

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026

The council met in a workshop session on Monday, March 16, 2026, and called to order at 6:30 p.m. This meeting was held in person at the Town Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Council Chairman, Nathan Calouro
Vice-Chairwoman, Mary Parella,
Councilman, Antonio "Tony" Teixeira
Councilman, Timothy Sweeney
Councilman, Aaron Ley

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator, Steven Contente
Town Treasurer, Carl Carulli

Chairman Calouro called the Bristol Town Council budget workshop to order. He thanked the Town Administrator, Treasurer, department heads, and staff for their extensive work in preparing the budget. He noted that, compared to prior years, the budget process has improved significantly, with fewer last-minute adjustments and a stronger level of trust and collaboration between the administration and the Council.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR OVERVIEW

General Budget Discussion

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

The Town Administrator presented an overview of the proposed municipal budget, noting a total appropriation increase of \$1,957,799, representing a 3.7% increase over the prior year's tax levy. He described the budget as lean, with most increases attributed to fixed obligations. Capital investments total approximately \$1,124,663 and include a DPW heavy truck, the first payment on a new rescue vehicle, initial funding for SCBA equipment, and improvements to recreational facilities. He also highlighted additional bond-funded projects, including \$1.5 million for road paving and approximately \$1,665,000 for resiliency efforts at Fales Road, the boat ramp, Church Street, and Independence Park. The Administrator further noted that the sewer use fee will decrease due to changes in commercial usage affecting billing calculations.

In reviewing operating costs, the Administrator identified salaries and benefits—particularly a 20% increase in medical insurance—as the primary drivers of budget growth. He reported that the OPEB trust performed well, allowing for a recommended disbursement of \$1,050,000 to help offset rising healthcare costs; an increase of approximately \$638,000 over last year's \$411,000. Departmental impacts were also discussed, including

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increased costs in the Police Department due to insurance changes and in the Fire Department to support weekend rescue staffing and EMS services. He emphasized that no new full-time positions are included in the budget, noting instead the use of contracted services to maintain efficiency and reduce long-term costs.

Town Administrator Contente also noted that the recommended budget includes the BWRSD 1.70% requested increase of \$520,093 for a total Bristol contribution of \$31,186,421.

Town Administrator Contente further expressed his gratitude for the involvement and cooperation of all department heads and thanked the Treasurer's Department for their hard work.

701-POLICE DEPARTMENT

Kevin Lynch, Chief of Police

During the Police Department budget discussion, Chief Lynch emphasized that the department continues to operate within its appropriations, noting that the majority of budget increases are driven by contractually obligated salary and benefit costs rather than program expansion. He reported that annual call volume remains steady at approximately 35,000 calls for service and noted that Bristol has again been recognized as one of the safest communities in Rhode Island. The Chief attributed this to strong staffing levels and continued investment in community-oriented initiatives, including youth leadership camps, women's self-defense classes, the overdose "safe station" program—which has reduced overdoses from approximately 20 in his first year to 1 in the past year—and comprehensive school safety efforts, including active-threat training, facility checks, and coordination with the Fire Department.

Chief Lynch highlighted significant fixed-cost pressures, particularly a roughly 20% increase in medical insurance, as well as six officers transitioning from individual to family health plans, resulting in an increase of over \$100,000. He also reviewed several capital and technology improvements, including the deployment of Taser 10 devices integrated with body-worn cameras, new service weapons and associated training, a modern fingerprinting system, and a radio communications upgrade funded through a grant approaching \$1 million. He noted that this system upgrade is expected to significantly enhance communications capabilities by 2026.

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With respect to operations, the Chief discussed a requested increase in detail wages (line 701-41500) to support staffing needs for large-scale community events, including the summer concert series and Fourth of July activities. He noted that the department continues to manage costs by utilizing administrative personnel and Fire Police when appropriate and adjusting staffing levels based on demand. The Chief also requested an increase in the uniform line to provide new officers with a full set of required uniforms at the start of employment, citing increased post-COVID costs and the financial burden placed on new hires. He further noted that specialty ceremonial uniforms for units such as the Honor Guard and Motorcycle Unit contribute additional cost pressures.

Chief Lynch addressed the rising cost of police vehicles, noting that new cruisers now cost approximately \$85,000 and often require entirely new emergency equipment due to evolving technology, limiting the ability to reuse existing components.

Council members asked questions regarding the cost-effectiveness of hybrid vehicles, the feasibility of reusing emergency equipment, and challenges associated with staffing holiday details, particularly Fourth of July events, where neighboring municipalities offer higher hourly rates.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator

702-Animal Control **Kevin Lynch, Chief of Police**

Animal Control Officer Simmons stated that most budget lines remain level and consistent with current operations. She requested two primary adjustments: an increase in salary funding to provide limited daily kennel-helper coverage to ensure the shelter remains open during posted hours and that volunteers are not left alone when the ACO is responding to calls, and a one-time increase of approximately \$10,000 in building maintenance to address repairs and repainting of cracked and peeling kennel walls.

She reported that the Bristol Animal Shelter continues to be highly adoption-focused, with over 100 cats and a smaller number of dogs placed annually. She noted that the Friends of the Bristol Animal Shelter continue to play a critical role in supporting operations by funding most veterinary expenses and assisting with volunteer coordination. However, due to declining

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donations and rising costs, a modest increase in town-funded supplies is now necessary.

Council members raised questions regarding volunteer safety, potential shelter closure scenarios, and opportunities for regional collaboration with neighboring communities. In response, the Chief noted that prior partnership discussions, including with the Town of Portsmouth, were not successful due to political considerations, but efforts to explore partnerships with Warren and Barrington are being revisited.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator

703-HARBOR PATROL

Greg Marsili, Harbormaster

Harbor Master Marsili presented his proposed budget, reporting a strong year for transient revenue, approaching \$200,000, noting that Fourth of July dock space sold out in approximately 15 minutes and that demand from yacht clubs and larger vessels remains high. He explained that the primary cost pressures are related to wages, as increases in minimum wage require higher pay for seasonal staff, along with corresponding adjustments for more experienced personnel. He further noted that both he and the Assistant Harbor Master routinely cover nights, weekends, and holidays to minimize overtime costs.

Harbor Master Marsili advised that certain planned capital improvements at Rockwell have been deferred; however, additional funding for dock maintenance is requested within the operating budget to complete necessary repairs and extend the useful life of existing infrastructure.

He also proposed a salary adjustment for the full-time Assistant (Deputy) Harbor Master, citing comparable positions in other coastal communities and the breadth of the role, which includes maintenance, fabrication, interdepartmental support, and special event coordination.

Council members inquired about title consistency, fuel budget levels, and compensation comparisons. Harbor Master Marsili clarified that fuel accounts can remain level-funded and that the proposed salary adjustment is intended to align the position with current responsibilities and market conditions.

Line item 703-46261 Vehicle fuel was level funded from 4,000 to 2,000.

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The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

601-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Diane Williamson, Director

Director Williamson presented an overview of the department's proposed budget, reporting that most budget lines have been adjusted to reflect the completion of specific projects and the department's current workload, noting that the overall operating budget remains stable. She highlighted reductions in areas such as street trees and Stormwater Phase II, explaining that recent plantings have been completed and that DPW has finalized a stormwater management plan.

Director Williamson explained that advertising and secretarial support lines encompass multiple boards, including the Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Historic District Commission, and noted that hearing-notice costs are reimbursed by applicants. She further advised that the department intends to bring forward a proposal to increase certain land-use fees, including zoning certificates, variances, dimensional relief, and the addition of a new "modification audit" category, as current fees are comparatively low relative to other municipalities despite the level of staff effort required.

She also clarified that Historic District Commission costs are no longer presented as a standalone budget line but are instead incorporated across staff salaries, advertising, and minutes-taking services. Additionally, she noted that the Town now manages HDC applications through OpenGov.

In response to questions regarding a decline in planning-related fee revenue, Director Williamson explained that the prior year's increase was driven by several large, one-time applications, including the Robin Rug project, and that current projections are more conservative due to a decrease in large-scale development activity.

Treasurer Carulli addressed fluctuations in the department's medical and dental budget lines, explaining that these changes reflect routine shifts in employee coverage (single versus family plans) and standard vacancy assumptions, rather than changes to benefit structures.

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Teixeira/Parella- vote unanimously to move the discussion of the tourism line item within the Community Development budget to Wednesday, March 18, 2026.

602-Building Inspection
- Building Official

Director Williamson presented an overview of the department's proposed budget, reporting both revenue projections and ongoing staffing challenges within the department. Permit fee revenue for FY26-27 is projected lower than the prior fiscal year, reflecting that the previous increase was driven by a limited number of large-scale projects (including Robin Rug), with fewer comparable developments anticipated moving forward. It was noted that permit revenue is based on construction value, making it inherently variable and difficult to forecast with precision.

The OpenGov online permitting platform was discussed as a centralized system supporting multiple departments, including planning, zoning, historic review, building, fire, WPCA, the Town Clerk, and the Assessor. Director Williamson noted that most module costs are reimbursable by the state, and that reimbursements are now being consistently tracked and submitted following prior gaps in the process.

With respect to staffing, Town Administrator Contente discussed the continued difficulty in recruiting a qualified building inspector who either holds, or is close to obtaining, the required state certifications and can be developed into a Building Official role. Despite multiple interview efforts, no suitable candidate has been identified, resulting in continued reliance on a part-time Building Official and a temporary part-time inspector.

Town Administrator Contente noted that the administration and Human Resources may be transitioning to a regional consulting model for inspection services. He explained that under this approach, the consulting firm would employ the current part-time personnel and could provide additional inspection coverage. The model is intended to help ensure continuity of services while potentially reducing the Town's direct personnel and fringe benefit obligations.

Councilors acknowledged the broader statewide shortage of certified building inspectors

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The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

402 TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

Steven Contente, Town Administrator

Town Administrator reported that operating lines are level-funded and that the overall 4.8% increase is primarily attributable to salary-related adjustments, including a 3% increase for the three office staff members, a Council-approved salary adjustment for the Administrator, and the impact of longevity pay.

He noted that the labor and negotiation line remains level-funded but is trending higher this year due to several ongoing matters, including an employee separation, a work-related injury case, and the negotiation of three current collective bargaining agreements, with an additional contract anticipated next year. He indicated that some of these matters may extend beyond July 1, which could allow the current fiscal year appropriation to offset costs into the next budget cycle.

Town Administrator Contente also highlighted that his office manages a broad range of projects and devotes significant time to constituent services, frequently serving as a liaison between residents and various Town departments.

In response to Council questions regarding whether an increase to the contingency line was necessary, Town Administrator Contente stated that the current funding of \$2,000 is sufficient at this time to cover smaller recurring expenses, such as Eagle Scout plaques, and acknowledged that while these costs are increasing, they remain manageable within the existing budget.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

501 FINANCE

Carl Carulli, Town Treasurer

Treasurer Carulli provided the Council with an overview of the proposed budget, highlighting that the primary drivers of the budget increase are salary adjustments and rising healthcare costs.

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Treasurer Carulli also highlighted the successful transition from the previous AccuFund system to the Tyler financial software, which is widely used by municipalities across Rhode Island. He noted that the system has improved functionality, streamlined the audit process by allowing auditors direct access, and enhanced customer support, while also making it easier to recruit finance staff already familiar with the platform.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

502 Debt Service

Carl Carulli, Town Treasurer

Treasurer Carulli provided the Council with an overview of Debt services highlighting general obligations and interest payments on bonds.

Treasurer Carulli reported that the Town will see a modest overall increase in debt service, driven primarily by changes in principal payments, while interest costs are declining as older loans are paid down and new bonds are phased in. He noted that several existing bonds are nearing payoff, including a \$5.5 million governmental bond, a \$3.7 million enterprise (sewer) bond, and a smaller \$147,000 issue, all expected to be fully retired within the next few years.

At the same time, the budget includes estimated first-year debt service—primarily interest-only—for two proposed new bonds: one for road paving and another for waterfront resiliency improvements. Mr. Carulli explained that as older debt is retired and new debt is issued, the Town's goal is to maintain a relatively stable overall debt-service burden, with new borrowing largely offset by bonds being paid off.

He also cautioned that the most significant future impact will come from the regional school bond. The district's current debt service of approximately \$360,000 is projected to increase to about \$1.5 million annually for Bristol's share once the new school borrowing is fully implemented, likely in FY2028, which will require substantial budget adjustments at that time.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

503 Fixed Charges

Carl Carulli, Town Treasurer

Treasurer Carulli provided the Council with an overview of the proposed budget for fixed charges. He explained that the budget reflects both increased benefit-related costs and some offsetting savings in insurance. He noted that the Town's OPEB trust continues to perform well, allowing actuaries to authorize a \$1.05 million draw to help fund retiree medical and related benefits for FY2027. This provides important revenue relief, even as retiree medical and dental expenses are projected to increase by approximately 15% or more.

Treasurer Carulli also reported a decrease in life insurance premiums, as several policies have been eliminated due to employee departures, with premiums tied to individual participants rather than a flat group rate. In addition, he highlighted a notable reduction in workers' compensation insurance costs, attributing the savings to fewer claims and improved workplace safety measures, including operational changes such as automated trash collection that have helped reduce the risk of injury.

Treasurer Carulli explained his recommended salary adjustment for the Tax Assessor, emphasizing the significantly increased workload and responsibility resulting from implementation of the homestead exemption. He noted that the role has shifted from calculating a single tax rate to managing multiple rates and conducting ongoing verification of exemptions.

Council members acknowledged that they had not fully anticipated the administrative burden associated with the homestead exemption at the time it was adopted and commended the Assessor's professionalism and responsiveness to constituent inquiries. Town Administrator Contente also clarified the March 15 application deadline and the availability of a brief grace period.

Later in the discussion, resident Alan Spen (in attendance at the budget meeting) asked how the Council plans ahead when inflation or unexpected costs impact the budget, and whether there is a predetermined strategy for reducing expenses or increasing revenues. The Chairman, Town Administrator, and Council members responded that there is no fixed formula; rather, they take a balanced and flexible approach. This includes prioritizing critical needs such as infrastructure and equipment, while being mindful of the impact on taxpayers, particularly those least able to absorb increases. Strategies may include reallocating funds within and between departments,

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adjusting the capital improvement program, and timing or phasing major expenditures, all within the constraints of the state tax cap.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

504 Town Hall Complex

Eric Dickervitz, Municipal Operational Manager

Treasurer Carulli and Town Administrator Contente explained that revenue is increasing primarily due to the full-year impact of the solar lease, which is expected to generate approximately \$110,000 annually, compared to only a prorated amount in the prior year. At the same time, the Town is losing rental revenue as a result of the school department vacating space within the complex.

On the expense side, they highlighted ongoing and rising utility costs associated with older school buildings, including Reynolds and Byfield, noting that these facilities remain costly to operate despite some efficiency improvements elsewhere. The budget reflects a \$50,000 increase in the school buildings line to account for the Town assuming utility costs at Guiteras School, while still maintaining other facilities. The Council and Administration also discussed the need to consolidate municipal facilities, pursue the sale or long-term lease of surplus school buildings where feasible, and ultimately return those properties to the tax rolls and reduce ongoing operational cost.

Municipal Operations Manager, Eric Dickervitz explained that the budget reflects a significant increase in software and licensing costs, primarily due to the transition in IT consultants from Freedom Tech to UplinkIT. He noted that UplinkIT provides more robust cybersecurity and malware protection tools, which come at a slightly higher cost. In addition, new cybersecurity requirements from the Trust, including multi-factor authentication and related protections, have contributed to the increase.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

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406 BOARD OF CANVASSERS

Melissa Cordeiro- Town Clerk/Canvassing Clerk

Clerk Cordeiro provided an overview of the Board of Canvassers budget. She explained that the budget increase is driven by the upcoming September primary and November general election, both of which require full 14-day early voting periods and expanded staffing. She noted that while the Board members declined a general stipend increase, they are requesting a \$200 election-day stipend for each of the five Board members/alternates in recognition of the approximately 14-hour days (5:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.) worked on election days, for which they are not otherwise compensated.

She also outlined several one-time costs, including specialized extension cords and protective floor coverings to reposition poll pads locations in compliance with Board of Elections layout requirements, as well as the purchase of "Pocket Talk" translation devices to assist non-English-speaking voters and ensure language access when bilingual poll workers are not available in bipartisan pairs.

Clerk Cordeiro further indicated that she is evaluating poll worker management software, estimated at \$3,000-\$4,000 annually, to improve scheduling and communication for approximately 176 poll workers, given the complexity of coordinating 14 days of early voting with varying availability.

During discussion, both Clerk Cordeiro and Council members expressed concern that the 14-day early voting period may be longer and more costly than necessary. She referenced ongoing legislative efforts, supported by the clerks' association, to explore shortening the period while maintaining voter access. The Council requested that any future related legislation be brought forward for their consideration and potential support.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

407 MUNICIPAL COURT

Melissa Cordeiro- Town Clerk

Clerk Cordeiro provided an overview of the municipal court budget noting that there were no substantial changes. She reported that revenues are projected to increase primarily due to recent parking fee changes adopted by the Council, with an additional \$10,000 included in the revenue projections. She

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noted that, because the changes were implemented in November of the prior year, there is limited historical data, and a clearer understanding of the full impact will be available after a complete year of collections. Staff will continue to monitor revenues closely throughout the year.

On the expenditure side, the budget is largely level-funded, aside from routine salary adjustments. Clerk Cordeiro stated that existing resources remain sufficient to support Municipal Court operations, including the use of translation tools, such as Pocket Talk devices, when needed. No major structural changes to services or staffing are anticipated in this budget cycle.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

403 TOWN CLERK

Melissa Cordeiro- Town Clerk

Clerk Cordeiro provided an overview of the Municipal Court budget, noting no substantial changes. noting that revenue is projected to increase primarily due to higher real estate conveyance tax collections and continued strength in the housing market. She explained that a recent statutory change increased the conveyance tax from \$2.30 to \$3.75 per \$500 of value, with a portion retained by the Town and the remainder remitted to the State. She also noted that median home values in Bristol are currently around \$615,000, although listing prices have shown some recent softening.

On the expenditure side, most operating lines remain level-funded, with modest increases in areas such as printing and residential parking stickers, reflecting both cost inflation and the Council's expansion of the residential parking district. Clerk Cordeiro further noted that a portion of the business licensing software cost has been shifted to the Community Development (OpenGov) budget line to align with state reimbursement procedures, while continuing to support the Clerk's licensing operations.

The Council made no changes to this budget as recommended by the Town Administrator.

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401 TOWN COUNCIL

The Council reviewed its budget, during which the Clerk noted a small increase in the advertising line to reflect higher publication costs, as well as a modest increase in the inaugural appropriation from \$500 to \$750, recognizing rising food and event expenses. It was noted that this line item had remained unchanged for approximately two decades.

Council members then discussed whether Council stipends should receive a 3% increase, consistent with other contractual and non-contractual salary adjustments included in the budget. The Town Administrator stated that he typically defers to the Council on this matter but supported the recommendation, noting that modest, periodic increases help maintain the viability of the positions and prevent long periods without adjustment.

By consensus, the Council agreed that aligning Council compensation with the same percentage framework used elsewhere in the budget was reasonable and should be incorporated into the working budget figures.

The Council confirmed a 3% salary increase to line item 401-41100 consistent with other contractual and non-contractual adjustments.

Recap

No items were earmarked for further discussion. However a motion was made and approved to move discussions on tourism line item 601-43220 to Wednesday, March 18, 2026

There being no further business, upon a motion by Sweeney, seconded by Councilman Teixeira, and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Melissa Cordeiro, Town Clerk