 1 and 2, Water/Sewer MWRA Loan Authorization: Standard authorization for interest-free loans and grants through MWRA programs, with approximately \$1.6 million in interest-free loans and \$1.2 million in grants for sewer rehabilitation, and \$500,000 in interest-free loans for water system improvements.

Article 25, Water Treatment borrowing – PFAS: Authorization to borrow \$14.2 million for PFAS treatment: \$10 million for permanent treatment at Morse's Pond, \$800,000 for permanent treatment design at Wellesley Avenue, and \$3.4 million for interim treatment at Wellesley Avenue and Longfellow facilities.

Article 26 MWRA Connection Borrowing: \$2 million for design of a second MWRA connection, including a pump station, 3-4 miles of water main, and related improvements.

Article 30 Land Swap DPW/NRC/MWR: Proposed land transfer related to the MWRA tunnel project, which would place a shaft near the Hegarty pump station. The shaft would be on NRC conservation land (Article 97 land), requiring a land swap where Water Works land near Morse's Pond would be transferred to NRC for conservation protection.

Questions/Discussion

- Will surrounding communities contribute to the MWRA connection capital investment if they benefit from it.
 - Cost-sharing will be necessary if other communities benefit, though no commitments have been secured yet. The \$2 million represents what Wellesley would need for its own connection.
- A question was asked about grant funding for the Weston/Linden intersection project.
 - MassDOT Bottleneck grants were applied for but were not granted. A re-application will be made but the Town is moving forward with the design as it's a priority for the Select Board and Traffic Committee.
- A question was asked about the DPW Campus Feasibility Study and whether purchasing an existing building might be more cost-effective than the potential \$100 million new campus.
 - Purchasing another building wouldn't address the needs of the DPW operations specifically. The feasibility study would help determine the best path forward, and if not approved, estimates for renovating the existing facility will likely be updated.
- Clarification was requested whether the feasibility study was for the entire campus or just one building.
 - It was confirmed the feasibility study would examine the entire campus and how various functional needs could be accommodated, including potentially housing land use departments currently located elsewhere.
- Could the design be incorporated into the feasibility study to save costs?
 - FMD will be asked about this approach.
- It was noted that the Select Board is considering budget cuts and a question asked if the playground project could be safely deferred.
 - It was felt that deferring the playground project wouldn't be a first choice due to safety implications, but it was acknowledged all projects will need to be examined, if further cuts are necessary.

- Will the design considerations for Great Plain Avenue cause disruptions like the Weston Road project?
 - The wider right-of-way on Great Plain Avenue provides more flexibility for design, potentially including proper bike lanes. Traffic management would be easier than on Weston Road, with less disruptive detours. Adding a traffic signal at the RDF entrance is being considered.
- Will there be safety improvements at the Weston/Linden intersection?
 - The primary focus is pedestrian safety due to sight distance issues and awkward geometry. The design would include a pocket-turning lane, improved sidewalks, and upgraded traffic signals with better pedestrian crosswalks.
- Is there urgency for the Hunnewell Field irrigation improvements?
 - Although functional, the aging system causes maintenance issues when leaks occur. However, the project is ranked lower in priority compared to other projects if cuts were necessary.
- Tom Hammond from NRC confirmed the NRC's support for the proposed land swap with MWRA, noting that it would enable the tunnel project to proceed.

Minutes Approval

Mariana Vinacur made and Susan Clapham seconded a motion to approve the January 7, 2026 minutes.

Vote: The motion passed 11 to 0.

Administrative

Chair Madison Riley discussed the Town Meeting survey, noting it was generally affirming of the Advisory Committee's work. He shared two questions from the Town Moderator Mark Kaplan:

- Whether lining up at microphones stifles participation at Town Meeting (versus the previous system of runners bringing microphones to speakers)?
- If microphones remain, where should they be placed?

The committee had a robust discussion about microphone accessibility, with members expressing various preferences. Some favored returning to runners with microphones to improve accessibility for those with mobility challenges or seated in middle sections. Others preferred the current standing microphone approach for its orderliness but supported a hybrid approach to accommodate accessibility needs. Suggestions included multiple microphone locations and prioritizing women speakers to encourage broader participation

Liaison Reports

Select Board/Rani Elwy - the Select Board discussed a \$2,290,000 deficit in the FY27 budget. They are considering options including reducing cash capital by \$1 million, using Free Cash for health insurance costs (\$1.3 million), and delaying some capital projects. The Select Board deferred signing the ATM Warrant pending further budget discussions.

Human Resources/Mark Benjamin - Human Resources Board discussed Annual Town Meeting articles, including personnel policies and bylaw changes. The board is considering several approaches to the bylaw, with changes to the process for policy approval. They've conducted research on 18 peer towns and are weighing options for Town Meeting involvement in policies.

Planning/Dan Weinger - Brad Downey was appointed interim Planning Director and there is no update on the search for a new Planning Director.

Board of Health/Penny Rossano – there will be a presentation on February 23rd at the library about the health needs of Wellesley residents, including community health survey results.

Adjourn

Approved January 21, 2026

248 Mariana Vinacur made and Penny Rossano seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting.

249

250 The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. 11 to 0.

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252 Meeting video [January14, 2026](#)

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254 **Meeting Documents**

255 • FY2027 Department of Public Works Omnibus Budget V3 Advisory

256 • DPW ATM 2026 Advisory Budget Presentation 2026-01-14

257 • Draft 010726 Minutes