
TOWN OF SOMERS



July 9, 2026

Subject: Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget

As we enter our 5th round of budget referendums, I want to give a little more insight into where we have been and where we are today, while trying to incorporate some of the suggestions that have been given.

The Board of Finance is the deciding board when determining what the dollar amount will be to send to referendum. The Boards of Selectmen and Education operate within the confines of the amount of money they are given, the appropriation.

Revaluation created a lot of turmoil in town, and it could not have happened at a worse time. However, it is mandated that we perform revaluation every 5 years and truly its purpose is to level the playing field for all. The mill rate is adjusted after revaluation. In this case the mill rate was reduced from 30.21 mils to 22.4 mils to bring to the Town the same revenue. The five-year average in residential appreciation determined by Vision Appraisals was 43%. Whether above or below the average appreciation for residential homeowners determines the adjustment made to residential tax bills.

The Board of Finance has always tried to deliver a fair, and concise budget to the residents with minimal tax impacts. While this is respectable, it comes at a cost as well.

Since the failure of the first budget referendum on May 19, and subsequent failures there to follow, the Town and the Board of Education have made cuts to find a landing spot voters can agree on.

On June 18, the Board of Selectmen heard from residents for approximately 2 hours regarding the budget. One suggestion was to cut \$1 million from the budget. I would like to point out that collectively, \$936,084 has been proposed to date to cut from the budget since May 19th. And these cuts have impacts. I would be remiss if I didn't point out that before the budget ever made it to the Board of Finance for the first review, the Town and the Board of Education made over \$800,000 in cuts.

Before I propose the next round of cuts for the Town, making \$936,000 in cuts already to the budget has angered residents. Making these substantial reduction requests sounds easy on paper, but they are not.

To meet the demands of residents, the Town has offered the following cuts already:

- Dismissal of Transfer Station Part-Time Employee
- Dismissal of Human Services Full-Time Employee
- Reduction of Days of Operations at the Transfer Station
- Reduction of Days of Operations at the Senior Center
- Reduction of Full-Time Senior Center Coordinator to Part-Time
- Reduction of Both Full-Time Transfer Station Maintainers to Part-Time
- Dismissal of the Deputy Emergency Management Director
- Reduction in the Proposed Cost of Benefits Due to Employee Reductions & Dismissals
- Reduction in Library Materials
- Elimination of COLA Salary Increases for non-union Town Employees

These adjustments to Town Government have been met with anger and rightfully so. However, the residents have repeatedly asked for reduced spending.

The truth of the matter is 62% of the Town's budget is salary and benefits. Another 28% are fixed costs for electricity, internet, waste hauling, legal services, annual audit, and state police just to list a few. That is 90% of our budget. That leaves 10%, approximately \$900,000, that is considered discretionary.

If the Town cut every dollar of "discretionary" spending, it still would not equal the demands of some residents.

And what makes up that \$900,000? Postage, Advertising costs for legal notices, supplies, tax bills printing and mailing, software licenses for departments to operate, vehicle maintenance, departmental supplies, required drug testing, portable toilets, and professional development. The Town has always operated on a very lean and thin budget. To reduce spending in town, services must be reduced because that is where 90% of the money spent by Town Government is allocated.

To meet the demands of residents saying to cut an additional \$1 million from the budget to eliminate the need for any mill increase, you would have to close the library permanently along with the senior center and would only have enough money to have the Transfer Station open 4-6 hours per week. That is the reality of that type of request. And no one wants that. However, when a budget proposal fails and when we are repeatedly told that the spending is too high, the only place to cut from are the services provided.

So, with that said, I propose the next round of cuts to the Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget in the amount of \$350,00 as:

Dismissal of 1.5 FTEs at the Library as well as closing the Library on Saturdays

Reduction of 1 FTE in Public Works to PT status and termination of their health benefits

Dismissal of 1 FTE in Recreation & Leisure Services and Transfer of Liability of Remaining FTE to the Recreation Fund

Transfer of Liability for FD Employee from the General Fund to the Ambulance Fund

Adjustments in Vehicle Fuel, Veteran's Outreach, FD Building Maintenance, and FD Gasoline Allowance to match prior year averages in spend rate

This proposal includes the previously listed cuts as well as this new proposal. In total this would reduce the Town Government budget by a total of \$697,731 and the overall budget by \$1,286,084. And even after all of that, all of the impacts to services in Town, after \$1.2 million in cuts, we will still require a 0.70 mill increase to balance the budget.

These cuts will not take effect until 30 days after a budget is passed. Until then, normal operations will continue as we operate under last year's line-item spending.

Respectfully,

Brian Wissinger, Chief Financial Officer

To put the mil rate increase of .7 mils into perspective, it is important to be reminded that last year Fiscal Year 2025-26 the mil rate increase of 1.23 mils was supported by Town referendum. The Board of Finance withdrew \$1 million from the Town's Fund Balance to offset an additional 1 mil increase. Had this not happened, the mil increase would have been 2.23 mils. This year, the Fund Balance cannot support any additional withdrawals. Since the recommended Town Budget request has been reduced below last year's request, the problem is one of less revenue available to the Town versus Town expenditures.

Tim Keeney

First Selectman

The school system is an important part of any town and is often a factor in how residents view the community. Enrollment figures in the younger grades indicate that many young families continue to move to Somers, with the school system likely playing a role in that decision. This budget cycle, both the town and the school system have experienced significant budget reductions. While state statutes may limit additional reductions to the school budget, the municipal budget continues to support many services that directly affect schools and students. For example, library closures will deny students access to study materials, a short staffed Department of Public Works may not be able to clear roads in time for school to open, not to mention the Parks and Recreation Department losing programs for youth sports. The Board of Selectmen has made tough budget decisions while balancing available resources with the need to maintain municipal services. Any additional reductions to the town budget could affect the level of services provided and may have long-term impacts on the community, including the school system. Engaged parents make for a stronger community and each parent's voice is important in determining the direction of the town for years to come.

Michael Briggs, Board of Education Chair