Marblehead School Committee
Chair: Al Williams
Meeting Date, Time & Location: Thursday, March 12th, 2026, 6pm, MHS Library, 2 Humphrey Street Marblehead MA 01945
SC Members Present: A. Williams, J. Schaeffner, K. Schmeckpeper, H. Gwazda, M. Clucas
SC Members Absent:
Agenda/Materials: Link
Meeting Recording: Link
Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Henry Gwazda

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance (00:00:00–00:01:00)

a. Meeting called to order at 6:03 PM on Thursday, March 12, 2026; noted the meeting was being recorded.

b. Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

FY27 Budget Revenue and Expense Allocation Framework (00:01:00–00:54:00)

a. Alec Goolsby, Chair of the Finance Committee, presented FY27 revenue allocation analysis; Molly Teets (Vice Chair, Finance Committee) and Dan Fox (Chair, Select Board) also participated.

- FY26 balanced operating budget was $97.1M total: $47,968,952 town / $49,120,287 schools (~51% schools).
- FY27 available revenue ~$96.5M (~$600K less than FY26), driven by reduced free cash ($5M vs. $7M), lower local receipts, partially offset by $2.1M Prop 2½ plus new growth.
- Pre-allocation reductions: ~$740K abatements, ~$2.5M state assessments, $150K snow/ice reserve, ~$450K warrant articles, ~$636K Essex Aggie assessment.

b. Goolsby presented a cost-allocation framework reallocating six shared "other general government" line items (pension, active employee health insurance, life insurance, retiree health insurance, PEC Medicare reimbursement, OPEB trust transfer) based on school-attributable percentages estimated by Finance Director Aleesha Benjamin.

- Reallocation shifted schools' true FY26 share from $49.1M to ~$61.3M, representing 63% of available revenue (vs. prior assumed 50/50 split).

c. Under the 63/37 framework applied to FY27, total town-wide deficit was ~$7.7M (~$3.2M school-side, ~$4.5M town-side).

- School's FY27 request was ~$50.8M; ~$1.7M in reductions already identified, leaving ~$1.5M additional gap; under 50/50 approach, schools would still need ~$900K below FY26 levels.

d. Assistant Superintendent Michael Pfifferling raised concerns about input accuracy — GIC health insurance figure used ($8.71M) exceeded his calculation ($8.37M), and a separate $350K GIC cushion appeared to double-count.

- Goolsby and Teets committed to rerunning analysis if numbers adjusted, returning savings to schools per 63/37 ratio.
- Pfifferling stated he could not advise adopting the framework without verified inputs given limited reconciliation time.

e. Goolsby reported without the $1.5M school reduction and without a trash fee, town faced cutting 55–60 positions (~22% of general fund employees), including full closure of library, Council on Aging, Recreation/Parks, and Cemetery.

- After school reduction and Select Board's decision to fund trash collection via fee, ~20 town positions (10–11%) still to be cut; remaining town-side deficit ~$1.5–2.5M.
- Jennifer Schaeffner questioned whether the trash fee constitutes true deficit reduction versus cost-shifting, analogous to schools' ~$325K–$348,194 shift to revolving funds.

f. Committee members discussed adopting the framework going forward.

- Kate Schmeckpeper supported the framework but sought assurance of year-to-year stability; Fox offered to bring a proposal to the Select Board for formal vote on adopting the collaborative framework and early-season joint budget meetings beginning in October.
- Teets recommended joint meetings with Select Board and School Committee representation at budget season start; Chair Al Williams asked about multi-year budgeting; Teets endorsed multi-year planning.
- Schaeffner noted an existing MOU (circa 2019–2020) already called for annual joint budget meetings but had not been consistently followed, and asked whether the committee should adopt the framework for FY27 or treat it as an FY28 project; Goolsby reiterated level funding was never on the table given the structural deficit.

School Committee Budget Direction and Vote (00:54:00–01:31:00)

a. Finance Committee Chair Alec Goolsby clarified that a department's requested budget can differ from the Finance Committee's recommendation, but town meeting cannot pass an unbalanced budget.

b. Committee debated adopting the ~$1.5M cost-allocation reduction for FY27 versus deferring to FY28.

- Jennifer Schaeffner questioned whether there was time to validate the underlying data.



- Members acknowledged the need to present a balanced budget to maintain credibility and position for a future override.
- Superintendent John Robidoux stated cuts beyond level funding would "100% impact classrooms" and that FY28 would be "way worse."

c. Assistant Superintendent Michael Pfifferling challenged the $1.5M figure, citing ~$750K in potential discrepancies and savings.

- Select Board Chair Dan Fox stated scenario planning was based on $1.5M and he was not asking for more.

d. Committee agreed Pfifferling and Finance Director Aleesha Benjamin needed to reconcile data before a final directive, with a revised budget to be presented the following week.

e. A motion was made by Jennifer Schaeffner and seconded by Melissa Clucas to direct Assistant Superintendent Pfifferling and Superintendent Robidoux to work with Finance Director Benjamin to reconcile the budget numbers, and to return the following week with a revised budget presentation reflecting the agreed-upon figures.

- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Kate Schmeckpeper, Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, and Melissa Clucas.

Override Planning and Multi-Year Budget Discussion (01:31:00–01:49:00)

a. Select Board Chair Dan Fox committed to partnering with the school committee on a future override alongside budget cuts; Superintendent John Robidoux emphasized continued collaboration.

b. The committee discussed aligning with the Select Board's tiered override approach.

- The Select Board had asked Town Administrator Thatcher Keezer to present override scenarios at its March 20 meeting; the committee agreed to add override planning to its next meeting agenda.
- Superintendent Robidoux stated the level-services budget developed in October — before deficit-driven reductions — should be the school's override target.

c. The committee discussed override dollar figures and multi-year projections.

- Assistant Superintendent Michael Pfifferling noted he could produce multi-year estimates within a week but cautioned FY29 projections were unreliable due to expiring employee contracts.
- Vice Chair Kate Schmeckpeper emphasized the need for a structurally sound, multi-year solution rather than a one-year fix.

d. The committee discussed bringing employee benefit line items into the school budget.

- Pfifferling indicated this would add approximately five to six line items and give the school committee greater visibility and control over benefit costs.



- Jennifer Schaeffner stated she could not support the transfer unless the school committee secured a role in benefit negotiations, including the Public Employee Committee (PEC) contract.
- The committee did not take a formal vote on transferring benefit lines but agreed the topic required further discussion.

Public Comment and Adjournment (01:49:00–01:55:00)

a. Chair Al Williams opened public comment with a three-minute limit per speaker.

- Leigh Blander urged the committee to keep the public informed about a potential override request and to respond timely to media and press inquiries.
- Sarah Fox referenced an existing MOU between the Select Board, School Committee, and Finance Committee requiring joint budget meetings, noting a prior Select Board chair had stated "an entirely different board is not bound to any MOU from years past" and cautioned that relying on a new MOU would be insufficient.

b. No other public comments were offered; public comment was closed.

c. A motion was made by Melissa Clucas and seconded by Henry Gwazda to adjourn.

- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Jennifer Schaeffner, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

d. The meeting adjourned at 7:58pm.