

City of Fall River Massachusetts

Office of the City Clerk

ALISON M. BOUCHARD
CITY CLERK

INÊS LEITE
ASSISTANT CITY CLERK

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL

MEETING: June 17, 2025, at 6:05 p.m.
Council Chamber, One Government Center

PRESENT: President Joseph D. Camara, presiding;
Councilors Shawn E. Cadime, Michelle M. Dionne, Paul B. Hart,
Bradford L. Kilby, Linda M. Pereira, Cliff Ponte, Andrew J. Raposo
and Ricky T. Tith

ABSENT: None

IN ATTENDANCE: Emily Arpke, Interim Director of Financial Services
Rebekah Pontes, Assistant Treasurer and Interim Purchasing Agent

President Camara called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. with a moment of silence followed by a salute to the flag and announced that the meeting may be recorded with audio or video and transmitted through any medium.

1. Citizen Input Time – None

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee on Finance recommending action:

2. Order – Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget
On a motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Dionne, it was unanimously voted to waive the rules to allow representatives of the Finance Departments to answer questions.

Councilor Ponte and Emily Arpke, Interim Director of Financial Services, held a lengthy discussion regarding various portions of the budget, including the Employer Health Trust Fund, the lack of capital projects within the budget line items, and the removal of necessary water and sewer rate payments for municipal departments during Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26). Ms. Arpke provided a detailed explanation of the long-term plan to grow and maintain additional capital within the Employer Health Trust Fund by applying adequate amounts of surplus revenue funds as well as implementing necessary reductions in future budgets. The Interim Director of Financial Services also explained that the Administration will provide up to \$10,000,000 in capital funding to various departments with long term debt funding that will not be due for repayment during FY26, and this will lessen the financial burden in the upcoming fiscal year. Councilor Ponte made brief remarks regarding the use of one-time funding, such as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, as the City will not have access to these funds going forward. Ms. Arpke agreed and stated that these financial challenges will be addressed by the Financial Services team prior to the next fiscal year.

The Interim Director of Financial Services provided a detailed summary of the agreement made with the Administrator of Community Utilities to waive municipal departments' responsibility of the water and sewer bills during FY26, which will allow those funds to be, instead, allocated to the Employer Health Trust Fund to assist with remedying the deficit. Councilor Ponte expressed concern with this funding plan, as it will affect the adopted FY26 budgets for the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds, and will only be a short-term, one-year solution. Ms. Arpke acknowledged that this plan is not sustainable but emphasized that it will allow the City additional time to develop a new, long-term policy to balance the trust fund. The Interim Director of Financial Services also clarified that the School Department and Emergency Medical Services Enterprise Fund will still pay their water and sewer bills.

Councilor Ponte made remarks on purchasing practices and stated that he has copies of purchase orders totaling \$9,999. Councilor Ponte expressed concern that these requested funds appear as though they are entered into the software in such a manner as to avoid the procurement process for purchases over \$10,000. Councilor Ponte requested that purchase order records, from May 2022 to present, equaling an amount of \$9,999, and also files of all purchase orders submitted by the Department of Facilities Maintenance and the Department of Community Maintenance, in all amounts, from May 2022 to present, be requested. Ms. Arpke clarified that requisitions are not always for one purchase order request and can also be used as a blanket method for multiple purchase order requests from the same vendor. The Interim Director of Financial Services also emphasized that there is a strict, rigorous policy in place within the Purchasing Department for transparent, detailed descriptions of all proposed purchases.

Councilor Dionne and Ms. Arpke discussed the Administration's plan to waive water and sewer fee payments for the municipal departments during FY26, surplus funds within various departments that were utilized in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), and anticipated use of one-time funding from the Diman Stabilization Fund. Councilor Dionne expressed concern as this significant decrease of \$400,000 in revenue in relation to the water and sewer fees being waived counters the argument that increased service rates were needed within the enterprise funds for FY26 and stated that this is not a long-term solution. The Interim Director of Financial Services explained the process of departments utilizing surplus funds at the end of the fiscal year, which will decrease Free Cash by a small amount, but will benefit the needs of the departments, such as the purchase of new police cruisers within the Fall River Police Department. Ms. Arpke also provided additional information regarding the potential use of one-time funding from the Diman Stabilization Fund but emphasized that the City anticipates that the new assessment on this project, which should be available in the Fall of 2025, will most likely be reduced from the \$600,000 shown within the budget, which will create less of a financial burden on the use of this capital.

Councilor Cadime and Ms. Arpke held a detailed discussion regarding the proper procurement policies that are required under various Massachusetts General Laws, and the potential violation of those laws if any department attempted to circumvent legal requirements by listing purchase orders incorrectly to avoid the bidding process. Councilor Cadime also requested additional information regarding the Employer Health Fund Trust, the one-time funding being utilized from the Diman Stabilization Fund, and the proposed waiving of water and sewer fees for municipal departments. Ms. Arpke stated that she anticipates it will take three or four years to completely remedy the deficit within the Employer Health Trust Fund but must also be thoughtful in the use of Free Cash, as this trust fund should not be overfunded, and Councilor Cadime agreed with this policy. The Interim Director of Financial Services also explained that the debt assessment for the new Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School project is anticipated to be lower than the original \$600,000 estimate, which will lessen the financial

burden if these funds need to be utilized elsewhere in the budget. Ms. Arpke reiterated that she has worked closely with the Administrator of Community Utilities to develop financial methods to offset the municipal departments' water and sewer fees being waived, and that this will assist in avoiding a structural deficit.

Councilor Cadime proposed reducing all 27 municipal department budgets by \$15,000, which would provide the \$400,000 needed without shorting the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds revenue. Ms. Arpke stated that, while this is a possible option, it would significantly affect smaller departments who already have very low budgetary allocations. Councilor Cadime then suggested that \$400,000 be removed from the Reserve Fund, which currently holds \$890,000 in funding for anticipated bargaining agreements. Councilor Cadime stated that, if additional funding is needed for this account in the future, following negotiations with various unions, it can be requested that the City Council approve the transfer of additional funding into the Reserve Fund. Councilor Cadime emphasized that this reorganization of capital would assist in balancing the financial status of the Employer Health Trust Fund without negatively affecting the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds.

Vice President Pereira stated that the vacant Financial Analysis and Compliance Manager position has a salary of \$118,881.25 and suggested that this position be eliminated, which would allow the funds to be transferred as needed. Vice President Pereira stated that this capital could be used to hire a full-time Purchasing Agent.

A brief recess was held from 6:47 p.m. to 6:50 p.m. to confirm that all Councilors had the correct copy of the proposed FY26 Municipal Budget appropriation order.

Councilor Ponte and Ms. Arpke discussed the need for reorganization within the Department of Facilities Maintenance and Department of Community Maintenance, as the current structuring is not efficient, and that the Administration should consider changes to the Financial Analysis and Compliance Manager position following the budget discussions. Councilor Ponte and Ms. Arpke discussed the City's plans to implement zero-based budgets and Ms. Arpke stated that, over the past few years, the Free Cash amount has been very high, and her goal would be to lower the total return to an amount between \$2,000,000 and \$6,000,000.

Councilor Cadime, Councilor Ponte and the Interim Director of Financial Services discussed the new growth in relation to property tax revenue, totaling \$2,000,000 during FY25, and how this has increased the base of City funding resources. Ms. Arpke reiterated plans to waive water and sewer rates for municipal departments and that the City anticipates a decreased assessment total for the Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School project.

Councilor Dionne and the Interim Director of Financial Services discussed the various funds and sources that are used for the Employer Health Trust Fund, including the General Fund, grant funding and Free Cash. Ms. Arpke explained that the trust fund was created to receive capital from many different sources, and there is a \$2,000,000 appropriation order for this trust fund that was referred to the Committee on Finance during the Regular Meeting of the City Council on June 10, 2025, which will, if adopted at a future meeting, assist with additional funding needed for FY25.

Councilor Ponte and Rebekah Pontes, Assistant Treasurer and Interim Purchasing Agent, discussed the process of submitting purchase order requests, the blanket purchase technique that is used by various departments, and the procurement requirements and procedures that the City follows. Ms. Pontes emphasized that all purchase order requests must be reviewed and approved by other City personnel, and that documents are required to show that the department has made adequate efforts to find the most appropriately priced item or service. The Assistant Treasurer and Interim Purchasing Agent also explained that, when a department will be using the same vendor for multiple purchases throughout the Fiscal Year, a blanket purchase order, usually totaling \$9,999, is issued to eliminate the need to request a purchase order for each transaction, such as when the Department of Management Information Systems needs to buy multiple licenses from software companies over a twelve-month period. Ms. Pontes explained that, if a purchase is under \$10,000, approval must be provided by the Department Head and herself, purchases between \$10,000 and \$50,000 require additional staff approval and purchase descriptions, with three quotes, if applicable, and that purchases over \$50,000 required sealed bids. Councilor Ponte commended the strict policy within the Purchasing Department but expressed concern that there are many procurement requests posted on the same day, with the amount of \$9,999, and asked Ms. Pontes to investigate those purchase order requests thoroughly. Ms. Pontes stated that she will research these matters and stated that the departments may have been waiting for a quote when these requests were submitted. Councilor Ponte suggested that the City Council present a resolution to discuss these policies further with Ms. Pontes at a future Committee on Finance meeting.

Vice President Pereira and Ms. Pontes discussed the use of surplus funds at the end of a fiscal year by the Department of Facilities Maintenance and the Department of Community Maintenances. Ms. Pontes stated that the Director of City Operations could provide more detailed information regarding the items purchased but reiterated that she is strict with the procurement processes and all documents must be uploaded to the MUNIS software system for her review prior to approval.

Councilor Cadime and Ms. Arpke held a brief discussion regarding her ability to present an amended appropriation order to the City Council with the suggested changes that were discussed, on behalf of the Administration.

A recess was held from 7:18 p.m. to 7:37 p.m. to allow the Interim Director of Financial Services to draft an amended copy of the proposed FY26 Municipal Budget appropriation order.

Ms. Arpke presented the City Council with an amended appropriation order for the proposed FY26 Municipal Budget. On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was unanimously voted to accept the amended appropriation order for the proposed FY26 Municipal Budget.

On a motion made by Vice President Pereira and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was unanimously voted to take line items A1 through A10 for the purpose of General Government together. On a further motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted to reconsider this motion.

On a motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted to approve line item A1 for Mayor, Salaries.

On a motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was unanimously voted to approve line item A2 for Mayor, Expenses.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Kilby, it was unanimously voted to take line items A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9, and A10, for City Council, Salaries; City Council, Expenses; City Clerk, Salaries; City Clerk, Expenses; Elections, Expenses; Veterans' Benefits, Salaries; and Veterans' Benefits, Expenses, respectively, together. On a further motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by President Camara, it was unanimously voted to approve line items A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9 and A10.

Councilor Dionne stated that the increase in the Salaries line item for the Board of Elections Department should be reduced. Councilor Ponte explained that the City Council approved the appointment for the Director of the Board of Elections Department, but that Councilors are not involved in making contract decisions. Councilor Dionne agreed but emphasized that the City Council does have jurisdiction related to the funds that are appropriated for the department's salary line item within the proposed FY26 Municipal Budget. On a motion made by Councilor Dionne and seconded by Councilor Cadime, it was voted 3 yeas, 6 nays to reduce line item A7 for Elections, Salaries, by \$8,000, with Councilors Cadime, Dionne and Tith voting in the affirmative, and the motion failed to carry. On a further motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was voted 7 yeas, 2 nays to approve line item A7 for Elections, Salaries, with Councilors Dionne and Tith voting in the negative.

On a motion made by Councilor Kilby and seconded by Councilor Hart, it was voted 7 yeas, 2 nays to approve line item B1, for Administrative Services, Salaries, with Councilors Dionne and Raposo voting in the negative.

On a motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 9 yeas to approve line item B2, for Administrative Services, Expenses.

On a motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 8 yeas, 1 nay to approve line item B3, for Judgements and Claims, with Councilor Dionne voting in the negative.

Councilor Dionne explained that there is a vacant position in the Department of Financial Services for a Financial Analysis and Compliance Manager and that the funding for this vacant position should be removed from the proposed budget. On a motion made by Councilor Dionne and seconded by Vice President Pereira, it was voted 3 yeas, 6 nays to reduce line item C1, for Financial Services, Salaries, by \$118,881.25, with Councilors Dionne and Hart and Vice President Pereira voting in the affirmative, and the motion failed to carry. On a further motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 7 yeas, 2 nays to approve line item C1, with Vice President Pereira and Councilor Dionne voting in the negative.

On a motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 8 yeas, 1 nay to approve line item C2, for Financial Services, Expenses, with Councilor Dionne voting in the negative.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted to take line items D1 and D2, for Facilities, Salaries and Facilities, Expenses, respectively, together. On a further motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was voted 9 yeas to approve line items D1 and D2.

Councilor Dionne stated that the increase in salary amounts within the Division of Traffic and Parking is large and should be reduced. On a motion made by Councilor Dionne and seconded by Councilor Cadime, it was voted 1 yeas, 8 nays to reduce line item E1, for Community Maintenance, Salaries, by \$15,000, with Councilor Dionne voting in the affirmative, and the

motion failed to carry. On a further motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was voted 8 yeas, 1 nay to approve line item E1, with Councilor Dionne voting in the negative.

On a motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was unanimously voted to approve line item E2, for Community Maintenance, Expenses.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was unanimously voted to take line items F1 through F3, for Community Services, Salaries; Community Services, Expenses; and Community Maintenance, Capital, respectively, together. On a further motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 9 yeas to approve line items F1 through F3.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Kilby, it was unanimously voted to take line items G1 through G3, for School Appropriation; for School Transportation; and for Education Assessments, respectively, together. On a further motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Vice President Pereira, it was unanimously voted to approve line items G1 through G3.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted to take line items H1 through H8, for Police, Salaries; for Police, Expenses; for Police, Capital; for Harbor Master, Salaries; for Harbor Master, Expenses; for Fire and Emergency Services, Salaries; for Fire and Emergency Services, Expenses; and for Fire and Emergency Services, Capital, respectively, together, with Councilor Raposo opposed. On a further motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Cadime, it was unanimously voted to reconsider the motion to take line items H1 through H8 together.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Dionne, it was unanimously voted to take line items H1 and H2, for Police, Salaries; for Police, Expenses, respectively, together. On a further motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 9 yeas to approve line items H1 and H2.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was unanimously voted to approve line item H5, for Harbor Master, Expenses.

On a motion made by Councilor Kilby and seconded by Councilor Ponte, it was voted 9 yeas to approve line item H6, for Fire and Emergency Services, Salaries.

Councilor Raposo stated that he will be voting against the proposed funding for the Fire and Emergency Services, Expenses, line item as he believes the Fall River Fire Department should receive a larger funding amount as they have significant repairs and renovations that are needed within various stations. Councilor Ponte agreed that additional funding is needed, but that the City Council does not have the power to increase line items within the proposed FY26 Municipal Budget. Councilor Ponte and Raposo emphasized that they will be advocating for the Fire Department's needs in relation to Capital Improvement Plans for the stations during FY26. On a motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Dionne, it was voted 8 yeas, 1 nay to approve item H7, for Fire and Emergency Services, Expenses, with Councilor Raposo voting in the negative.

On a motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Kilby, it was unanimously voted to take line items I1 through I4, for Debt Service; for Insurance; for Pension Contributions;

and for Reserve Fund, respectively, together. On a further motion made by Councilor Cadime and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted to approve items 11 through 14.

On a motion made by Councilor Kilby and seconded by Vice President Pereira, it was voted 8 yeas, 1 nay to adopt the order for the FY26 Municipal Budget, as amended, with Councilor Dionne voting in the negative.

Approved, June 20, 2025

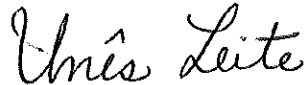
Paul E. Coogan, Mayor

On a motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:02 p.m.

List of documents and other exhibits used during the meeting:

Agenda packet (attached)

A true copy. Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Unis Leite". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Assistant City Clerk

In City Council, July 15, 2025

Approved.



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JUNE 17, 2025

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ONE GOVERNMENT CENTER

6:00 P.M. COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

AGENDA

Cancelled

1. Citizen Input
2. Discussion of the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget as follows:
 - Departments carried over from the June 16, 2025, Committee on Finance agenda, if needed

6:05 P.M. SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL (IF NEEDED)
(OR IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
MEETING IF THAT MEETING RUNS PAST 6:05 P.M.)

AGENDA

1. Citizen Input

OTHER POTENTIAL MATTERS TO BE ACTED UPON (if received):

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee on Finance recommending action:

Order – Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget

Alison M. Bouchard
City Clerk

ADA Coordinator:

Gary P. Howayeck, Esq. 508-324-2650