

Cohasset Public Schools

143 Pond Street

Cohasset, MA 02025

Empower Students to Improve Communities

MINUTES OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2027 SCHOOL BUDGET March 18, 2026 5:00PM

Cohasset Middle and High School
Learning Commons
143 Pond Street
Cohasset, MA 02025

Attendance

Committee Members in Attendance Jennifer Lesky, Chair
Craig MacLellan, Vice Chair
Corey Evans, School Committee Member
Jacob Squatrito, Interim School Committee Member

Others in Attendance Dr. Sarah Shannon, Superintendent
Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent
Susan Owen, Director of Finance & Operations

Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the hearing to order at 5:18PM.

Roll Call: Mr. Evans-Present; Mr. MacLellan-Present; Mr. Squatrito-Present; Ms. Lesky-Present.

Ms. Lesky noted Mr. Dial was absent, but that the Committee nonetheless had a quorum.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Shannon provided an overview of the FY27 school budget ahead of the Committee's anticipated March 25, 2026 budget vote, summarizing the extensive multi-month process undertaken to address significant structural funding challenges. She explained that while the district successfully secured a 4.99% increase over FY26 through close collaboration with Town leadership, this increase still falls materially short of full level-service needs, leaving a remaining deficit of approximately \$1 million. Dr. Shannon emphasized that despite meaningful progress in reducing budget gaps and minimizing staffing and programmatic harm, the district continues to face broader systemic municipal and educational funding issues that will require long-term structural solutions beyond annual budget adjustments.

Chair Lesky reminded all in-person and virtual participants that public commenters must clearly identify themselves by name and address to ensure accurate inclusion in the public record.

Committee Comments

Prior to opening the floor for public comment, Chair Lesky invited initial remarks from School Committee members regarding the FY27 budget presentation.

Mr. Evans praised Dr. Shannon, Ms. Owen, district staff, and educators for the extraordinary level of diligence, persistence, and detailed financial analysis that substantially improved the district's budget position over recent months. He emphasized that each incremental budget improvement reflected countless hours of careful work and noted that while the district still faces painful reductions, the Administration's efforts significantly reduced the severity of those impacts while strengthening the Committee's understanding and communication of district needs.

Mr. Squatrito similarly expressed appreciation for the collaborative efforts of district leadership and Town officials in mitigating what had initially appeared to be far more severe budget reductions. He cautioned, however, that despite meaningful progress and reduced loss of staffing, the adopted budget still carries substantial consequences for students and programming. Mr. Squatrito stressed that while the district is now in a better position than feared earlier in the process, significant challenges and educational impacts remain and must continue to be addressed moving forward.

Public Comments

Victoria Lattanzi, 125 Doane Street, requested extensive clarification regarding the practical impact of proposed FY27 reductions on educational programming, including whether staffing reductions could lead to broader program loss beyond headline FTE figures. She specifically questioned Pre-K class reductions, athletics budget cuts, the structure and future of co-op sports programs, and whether partial FTE reductions could create indirect workforce losses if affected staff chose to leave due to reduced hours or benefits concerns. Ms. Lattanzi also raised concerns about maintaining pension eligibility and financial stability for staff facing reduced schedules.

In response, Dr. Shannon explained that Pre-K enrollment projections currently support the proposed classroom structure, athletics reductions would likely target limited underutilized co-op or junior varsity programs, and while some staffing reductions involve fractional FTE changes, the district intends to preserve as many full-time positions as possible while continuing to fill necessary roles.

Sandra Simmons, 22 Atlantic Avenue, thanked the Committee for its steady progress while expressing concern that annual budget crises are unsustainable for both families and the broader community. She specifically asked how current operational budget pressures may affect the district's ability to continue pursuing long-term middle/high school building projects and broader strategic planning. Ms. Simmons emphasized the need to understand whether immediate fiscal constraints could delay or undermine future educational infrastructure investments.

In response, Dr. Shannon clarified that operational school budgets and capital building projects are funded through separate financial structures, allowing both efforts to proceed simultaneously. Mr. MacLellan further noted that while legally distinct, public appetite for future capital investments may still be influenced by broader operational override discussions.

Stephanie Saunders, 10 Stratford Terrace, asked whether prior fee increases and staffing reductions from earlier budget cycles would be prioritized for restoration if a future operational override is pursued. She also emphasized the importance of robust community input beyond standard public forums, particularly regarding deeply felt issues such as fees, staffing, and educational service levels.

In response, Dr. Shannon stated that some prior reductions may be reconsidered as part of broader long-term planning, while Mr. Evans emphasized that extensive community engagement will be critical in shaping any future override package.

Theodore Amara, 75 Pleasant Street, asked what concrete actions parents and residents can take to most effectively advocate for sustained or expanded school funding. He sought practical guidance on how community members can meaningfully support the district's long-term financial goals.

In response, Committee members emphasized the importance of sustained civic participation, including attending meetings, monitoring budget timelines, engaging neighbors, supporting public communications efforts, and mobilizing turnout for any future override-related Town Meeting and ballot votes.

Melissa Slazier, 174 Forest Avenue, sought direct confirmation as to whether the Committee was actively contemplating a future tax increase to address long-term school funding needs. Her question focused on clarifying the broader implications of current override discussions.

In response, Chair Lesky confirmed that a future operational override is under consideration as part of long-term structural planning, while Mr. Evans clarified that FY27 itself is currently balanced and that override discussions are focused on future sustainability rather than an immediate deficit.

Patrick Marooney, 38 Oak Street, questioned why additional resources could not simply be reallocated from other municipal departments to prioritize school funding, arguing that education should remain the Town's foremost budgetary priority. He expressed frustration that a relatively modest funding gap could create such significant district disruption.

In response, Dr. Shannon explained that the Town has already made substantial one-time reallocations and reductions to support FY27 school funding, but broader structural funding deficiencies affecting the full municipality require more comprehensive long-term solutions than repeated annual departmental cuts.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to adjourn the FY27 School Budget Public Hearing at 6:00 PM.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Evans – Aye; Mr. Squatrito – Aye; Mr. MacLellan – Aye; Ms. Lesky – Aye.

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial
May 17, 2026