



TOWN OF MONROE

TOWN COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

Session # 2026-05

Special Meeting – Thursday, February 26, 2026 – 6:00 P.M.

Meeting conducted in Council Chambers of Town Hall

& Remotely via Zoom

PRESENT:

Chairperson Jonathan Formichella
Vice-Chairperson Dona-Lyn Wales
Councilmember Vincent A. Duva
Councilmember Nina Gagnon
Councilmember Cathy Kohut
Councilmember Enid Lipeles
Councilmember Sean O'Rourke
Councilmember Jason Maur

ABSENT:

Councilmember Kevin Reid

ALSO PRESENT:

First Selectman Terrence P. Rooney
Finance Director Ron Bunovsky
Assistant Finance Director Heidi Meade

I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Formichella called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and led with the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. ROLL CALL

Formichella took the roll call as noted above.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

A. Memo from the First Selectman to the Town Clerk dated February 24, 2026 regarding the Town Council Public Hearing on the Proposed FY27 Budget.

IV. PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE FY26-27 BUDGET

Pursuant to Town Charter, Chapter VIII, §4, the purpose of this Public Hearing is to provide any elector or taxpayer the opportunity to be heard regarding the Town budget as proposed by the First Selectman.

Formichella opened the Public Hearing at 6:08 PM.

Sue Koneff, 7 Georges Lane – stated she had lived in Monroe for 50 years, and was a retired Jockey Hollow Language Arts teacher. She stated that before her and her husband bought their house here, they researched the school system and that a quality education for her two boys was of utmost important to them, especially as educators. She stated that in the 70's they had to watch the destruction of a once vibrant school system. She stated that year after year the cuts and underfunding caused the cancellation of all sports programs at the high school and all art, music, home ec, industrial arts, and sports at the middle school. Ms. Koneff stated they were witnessing a repeat of that situation with this budget cut. She stated we were at a crisis point and years of reduced budgets have taken a toll on building repairs, lack of space planning, and the underfunding and shrinking of important programs. Ms. Koneff stated it was time to say no to the Selectman and the Board

of Finance and recommended having an advisory question on the ballot so that they would know if they wanted the budget raised or opposed.

Tiffany Loconte, 334 Moose Hill Road - Ms. Loconte stated that she came before Council today as a Monroe taxpayer, a mom to a first grader, and a first-grade teacher at Fawn Hollow. She stated that last time she spoke about restoring the money that was already cut from the superintendent's budget was because of what it meant for children right now, but tonight she wanted to talk about what it meant for Monroe's future. Ms. Loconte stated that as both a parent and a teacher, she saw two sides of the community every day. She stated she saw families that moved here for the schools and she was one of them. She noted that she saw children who needed stability, early intervention and strong instruction and that she saw educators working incredibly hard to meet growing needs inside systems that were increasingly strained. Ms. Loconte stated that the school budget was growing because costs that were not in their control were rising such as healthcare, special education mandates, transportation, utilities and insurance. She stated they did not go away when funding was cut. She stated those cuts get absorbed by the children which looked like larger class sizes after last year's budget cuts. She stated that it looked like fewer interventionists, delayed curriculum updates, and postponed building maintenance. Ms. Loconte stated that she had taught at Fawn Hollow for four years and there was not a single winter where they have had ice melt or someone's ceiling tiles collapse, thankfully not on a student yet. She continued by saying budget cuts look like staff reductions, many of which were Monroe residents. She inquired which one of your neighbors and constituents' lively hoods they were willing to negotiate. She stated that we could not keep asking the schools to absorb systemic cost increases while expecting outcomes to remain unchanged. She stated that if the Council and Selectman valued strong schools then they needed to move from reactive budgeting to intentional involvement, which meant asking bigger questions like what kind of learning conditions we want, what staffing levels would truly allow teachers to meet student needs, what facilities were required for safe learning, and how do we build a sustainable financial plan that reflects those priorities. Ms. Loconte stated that as a teacher she knew that children thrive in predictable, supported environments and as a parent she wants Monroe to be the kind of town that planned ahead, rather than continually tighten. She stated that strong schools do not happen by accident, they were a result of consistent investment. Ms. Loconte stated that tonight she was asking the money be restored to the funding that had already been proposed to be cut, trust the Superintendent and his team, stop the cuts and let the voters decide at referendum with the advisory question of too high, just right, or too low.

Marie Blake, 359 Whitman Road – stated that as a retired Monroe teacher, a town resident and homeowner she was there to express her concerns about the cuts made to the education budget. Ms. Blake stated that one of the major functions of the Board of Education was to set forth a fiscally sound budget to meet the needs of our students and our schools. She stated that she knew members of the Board of Education met with school administrators to get a clear understanding of the needs of the district and that the Superintendent composed a budget to meet those needs. She noted that workshops were held, discussions were had, questions were answered but before the budget even got to the First Selectman, the Republicans on the Board slashed it by \$250,000. She stated then the First Selectman slashed another 1.6 million, similar to last year and she inquired as to why. She stated that she trusted their administrators did their due diligence in putting forth the proposed budget. Ms. Blake stated that she had attended meetings, had listened and did her own research and in her opinion, there was not fluff to the tune of 1.8 million in the budget. She stated a cut of that magnitude would not keep their schools status quo, but would inevitably result in loss of programs and staff. Ms. Blake thanked the administrators for working hard for keeping the sinking ship afloat year after year and that she recommended putting the funds back into the budget and let the Town decide at referendum.

Elizabeth Richer, 3 Founders Way - stated that in 2026 we were once again navigating a challenging budget season. She stated everyone was feeling the pressures of rising costs in every aspect of our lives and that our schools were no exception. Ms. Richer stated that since the school budget had been the most consistent sticking point in the Town's budget process year after year, she was asking that the First Selectman and the

Town Council modify the budget referendum to include non-binding advisory questions specific to the Board of Education's budget. She stated for example, was the Board of Education budget too high, just right or too low. She stated that questions like that would give residents a meaningful way to provide context alongside their votes, which a simple yes or no would not capture. Ms. Richer stated that by focusing on these questions specifically on the Board of Education budget, rather than on the budget as a whole, Town leadership would gain more useful information to guide their decisions. She stated she was not an expert on the steps to make such as change, but believed our Town Charter and Connecticut General Statutes would give them the authority to do so, and she hoped the Town explored that path. Ms. Richer stated that she felt strongly about funding education and hoped that the Board of Finance would reinstate the full budget as proposed by the Board of Education and that residents would have the opportunity to vote on that number.

Catherine Tolan, 74 Old Castleton – stated that to her understanding, a large portion of the Board of Education budget was allocated to unfunded mandates by the State. She stated they were all aware of the 2.14% reduction before a town vote met the costly mandates, but left funds lacking to cover teachers' salaries and insurance. She stated that from the February 9th Town Council budget presentation, Selectman Rooney stated, "the reduction was investing in education fairly". She stated to let the people decide what they deemed fair. She asked that the budget be restored to the original number presented by the entity experienced to create it, the Board of Education and then let the people decide.

Rosario Renda, 25 Sunset Hill Drive – stated he supported education and restoring the budget for schools was important. He stated that it helped the children and also the values to their homes stable and growing. He inquired how the 2-million-dollar cost would impact taxes. He stated there should be a separate referendum.

Jennifer Aguilar, 32 Surrey Lane – stated she had been out of the school system for years now, but currently worked as a paraeducator at Fawn Hollow. She stated that she wished she had photos of the infrastructure of the schools to show and that the can had been kicked down the road for too long. She stated she gets it, taxes go up and nobody wanted their taxes to go up but the infrastructure of the schools was poor. She stated they have not kept up with what had been needed. She stated that being on Council before, she heard them say the First Selectman did their due diligence lets just leave the town budget as it was, and she voted for that because she believed he had done his due diligence. She asked that the same faith be put in the Superintendent and the Board of Education.

Formichella closed the public hearing at 6:24PM and thanked everyone for coming out.

V. BUDGET DISCUSSION WITH DEPARTMENT HEADS

Department heads and members of Town Council discussed various details of the department budgets. No votes were taken. **Formichella** noted that the budget vote for Town Council would be held during their regular meeting on March 9th and the budget would then be passed on to the Board of Finance.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Formichella adjourned the meeting at 8:04 PM.

Respectfully submitted by, Kerry McAndrew, Clerk