

**Minutes
Lincoln Finance Committee**

Virtual Meeting Pursuant to Governor Healey's March 29, 2023 Signing of a Supplemental Budget Bill
which extended the Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law

February 11, 2026
7:30 pm

Finance Committee Members: Merrill Berkery, Paul Blanchfield (Chair), Buck Creel, Greg Haines, Nancy Marshall, Rich Rosenbaum (Vice Chair), Ellen Myer Shorb

Others present: Steve Gladstone (Water Commission), Parry Graham (Superintendent, Lincoln Public Schools), Jim Hutchinson (Select), Matina Madrick (School Committee), Richard Nolli (Water Superintendent), Colleen Wilkins (Finance Director)

Introduction

Paul Blanchfield called the meeting to order at 7:31 PM. Blanchfield reviewed the agenda.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Water Department Presentation

Water Superintendent Richard Nolli presented the FY27 water department budget and planned capital spending. To fund capital improvements, water rates are expected to rise 13% per year in FY26-29. Without a rate increase, retained earnings would be depleted. Nolli also discussed the new smart meters that will be given to everyone in town to prevent leaks and aid in water conservation. There have been some large spikes in Capital Expenses over the period of 2025 & 2026 mostly related to the water main project. Nolli noted that the majority of Lincoln's water pipes will reach the end of their service life over the next 20 years. The borrowing for the water main project was approximately \$8,400,000.

Lincoln Public Schools Presentation

Lincoln K-8 Superintendent Parry Graham summarized Lincoln and Hanscom budget proposals based on discussions from 1/15/26 meeting. Graham also spoke about a new contract signed with Hanscom and the Dept of Defense. He also presented a level service budget with 4.7% increase over FY26.

Town Budget Presentation

Blanchfield presented a draft Town Budget Presentation in advance of the March 28, 2026 Town Meeting. The presentation and accompanying slides will be made available on the town website. The draft presentation was recorded.

Town Meeting Preparation

Next steps will be to finalize the Finance section of the Town Report. Town finance information will be provided in a town-wide mailing prior to Town Meeting.

Liaison Updates

Marshall provided an update for LS that drafts of LS agreements were received. Meeting will be taking place tomorrow night.

Public Comment

A member of the public made a statement about three concerns which are enumerated in the subsequent pages as provided by the resident.

Review & Approve Prior Meeting Minutes

Some updates were made to minutes from 1/28/26 meeting. Motion by Creel to approve minutes for January 28, 2026 meeting with amendments. Seconded by Rosenbaum. Motion passed unanimously.

Adjourn

Berkery moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Marshall. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 pm.

Submitted by: Merrill Berkery

Public Statement from Resident

At the last public comment session some of my remarks were misunderstood. I want to clarify my concerns.

First, regarding the school budget. At the previous meeting the reduction in the school's surplus was characterized as a positive development. In practical terms that occurred because actual spending increased by approximately ten percent last fiscal year. There has been no operational or academic improvement that justifies a ten percent increase in spending. In fact, enrollment has declined by roughly ten percent, much of it through voluntary attrition. Spending rose while enrollment and parental satisfaction fell. That is not an improvement.

This did not occur by accident. The Finance Committee has approved annual increases of two and a half percent year after year without demanding structural adjustments. When oversight is not exercised, spending expands. The result was a ten percent surge in spending. The same lack of discipline contributed to the Hanscom misallocation. The pattern is consistent. When the committee does not use its authority, costs rise and taxpayers absorb the consequence.

I also want to address the suggestion that these decisions fall under pedagogy. They do not. The school has an official class size policy developed through a formal subcommittee process. That policy should guide staffing decisions. It is not being followed and it is not being discussed. That is a School Committee and Finance Committee governance issue, not a teaching philosophy issue.

Second, on reserves. It was stated that providing tax relief this year would necessarily require raising taxes next year. That is incorrect. Even after accounting fully for OPEB and reserve contributions, the town is levying more than ten million dollars above regular operating expenses. That exceeds any reasonable level of prudence for capital planning within the annual budget.

The issue is not whether tax relief creates instability. The issue is how to prevent reserves from rising every year when we consistently levy more than we need. Each year the maximum is taken. Each year collections exceed requirements.

What is required is a serious discussion about aligning the levy with actual expenditures rather than defaulting to overcollection. When funds accumulate in reserves, the perceived cost of spending declines. Money already collected begins to feel available rather than extracted. That dynamic weakens scrutiny and encourages lower return projects simply because the resources appear to be there.

Rising school spending during declining enrollment, unenforced policies, reserves growing beyond guidelines, and a levy that consistently exceeds needs are not isolated issues. They reflect a budgeting framework that requires correction.

Lincoln requires disciplined stewardship. Taxation should reflect need, not capacity.