

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
March 18, 2026**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA. Councilors present: Jane Callaway-Tripp, Ted Cormier-Leger, Robert Dellorco, Gene Grella, Caroline Griffith, Stephen Malloy, Max Morrongiello, Kenneth Ojukwu. Councilors absent: Michael LeBlanc. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Mark Cerel, Town Attorney; Julie McCann, Operations Manager.

Note: Documents for the Town Council are on file and provided in the online meeting packet.

At 6:01 PM, School Committee Chair Paul Griffith called the School Committee meeting to order.

CALL TO ORDER: ► Chair Dellorco called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR: ► Chair Dellorco reviewed the following as posted on the agenda. A Note to Residents: All citizens are welcome to attend public meetings in person. To view the live meeting remotely, citizens are encouraged to watch the live stream on the Franklin Town Hall TV YouTube channel or the live broadcast on Comcast Channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29. To listen to the meeting remotely citizens may call-in using the number on the agenda. To participate in the meeting remotely citizens may join a Zoom Webinar using the information provided on the agenda. Meetings are recorded and archived by Franklin TV on the Franklin Town Hall TV YouTube channel and shown on repeat on Comcast Channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29. Any participants who wish to speak during the webinar must enter their full name and email address when joining the webinar. All participants will be automatically muted upon joining the webinar. In order to speak, participants will need to select the “raise hand” function to request to be unmuted. All speakers will be required to state their full name and street address before commenting. This meeting is being recorded by Franklin TV and shown on Comcast channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29. This meeting may be recorded by others. ► Chair Dellorco stated Councilor LeBlanc will not be attending the meeting in person; however, he may attend remotely via Zoom. ► Chair Dellorco stated for upcoming community events the Town Council office hours will be held at the Senior Center tomorrow at 8:30 AM.

► Chair Dellorco listed the committee assignments as follows.

- Joint Budget Subcommittee: Councilors Ojukwu (chair), Grella (vice chair), Cormier-Leger, Malloy.
- Communications Subcommittee: Councilors Griffith (chair), Callaway-Tripp (vice chair), Morrongiello, Grella.
- Economic Development Subcommittee: Councilors LeBlanc (chair), Morrongiello (vice chair), Griffith, Malloy.
- Town Charter Review Subcommittee: Councilors Dellorco (chair), Cormier-Leger (vice chair), LeBlanc.

► Chair Dellorco reminded all Town Council members that if their attendance at a subcommittee meeting results in a quorum of the Town Council, non-subcommittee members cannot speak unless a Town Council meeting has been separately posted because that would be a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

► All recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: ► Mr. Steve Sherlock, 13 Magnolia Drive, Franklin Matters and Franklin Public Radio, Community Information Director, said on March 28 at The Black Box the Food Pantry is benefitting from the Party for the Pantry. He noted he had a conversation about the event which can be heard on the radio. He said April is National Poetry Month. Saturday, April 18, at 1:30 PM there will be a favorite poem reading at the library. More information will be available. ► Ms. Rachel Plukis, 37 Anchorage Road, said she serves as the chair of the Franklin Democratic Town Committee. She said that the annual caucus to elect

delegates to the convention for the democratic party occurred and for the second year Franklin filled their slate of 17 delegates, so we will be represented by the state at the end of May.

COUNCILOR COMMENTS: ► Councilor Ojukwu said he is looking forward to figuring out how to develop a strategic plan as a Town Council, Finance Committee, and School Committee. ► Councilor Morrongiello explained they are a body of different viewpoints, but tonight is special because they are crafting unified strategy to move the town forward. Tonight, the Town Council and School Committee are ready together to take on the challenges facing the community. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said she received an email from Bellingham regarding a battery storage location. She reached out to those who sent the email for more information. She is going to try to attend their April 2 meeting in Bellingham. She asked if anyone knew about this regarding the location near the Charles River or how it impacts Franklin. ► Mr. Hellen said he knows the Town of Bellingham owns the land, and they are sponsoring the battery-storage facility. He said he thinks the parcel is all in the Bellingham community. He explained the Charles River location. He said he was going to email the town administrator to get some facts on it and will report back to the Town Council. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger welcomed School Committee members to tonight’s meeting. He noted tickets for the Into the Woods production at The Black Box. ► Councilor Grella said he is also excited about working with the School Committee. ► Chair Dellorco said he was happy to see the School Committee here and happy to work together. He gave his condolences to the Dean College community and family of long-time President of Dean College Paula Rooney.

SUBCOMMITTEE & AD HOC COMMITTEE REPORTS: ► No updates.

- a. Joint Budget Subcommittee
- b. Economic Development Subcommittee
- c. Communications Subcommittee
- d. Town Charter Ad Hoc Committee
- e. Police Station Building Committee

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT: ► Mr. Hellen gave condolences to the Bellingham community for their loss of Denis Charles Fraine, their town administrator for more than 35 years. He gave his condolences to the Dean College community for their loss of Dr. Paula Rooney, their former college president for 27 years. He acknowledged Representative Roy is attending via Zoom. He said on March 27, he will be officially filing the Town Administrator’s Budget. It will look the same as what has already been presented. Finance Committee hearings will be April 6 to April 9. He reiterated they will not have full budget numbers until the health care comes in after open enrollment. They should know the numbers around Memorial Day. He said he hopes the committees will use this time to go through every line item on the town and school budgets and hopes they answer all questions people may have. He reviewed upcoming budget dates. He said on April 16 there is a Joint Budget Subcommittee meeting. He gave a shout-out to Director of Community Planning and Development Morena Zelaya as they were awarded a \$250,000 grant from DEP to help clean up the Nu-Style site which is a polluted town-owned site off Grove Street. He said they now have about \$1 million to do some site cleanup. He said once the site is cleaned up, it will be a huge town asset for new growth as we may be able to sell the land after the cleanup. He said he will ask the Town Council to vote in \$30,000 of matching money to get the \$250,000. He noted Restaurant Week. They are looking at Sunday, May 31 to June 6. Staff are working on that and trying to coordinate with Porchfest. He said the Planning and Conservation Departments want to make sure the community is aware of continual fraudulent emails and phishing scams that are impersonating town departments and sending invoices to people who are applicants at those boards. He said the police have been working on this for the past year and a half. It is not unique to Franklin. He noted one of the issues is that because the records are public for all the applicants that go before these boards, it is convenient for scammers to go in, use AI to basically document the letterhead and make it look like the town, and it is a perfect target. He said there are people who have paid these bills in other communities. He said to residents and applicants if they get a bill in their inbox, please call the office or send us an email to make sure it is a real bill and not a scam that is out there. He introduced a new employee in his office, Director of Communications and Community Engagement Elizabeth Kalajjian. Ms. Kalajjian said she looks forward to working with all.

PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS: ► Chair Dellorco noted a Boston Post Cane to honor Franklin's oldest citizen Naomi Beard. He said Town Clerk Nancy Danello will bring the proclamation to the recipient.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

a. ► **January 21, 2026 (tabled from February 11, 2026 Town Council meeting).** ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said the link to the video was added to view the questions asked. ► **MOTION to Approve** the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes by **Grella. SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

b. ► **February 4, 2026.** ► **MOTION to Approve** the February 4, 2026 meeting minutes by **Cormier-Leger. SECOND** by **Callaway-Tripp. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

c. ► **March 4, 2026.** ► **MOTION to Approve** the March 4, 2026 meeting minutes by **Grella. Discussion:** ► Councilor Morrongiello requested that Chloe Bowser be added to the minutes for proper recognition. ► Mr. Cerel said they could make a motion to approve the minutes as amended. ► **MOTION to Approve** the March 4, 2026 meeting minutes as amended by **Ojukwu. No Second Made. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

APPOINTMENTS: ► **Finance Committee: Tom Sullivan.** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the appointment. ► **MOTION to Ratify** the appointment by the Town Administrator of Thomas Sullivan to serve as a Member of Franklin's Finance Committee with a term to expire on June 30, 2026, by **Cormier-Leger. SECOND** by **Malloy. Discussion:** ► Mr. Sullivan introduced himself and provided his background. ► Chair Dellorco and other Town Council members said thank you. ► Councilor Morrongiello asked about having the language on the appointments be clear that the Town Council is the appointing authority, not the town administrator. ► Mr. Hellen said they can make an amendment regarding the appointment language. ► Chair Dellorco confirmed they will do it for the next time. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

PUBLIC HEARINGS - 6:00 PM: ► **None.**

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS: ► **None.**

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS: *a.* ► **Chapter 70 Program - Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).** ► Mr. Hellen thanked the superintendent and others for this presentation and for the School Committee coming to this meeting to have a broader discussion on Chapter 70. ► Mr. Rob O'Donnell, Director of School Finance at DESE, and Ms. Meghan Ryan, State Aid Programs Manager at DESE, introduced themselves. ► Mr. O'Donnell thanked the school district, Town Council, and School Committee for having them. He said they will give a brief overview of the Chapter 70 formula. He will take questions from Town Council and School Committee members as they go through the presentation and at the end, which he did. He reviewed his slideshow presentation titled Preliminary FY27 Chapter 70 Aid and Charter Reimbursements (House 2) January 2026. He reviewed the governor's budget filing. FY27 House 2 Chapter 70 continues implementation of the Student Opportunity Act (the SOA). FY 27 Chapter 70 is \$7,603,623,093, a \$242 million increase (3.3%) over FY26. He reviewed the SOA establishes new, higher foundation budget rates in five areas. House 2 includes rate changed above inflation toward the goal rates in these five areas and closes the final 1/6th of the gap. The five areas are: Benefits and fixed changes; guidance and psychological services; special education out-of-district tuition; English learners; and low-income students. FY27 will be the final year of implementation of SOA which was passed in 2019. He gave a brief review of the Education Reform Law passed in 1993. The Reform Law established the foundation budget formula that set an adequate spending level for every district in the Commonwealth and defined how much of that should be funded with local revenues and funded by the state. He gave a brief review of the 2019 Student Opportunities Act (SOA) which responded to a set off issues identified by the Foundation Budget Review Commission in 2015. This Commission was legislatively authorized to review the Chapter 70

formula and identifies areas for improvement. He discussed the SOA focused on the five areas and established new goal rates in these areas in the foundation budget. He noted the SOA was not funded until FY22. They are on a six-year implementation cycle with FY26 being the sixth and final year. He reviewed the rates they are using and the inflation added. He reviewed this year's 3.3% increase. He said it was a lower increase than last year. He said the lower increase is due to significant enrollment loss seen across the Commonwealth from FY26 to FY27. Chapter 70 is based on October 1 enrollment counts submitted by school districts for the next year. Now it is over 15,000 students lower than the prior October. He said the reasons included they are not seeing the same in-migration as seen previously to replace students that have left the system. It is hard to pin down exactly the cause. This brought the aid increase down. He said the governor's budget is for \$7.6 billion; the House and Senate will have their turn. House 2 sets the low-income threshold is 185% of the federal poverty level in accordance with the SOA. This is up from 133% which was used from FY17 to FY22. The SOA also increases the assumed in-district special education enrollment percentages. The SOA increases the rate for vocational students from 4.75% to 5% and from 3.75% to 4% for non-vocational students. He said they do not identify students on IEPs; they apply an assumed percentage of the headcount. He further explained they apply a higher percentage to vocational students and vocational districts than they do to non-vocational students and non-vocational districts. He said the way to think about the percentages is that it is an FTE based, not a headcount-based percentage. He confirmed that he will send the slides as they were not provided to the Town Council. He further explained the percentage. The 4% FTE percentage translates to is that we are assuming that 16% of your students are receiving some level of special education 25% of the time. He said there are students with higher and lower levels of intervention. This is the assumed rate that has been established in the formula. On the vocational piece, it assumes in a vocational setting 25% of the students are receiving special education services 25% of the time. Person who did not identify themselves stated Franklin is at 23% which is a little over the estimated percentages. Throughout the presentation questions were answered by Mr. O'Donnell. He discussed the foundation budget assumes a level of spending for in-district students of around \$30,000 per student. It is meant to reflect costs of students being served who are not eligible for circuit breaker. Once you get into the above-the-circuit-breaker threshold to reimbursement districts for higher cost students it is a separate funding program. The foundation program works with the circuit breaker program to address funding for higher-cost students. He said they are working on a study for the legislature as authorized through this year's budget and the focus is on local contribution requirements and how we define local contribution requirements in the formula. He said that is their charge right now. He moved to the next slide. On top of the targeted rate increases, all foundation budget categories have been adjusted upward for inflation. An employee benefits inflation rate is applied to the employee benefits and fixed charges category, based on the enrollment-weighted, three-year average premium increase for all GIC plans. For FY27 the increase is 8.29%. An inflation increase of 2.76% has been applied to all other foundation budget rates, based on the U.S. Department of Commerce's state and local government price deflator. He said calculating local contribution requirements is the most complicated part of the formula. He said barring anything else the legislature might do, assuming there are no other changes initiated in FY28, we will be in an inflation and enrollment growth environment at that point. He confirmed there will be no SOA, the baseline will be higher. No other factors but enrollment and inflation will be considered. He explained SOA legislation amended Chapter 70. Some districts benefitted from SOA. Other districts have not received additional aid increases; Franklin was one of those per the formula. He noted a lot of districts have declining enrollment. In response to a question, he explained there are two categories of aid in the formula: foundation aid and minimum aid. He said the governor proposed \$75 per student in increase funding and that is what Franklin is scheduled to get. The legislature usually does more than that. He does not know where that is going to land this year. He said they will know more when the House comes out with their numbers in April. From his slide he explained the SOA codified the aggregate wealth model for determining local contribution requirements. For municipalities with required contributions above targets, the requirement is reduced by 100% of the gap. Cities and towns with combined effort yields greater than 175% of foundation have required local contributions set at not less than 82.5% of foundation. Due to rapid increases to foundation, many communities are below target and fewer are eligible for excess effort reductions. He said he could come back to the slide on charter school reimbursements. ► Ms. Ryan reviewed how they do foundation enrollments and foundation budgets. She began with the goal of the Chapter 70 formula is to ensure that every district has sufficient resources to meet its foundation budget spending level,

through an equitable combination of local property taxes and state aid. In House 2, these are specified as: total state target local contribution = 59%; effort reduction = 100%; minimum aid = \$75 per pupil. ► Mr. O'Donnell said these are key parameters that are set in the budget. He said therefore, 41% is funded from state aid. ► Ms. Ryan said there are six factors that work together to determine a district's Chapter 70 aid. Foundation Budget: enrollment, wage adjustment factor (Franklin's wage adjustment factor is higher than the state average which increases the foundation budget), and inflation. She noted the type of students also contribute to the foundation budget. Local Contribution: property value, income, and municipal revenue growth factor. She reviewed there are three primary steps in determining each district's Chapter 70 aid. Define and calculate a foundation budget for each district given the specific grades, programs, and demographic characteristics of its students. Determine an equitable local contribution requirement, how much of the foundation budget that should be paid for by each city and town's property tax, based upon the relative wealth of the municipality. Calculate state aid, providing necessary funds to reach foundation or mandated minimum aid increases. Required local contribution plus state aid equals a district's net school spending (NSS) requirement. This is the minimum amount that a district must spend to comply with state law. Each district's foundation budget is calculated by multiplying the number of pupils in 13 enrollment categories by cost rates in 11 functional areas. She reviewed the FY27 Chapter 70 Foundation Budget slide for Franklin and explained the categories of students. She noted the incremental costs above the base for students. She explained Franklin is in low-income group 4 which she will have a slide for coming up. Discussion commenced on the cost for out-of-district special education are higher than in-district costs. ► Mr. O'Donnell explained the assumed rate for out-of-district special education placements is 1% of your headcount. He explained this is where they have the circuit breaker program. The SOA fixed the eligibility threshold at FY21 level at \$45,000 to increase it by inflation annually. There has been more circuit breaker funding that has gone out. The goal of circuit breaker is to fund 75% of the cost above the threshold for districts that claim students at that level of service. He said the SOA also added eligibility for transportation reimbursement for out-of-district special education students which did not exist before the SOA. He repeated that circuit breaker funding has grown substantially. It is now \$600 million or higher including transportation costs reimbursements. He said they have heard it a lot that special education funding is a concern. Those costs are growing and student needs are growing and we need to continue to meet those costs. ► School Committee Chair Paul Griffith said these are all estimates based on the formula. The special education tuition is 1% based on this; for us we are right around 2%. Franklin as a whole is above the estimates. Our numbers are higher than what is estimated by the state. ► Mr. O'Donnell reiterated that the SOA was passed in 2019 and things have moved since then and it continues to evolve. This is a big thing to change. He does not know when the legislature will take this up again. ► Mr. Hellen said usually around every 8 to 12 years is when the state legislators and DESE hear enough comments about the formula. This community has to be prepared that after the election this year, there will be a report by DESE in the summer. You are looking at FY28 and FY29 that is about 10 years since the SOA. He said every community evaluates the formula and how it impacts them. He said we have to be prepared that we have to pay serious attention to if the legislature brings back the foundation review commission that is a signal and an alert that it is a serious issue. He reviewed that around 8 to 10 years ago the School Committee hosted a lot of legislative sessions about this. He said the SOA did very little for Franklin. ► Mr. O'Donnell noted that charter school reimbursement was part of the SOA. It was reiterated that Franklin is paying more in special education fees than the state assumes. ► Person who did not identify themselves said we talked about funding and revenue. She said the secondary side of that when it comes to special education is tuition increases and the office of OSD. She asked for their relationship with OSD and what that looks like when taking these things into consideration. ► Mr. O'Donnell said OSD, the Operational Services Division, the Commonwealth's procurement arm, set rates for out-of-district special education schools. He said we do not have input into that rate setting. We are receivers of those rates. Those rates are incorporated into the circuit breaker claim form. Mr. O'Donnell responded to a question regarding is it too complicated to reimburse a district on actuals instead of the formula that makes these assumptions and said at that moment in time they were concerned that if they set a higher assumed special education rate that would create perverse incentive to identify students for special education programming. That is why they set the levels as they did. It was noted how expensive some of the out-of-district tuitions can be. ► Superintendent of Schools Lucas Giguere said they held a legislative forum for all local area school districts surrounding Franklin and the average special education out-of-district

tuition has gone from 2021 at \$96,000 to 2026 at \$135,000. He explained they are petitioning the legislature to look at the formula. ► Ms. Ryan explained Franklin was in low-income group 4. She moved to the next slide. She noted the average per pupil foundation budget for each low-income group level. ► Mr. O'Donnell said after you do all the math, it gives us a foundation budget for FY27 of just over \$68 million for Franklin Public Schools. He said to keep in mind this is the operating budget, it does not include capital or transportation. ► Ms. Ryan reviewed that foundation budgets vary based on student needs, including concentrations of low-income students. Franklin's low-income percentage is just over 18%. So, the average foundation budget per pupil is \$14,241. ► Mr. O'Donnell explained how the low-income rate is defined. The SOA set hard cut points between low-income groups. He responded to the question of how do you know students' income levels. He said they work collaboratively with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. He explained each Students Information Management System (SIMS) collection period. They collect SIMS from districts three times per year. The key collection point is October 1. After each collection period, they take their SIMS file and they send it to EOHHS and they match it up to identify students receiving SNAP benefits, enrolled in MassHealth, and other items. He said they developed this in the 2015/2016 timeframe.

► School Committee Chair Griffith was asked about the free-lunch program paperwork and would that paperwork tie into this. ► Superintendent Giguere said yes and they submit that to the state as part of their data. He confirmed it is important for parents to fill in to the paperwork and said it this also applies to Chromebook insurance, bus, athletic, activity and other fees. They look at leveling the playing field for kids that may not be able to sign up for a sport otherwise. They submit the paperwork and can have access to the student life. ► Mr. O'Donnell said some districts still collect the forms to run the school nutrition program. But his office for Chapter 70 is fully reliant on the match that they do with EOHHS to identify students as low-income. He said once they determine the foundation budget, they determine how much should be funded through the local revenues and how much should be funded by the state. He said they do this through the aggregate wealth method which he explained 59% local contribution and 41% state aid. He explained of the 59% local contribution there is the income effort and the property effort. Property and income percentages are applied uniformly across all cities and towns to determine the combined effort yield from property and income. He said all the taxing authority rests with the cities and towns. He said there are different kinds of school districts out there. He said in other states, school districts have taxing authority when they issue property tax bills. But that is not true in Massachusetts. He explained Franklin Public Schools K-12, Tri-County, and Norfolk County Agricultural School are three districts Franklin have a share in their foundation budgets. He explained the mathematical process. He noted that charter schools are not included in the Chapter 70 formula. He discussed the 59% funding goal and the 82.5% cap on local contribution requirements. In 2024 the equalized evaluations reported for the Town of Franklin from the Department of Revenue was \$8.5 billion and the aggregate income reported on state tax returns by taxpayers who live in the Town of Franklin was \$2.1 billion. He said these are the numbers that we are using to measure your ability to fund your foundation budget. He explained based on the available wealth data they feel that Franklin can fund toward its foundation budget \$62.9 million. He explained that the 82.5% cap is less than the \$62.9 million; Franklin is a capped community. So, the maximum local contribution at 82.5% is \$59.75 million. He talked about the target local share (82.5%) and target aid share. He said they are going to be looking at this in the legislature as how many communities are caught up in the 82.5 percent. He said once the goal is established, they look at the prior year which was \$55.7 million which includes the minimum local contributions to Tri-County and Norfolk County. He reviewed other data from the DOR used to run the formula. With all factors taken into consideration, the FY27 required town's local contribution is \$58 million. He responded to a question about data not being considered from seniors and others who do not need to file taxes. He confirmed if people do not file tax returns, they are not included in this aggregate number. The more folks who do not file taxes because they are not meeting the income requirements, it is going to make the community look less wealthy based on this methodology. He discussed they are trying to capture the overall wealth of the community with this metric. He explained there is some additional information on the DOR website describing how they calculate the growth factors annually. He said the factor they use to establish local contribution requirements was established in 1993. ► Mr. Hellen talked about the formula and noted that for those that do not file taxes due to income, that applies to all cities and towns, so it is an equal playing field in terms of the formula. He said in 1993 the model was on land value. The argument about

income is the same argument from 2005/2006/2007 from the Town of Sandwich who said the formula is unfair because they are land rich, but their wealth is not as great as you would think. That is where the aggregate wealth model came from. He said in 1993 Franklin was not a land rich or income rich community. So, when the town grew with house lots, you got a lot of enrollments which gave the town a lot of Chapter 70 money. When you get to 2006, and you get to the aggregate wealth model, things started to level. Peak enrolment was 2008 and 2009. He said when he got here 10 years ago, the average house was about \$400,000. Today, it is about \$775,000, and the income value has gone way up as well. He said this is one of the issues that will be a part of the report and a big feature in the foundation review commission. ► Mr. O'Donnell responded to questions and noted that Franklin is probably actually spending more than they are requiring of Franklin to spend. This is setting spending requirements, but districts can spend what they see fit. Many districts spend 25 to 30% higher than their required net school spending levels. ► School Committee Chair Paul Griffith said we are a community that is barely funding over the required. ► Mr. O'Donnell said he does not have that number. ► Mr. Hellen explained the chart and the categories. We are in the lower-level tier of what we end up contributing, but that is where the hard part is. There is also the data by this model that we are one of the more affluent communities compared to the 351 towns and cities. He confirmed about 19% of students fall in the low-income category. ► Mr. O'Donnell said for the FY25 reported spending, Franklin is at 138% of their required net school spending. He responded to the goal of state aid. He said they have a slide at the end of the presentation about this. ► Chair Griffith explained that hold harmless still hangs over our head. When you talk about things being fair and being reevaluated, you talk about the parts that benefits us, but if hold harmless were brought in across the state, we would forfeit about \$14 million. He said we are second only to Boston in the amount of hold harmless that we have remaining. So, anyone else watching this is saying that is not fair either. ► Mr. O'Donnell said after the town's contribution required of \$58 million, the formula then allocates that spending goal over all the districts that Franklin sends its students, and explained how this is done within the formula in order to allocate it. As shown on the chart, 93.9% is going to Franklin Public, 5.5% is going to Tri-County, and 0.5% to Norfolk County; this is how we allocate the dollars. He said once all these parts of the formula are done, the aid calculation is straightforward. We look at the aid received in the prior year, your required contribution for the upcoming year, add the numbers together, and if they exceed the foundation budget which they do, then you do not need any additional foundation aid to get up to foundation. He said there has been a strong commitment to make sure you do not get any less than what you got the prior year plus a minimum aid adjustment which Franklin is in. He discussed the governor's \$75 per pupil increase which multiplied by 4,700 students equals \$355,000. He noted Franklin's enrollment declined quite a bit from FY26 to FY27, more than the statewide average which was about 2%, Franklin is more than doubled that. He noted Franklin's enrollment was about 6,000 students at one point. ► Superintendent Giguere talked about the net school spending. He said for FY24, we spent 13% more than the requirement. He showed a bar graph showing the 13% for Franklin and the percentages for other towns. He said the enrollment has declined, but over the next two years it looks like it is going to swing back. ► Mr. O'Donnell talked about the FY27 Chapter 70 aid of \$30.8 million. He said hold harmless guarantees the same amount of aid that you received the prior year. But the enrollment is steadily declining. Franklin has built up an over-aid balance. He responded to the question of does Chapter 70 account for the percentage of the town's population being educated by the town, and if it does not, should it. He said it does not. This is a theme we heard in the public comment sessions. In a declining enrollment environment, there is a smaller constituency of folks who access the schools. That makes it challenging to get proposition 2.5 overrides to support the schools. For folks on fixed incomes, it is tough to take on the increased tax burden. He said that will be a topic of conversation as well as other metrics to look at regarding the burden districts are bearing. He reviewed his last slide: Districts with higher concentrations of low-income students received more state funding per pupil. He responded to questions. He said this is entirely a state-funded program with no federal funding. ► Chair Griffith said they do have some direct funding from some of the federal agencies of around \$1.5 million which is accounted for under separate line items for these federal grants. There is very little change year to year. ► Person who did not identify themselves said for federal impacts, we are losing 15% of Title 1 grants which accumulates to \$27,000. ► Representative Jeff Roy (via Zoom) thanked the presenters. He said he is at the state house debating the fair share surplus money supplemental budget. He said he has good news. His amendment was adopted to modernize the Franklin middle school library space for \$150,000. He said his question is that he

heard that Franklin being hold harmless was \$14 million, but if you do the math the actual aid Franklin gets is \$30.5 million and the foundation aid entitled to \$13,500. So, Franklin is actually getting additional aid of \$17 million. ► Mr. O'Donnell said that is correct. ► Rep. Roy said he has been resistant to advocating to change the foundation aid formula as it would result in a hit to Franklin of \$17 million less in state aid. He said Franklin gets a huge amount of aid that would not be justified under the formula because the legislative delegation fought hard for the hold harmless agreement. He said he does not think the formula should be revisited. ► Mr. Hellen talked about DESE doing a report which oftentimes that is a precursor to re-establishing the foundation review commission. He is hearing from Rep. Roy that he would be against bringing back that commission because you may end up opening Pandora's Box. He said this community has to be alert and awake and working with Rep. Roy and others on this. He said there are other communities that are hold harmless districts and do not want it changed. He said districts will not vote for change where they lose money. The town cannot be complacent in this. ► Rep. Roy said he will continue to fight to keep hold harmless as it is so vital to this community. He would like to have unanimous support from the Town Council, School Committee, and Finance Committee to keep hold harmless in place. ► Town Council members thanked the presenters.

Chair Dellorco declared a two-minute recess.

b. ► Discussion: School Committee & Town Council Strategic Planning Request for Information. ► Mr. Hellen said this was a goal. He said this is a strategic planning process. He referenced his memo provided in the meeting packet dated March 13, 2026:

The Town Council will consider discussing and voting on a statement of interest for development of a strategic plan, which will focus on establishing a set of community values, principles and common areas of agreement to govern policy decisions over the next 1-5 years. The School Committee will be in attendance for the March 18th meeting and this should be a joint discussion between both boards. The Town is not obligated to conduct this exercise, but as previously discussed, it may be helpful to help the Town Council, School Committee and other town/school boards, committees and staff focus on a set of agreed upon community values, principles and common areas of agreement to guide policy decision making.

He said they are either going to do this or not. He said he feels the community has given a lot of input on a lot of issues at this point, and they may be surveyed out. The voters have weighed in where they want to go. There has been division in the community over items including overrides and development. He said this plan has been capped at \$40,000. If approved tonight, the request for statements of interest will go out over the next few days. He said the consultants provide information on how they would do this. He gave an example and said the Town Council and School Committee would choose three of the consultants they thought were good fits, then they would get pricing from all three, and the lowest pricing would get the bid. He noted there is no obligation to sign a contract with any vendor even when the lowest bid comes in. He said some of the division in the community might benefit from this strategic process. ► Superintendent Giguere said he would echo what Mr. Hellen said. They have done a lot of outreach in different ways to gather ways for Town and Schools to provide information. He said he wants to work together with the community to set goals and work through and resolve some issues in the community. ► Mr. Hellen said if there are six or seven bids, then the Town Council and School Committee will review their proposals. They will then decide who they want to get pricing from. He noted sometimes they put out bids, but do not get anything back. He said in April or May there would be time to look at those and determine who you want to get pricing from. Then the bid would go to the lowest bidder. They would look at it again to see who came back. They would make a decision. Overall, if this goes forward, a final report should be expected by the end of the year. ► Councilor Malloy said he is generally in favor of it. He is not crazy about the timeline and would like to speed it up. ► Councilor Ojukwu said he agrees with that and they want speed. They should get the RFI out. He is in support. ► Councilor Griffith said she is in support of this. She wants to make sure it is a joint effort between the Town Council and School Committee. She questioned the money for this and was it already set aside. ► Mr. Hellen confirmed the money was already set aside and a capital account for this already exists as it was from the marketing and branding project. ► Chair Dellorco said he also wants the School Committee involved. ► Councilor Morrongiello said he is a big proponent of strategic planning. He said he thinks they

need public input as a part of this. He asked if there is any language to include members of the public. ► Mr. Hellen said he thought there was something in there but he will add it in. He said he thinks it would be for the consultants to say how to do that. With a limited amount of money, doing a massive outreach will cost a lot of money. He said he thinks the issues to hone in on are trust, honesty, and communication. He said the residents have already spoken and said this is a problem. He noted the \$40,000 budget. The consultants will come back with that. ► Councilor Callaway-Tripp said she is all for it. She said they need a strategic plan. She said she thinks residents need to be more involved. She said there are people in town that could help with some of these things. She said we have to work together. She said we are all saying the same things, we just have different ideas on how to get there. We have to listen. She said they are going to use the marketing and branding money for this. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger confirmed the marketing and branding is not going away, and we are using the new logos, we are just not going to do any more. He said he strongly hopes they can do this and thinks it is a good idea. He asked about the top of the document and said it is divisive and separates us. We are not the Town of Franklin and a School Committee; we are just the Town of Franklin. He suggested the top say Town of Franklin and the first paragraph be reworded to include the Franklin Public Schools rather than approaching this as two separate bodies. Discussion commenced on the wording and all agreed. ► Councilor Grella said it would be great to have a professional come in and do this. He said he is all for it. ► Mr. Dave Callaghan said to put out the statement of interest is fantastic. He thanked everyone for putting in the work to make this happen. He said he wants to look at what the outcome is going to be and if they could speed it up a little bit. ► Ms. Nadia Mausolf said she supports this and does not think there is any harm in doing this. ► Mr. Reis Hansen said he supports this and having a clearly defined goal for this is important before we put the money down for this. ► Chair Paul Griffith said he thinks this overall concept codifies what we all ran on. This gives us an opportunity to provide a tangible outcome for all the collaboration. He said he looks forward to working together. Regarding the timeline, he wants to make sure they know the plan, have a clear set of goals, and the final outcome is a chance to close out a lot of items, and quickly turn it around and implement it. He said he thinks it is a good idea. ► Chair Dellorco said he is on board with this. He said this is great that we all came together. He thanked the School Committee for attending tonight. ► Mr. Hellen noted there is a vote to issue the RFI. He noted the Town Council issues this for the procurement office. The School Committee can take a ceremonial vote. He referenced the wording requested and said they will make that change. He said the structural deficit should be mentioned in the document, but it is not; he will add that in and indicate the bidders should be clear in their proposal for the ratio of public input versus elected official input. ► Councilor Griffith noted the structural deficit was mentioned in the document. ► Mr. Hellen noted this is not going to be done by the time you vote on a budget this year. ► Superintendent Giguere said he hopes any consultant would do their homework on Franklin before they submit. ► Mr. Hellen said the bids will be in by the 10th and they could be reviewed here on April 15th. ► Discussion commenced on reviewing the bids at the Town Council April 15th meeting, at the School Committee meeting on April 14th or May 12th, or an additional scheduled meeting. It was determined the date on the RFI would be changed to April 17th and they would meet on May 12th to discuss.

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION:

Note: Two-Thirds Vote requires six votes; Majority Vote requires majority of members present and voting.

- a. Resolution 26-16: Approval for Request for Statements of Interest for Development of a Strategic Plan (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-16 - Majority Vote).* ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Amend Resolution 26-16:** Approval for Request for Statements of Interest for Development of a Strategic Plan, to the date of April 17th, and the top of the document to say Franklin Town Council and Franklin School Committee by **Griffith**. **SECOND** by **Ojukwu**. **No discussion.** ► **VOTE (on the amendment): Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.** ► **MOTION to Approve As Amended Resolution 26-16:** Approval for Request for Statements of Interest for Development of a Strategic Plan by **Grella**. **SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger**. **Discussion:** ► Mr. Cerel indicated if the School Committee wanted to do a ceremonial vote, it would have to be done separately. ► **VOTE (as amended): Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

Franklin School Committee Vice Chair Callaghan made a motion to adjourn the School Committee meeting. Second by Ms. Mausolf. Vote: 4-0.

- b. Resolution 26-17: Town Council's Support of FY27 State Budget Priorities (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-17 - Majority Vote).** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 26-17: Town Council's Support of FY27 State Budget Priorities by Grella. SECOND by Malloy. Discussion:** ► Councilor Morrongiello said we could have had the School Committee join us for these discussions as well. ► Mr. Hellen said Superintendent Giguere talked about this and they have written other letters a few weeks ago. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- c. Resolution 26-18: Town Council Support for H. 4297, An Act relative to the Lowell Mason Act to mandate a percentage of Chapter 70 funds for Arts Education Programs (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-18 - Majority Vote).** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Amend Resolution 26-18: Town Council Support for H. 4297, An Act relative to the Lowell Mason Act to mandate a percentage of Chapter 70 funds for Arts Education Programs, to add the House and Senate Ways and Means Committees on the copy section on this letter by Griffith. SECOND by Grella. Discussion:** ► Councilor Ojukwu asked for the benefit of sending it to the Ways and Means Committees. ► Councilor Griffith said people were saying thank you for voicing your support. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger confirmed there was no language change to the item, only adding people in the copy section of the letter. ► **Councilor Griffith withdrew her motion. ► Councilor Grella withdrew his second. ► VOTE (on the original Resolution 26-18): Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- d. Resolution 26-19: Request for Special Legislation Re: Increase in Local (Hotel) Excise Tax (Motion to Approve Resolution 26-19 - Majority Vote).** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Waive the reading by Grella. SECOND by Ojukwu. No discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1. ► MOTION to Approve Resolution 26-19: Request for Special Legislation Re: Increase in Local (Hotel) Excise Tax by Grella. SECOND by Ojukwu. No discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: ► Councilor Morrongiello said he would like to put forward a resolution opposing changes to hold harmless for the next joint meeting with the School Committee.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: ► None.

ADJOURN: ► **MOTION to Adjourn by Griffith. No Second Made. No Discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary