

- **Police/Dispatch:** increase sworn staffing (total of 11) to relieve strain on current two-officer minimum staffing, strengthen coverage, response capacity, and communications.
- **Berkeley Public Schools (K-8):** avoid deep reductions estimated at 10-15 staff under a 6% cut scenario, mitigate class size increases (projected up to ~28 students per class under cuts), and support restoration of selected positions and operating needs, while noting that the proposal does not fully replace all ESSER-funded positions that have already sunset.
- **Highway:** avoid additional loss of full-time staff and reduction of hours at the transfer station (which would otherwise drop to Wednesday daytime only), and provide limited additional funding for materials and operations in a department already operating at or near minimum levels.
- **General Government / Town Hall:** restore positions lost to vacancy, support key finance and administrative roles (e.g., treasurer/collector and accounting support), and allow movement toward more sustainable **32-hour "full-time"** models to improve retention and maintain financial controls and resident service levels.
- **Library and Council on Aging:** maintain a **30-hour library** with appropriate staffing and expense growth, and fund a **full-time (32-hour) COA Director** and associated operating cost increases.

Mr. Chabot further explained that the override plan totals approximately **\$4.874 million**, of which roughly **\$3.11 million** represents the **year-one departmental investment** (approximately 62% to K-8 schools, 14% to Fire/EMS, 13% to Police/Dispatch, 5% to Highway, 4% to general government, and 2% to Library/COA), with the remaining amount (approximately \$1.76 million from FY24 surplus) to be deposited into a dedicated **Override Stabilization Fund**. This fund is designed to offset projected increases in health insurance, pensions, utilities, and regional school assessments over a five-year horizon, with the expectation that in early years revenues will exceed costs, and in later years the stabilization balance will be drawn down.

Throughout the presentation and extended question-and-answer period (including comments from Select Board members, residents, and Superintendent Ryan), several themes were discussed:

- The **tradeoffs** between proceeding with the override versus implementing across-the-board **6% cuts**, and the resulting impacts on **schools, public safety, highway, and town hall operations**.
- Concerns about **long-term sustainability** and whether the town would face the same problem again after five years; Mr. Chabot stressed the need to use that time to advocate for improved **state aid** (Chapter 70 and unrestricted general government), explore **regionalization** and shared services where appropriate, and plan for **commercial and mixed-use growth**.
- The town's highly **residential tax base** (roughly **95.4% residential/open space** of total valuation) and relatively small commercial/industrial/personal property base compared to neighbors, limiting the effectiveness of a **tax rate shift** and making the burden fall predominantly on homeowners.
- Potential **economic development strategies**, including water extensions, zoning changes (village and riverfront districts, higher-density residential in appropriate areas), better assessing of large utility and infrastructure assets, and exploring business growth that aligns with community preferences.
- Superintendent Ryan's detailed remarks on **Chapter 70 funding**, minimum-aid status, systemic underfunding of small "minimum aid" districts, the impact of declining or flat enrollment, and the importance of strong schools for **property values and community desirability**.

Mr. Chabot concluded that, with or without an override, the town must address its **structural deficit**, but that the override, coupled with a disciplined long-term plan and active advocacy and development efforts, is intended to buy sufficient time to stabilize services and avoid repeated annual crises. The presentation slide deck will be made publicly available for residents to review.

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SELECTMEN IN ATTENDANCE: Jennifer Vincent-Chair, Tabitha K. McCrohan-Member, Mark Horsfall-Member

2. Board to consider waiver of the building permit fee for the Berkley Community School project. Review of matter; votes may be taken.

JV moved; TM seconded; (motion approved 2-1) MH opposed

The Board discussed waiver of the building permit fee for the Berkley Community School project. Ms. McCrohan noted that if the Town were to charge itself the fee, it would ultimately increase the cost of the project by adding to the amount borrowed and incurring interest on that portion and therefore recommended waiving the fee. Following brief discussion, the Board voted to waive the building department fee for the Berkley Community School project so that it is not included in the long-term bonding for the project.

3. Board to discuss the upcoming blood drive benefiting Boston Children's Hospital, including potential community outreach and Board participation.

No action taken

Ms. McCrohan reported that she has been working with Boston Children's Hospital to schedule a blood drive in Berkley. The originally proposed date conflicted with other commitments, so the event will be rescheduled for the spring. She noted that the hospital will provide a mobile unit and staff in the parking lot, and that she intends it to be a community event. Ms. Vincent suggested coordinating with Superintendent Ryan, as the schools also host blood drives, to stagger dates and maximize participation.

4. Board to discuss potential additions to the Annual Town Meeting warrant mailer, including inclusion of a TextMyGov flyer to increase community enrollment and engagement.

TM moved; MH seconded; motion approved

Ms. Vincent initiated a discussion about maximizing the value of the required annual town meeting warrant mailing, noting the high cost of sending information to all residents. She suggested including additional materials with the warrant to increase engagement, specifically mentioning a flyer for the TextMyGov service to help boost resident sign-ups and awareness. The Board agreed in concept to include TextMyGov information and other concise, high-value content in the annual warrant mailing so residents receive both the formal warrant and practical tools/updates in a single mailing. Motion to add textmygov flyer to the Annual Town Meeting Warrant mailer.

5. Board to review and consider approval of a one-day liquor license application submitted by the Bay State Beagle Club for wine and malt beverages at 44 Point Street on Sunday, March 1, 2026, including authorization for one day before and one day after for transportation.

MH moved; JV seconded; motion approved

6. Board to review and potentially approve Commonwealth earmark proposals submitted by Town departments for inclusion in the FY2027 State Supplemental Budget, or to take any related action.

TM moved; JV seconded; motion approved

The Board reviewed and discussed proposed earmark requests to be submitted to the Legislature for inclusion in the FY27 supplemental budget. Ms. Vincent read the items into the record: **\$50,000** for firefighter personal protective equipment; **\$85,000** for a new police cruiser; **\$100,000** for the Berkley Public Schools to purchase high-quality reading curriculum resources; and **\$75,000** for security improvements to municipal buildings. She noted that Berkley has increasingly and proactively pursued such earmarks in recent years, and that submitting four targeted requests this cycle aligns the town with other

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communities that regularly advocate for state funding. Ms. McCrohan then moved to approve the earmark list as presented; Ms. Vincent seconded, and the motion carried.

- 7. Board to designate Mr. Marc Dorscheid as the Animal Control Officer for the Town of Berkley for calendar year 2026.

The Board considered the annual designation of **Mr. Mark Dorscheid** as Animal Control Officer. Ms. McCrohan requested that the item be tabled to a future meeting, explaining that there are outstanding questions related to required training that she would like to review before making the appointment for the year. Ms. Vincent expressed support for tabling and suggested that, longer-term, the Town also explore regionalization opportunities for animal control services with a partner community.

- 8. Board to discuss short, educational video content regarding Town government posted by Selectwoman McCrohan on her Facebook page.

No action taken

The Board discussed Ms. McCrohan's ongoing series of short educational videos explaining town government operations. In response to Ms. Vincent's request to describe the project publicly before sharing more broadly on official channels, Ms. McCrohan explained that the videos are intended to help residents understand how general government functions, with a focus on under-the-radar offices like accounting, assessing, permitting, and other Town Hall departments that are operating at bare-minimum staffing. She has been visiting offices, describing staffing levels, statutory/mandated responsibilities, and the volume of work relative to available hours (e.g., finance staff effectively having 40-50 hours of work in 23-35 hour positions) to show where operations are now inefficient or unsustainably lean. She noted that most staff prefer not to be on camera but contribute behind the scenes to ensure the information is accurate and complete. To date, she has recorded videos on several Town Hall offices and has material ready for the Town Administrator's office, boards and committees, the Highway Department, police, and other departments, with plans to continue the series. The videos are currently posted on her personal Facebook page and shared to the Town of Berkley page so residents can further share them.

- 9. Board to discuss scheduling of future meetings and upcoming critical actions, including voting the override question onto the Annual Town Election warrant, execution of documents related to the Berkley Community School bond, and the annual appropriation into the Somerset Berkley Regional Special Purpose Stabilization Fund.

No formal action taken

The Board discussed upcoming deadlines related to placing the override question on the annual town election ballot and executing documents for the Berkley Community School bond and regional/special purpose items. Mr. Chabot noted the statutory **35-day deadline** before the local election (approximately **April 4**) as the latest possible date to vote the question onto the ballot, but advised not waiting that long. After reviewing the calendar and the timing needs for school bonding documents and other actions, the Board agreed to hold its next meeting on **Monday, March 4**, with all three identified items (override ballot vote, BCS bond documentation, and related regional/special purpose matters) to be scheduled for that agenda.

- 10. Board to consider and potentially authorize the Town Administrator to negotiate and execute an engagement letter or standard contract for audit services related to the FY2025 and FY2026 Single Audit.

Motion to authorize: TM moved, JV seconded; motion approved

	<p>The Board reviewed the status of the Town's audit services and the need to change firms. Ms. McCrohan explained that the current audit company, which had been acquired by another firm, has repeatedly failed to meet timelines despite the Town providing requested information, resulting in significant delays in completion of the FY24 audit. She requested authorization for Mr. Chabot to execute an engagement letter with a new audit firm, which has indicated upcoming capacity to take Berkley on, so that the Town can secure a place in their schedule while a full contract is finalized. Superintendent Ryan joined the discussion to emphasize that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires school districts to submit their annual audit by the last day of March, that Berkley has historically been late, and that DESE has warned that late or missing audits can affect eligibility for future grants. She urged that any new contract explicitly recognize the March 31 deadline going forward. The Board then voted to authorize the Town Administrator to execute an engagement letter with the new audit firm while reserving Board review of the full contract language—particularly around performance expectations and deadlines—before final execution.</p>	
<p>Old Business:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board to discuss the scope and manner of public communication regarding pending litigation, consistent with legal counsel and applicable law; review of matter; votes may be taken 	<p>No action taken</p>
	<p>The Board held an open discussion on how to communicate with residents about pending and past litigation and investigations, while remaining consistent with legal counsel's guidance and public records law. Ms. Vincent reiterated her desire for greater transparency around cases that involve public funds—particularly matters involving elected officials—so taxpayers can better understand both conduct and costs. Mr. Horsfall strongly agreed, arguing that past investigations and settlements (including a 2024 paid investigation and related costs) were not adequately communicated to the public and that residents have effectively had to uncover these matters themselves via public records requests; he advocated for proactively publishing more information and questioned the deference shown to town legal counsel when that advice limits disclosure.</p> <p>Ms. McCrohan summarized the prior board's experience managing a high-profile personnel and harassment matter involving an elected official and appointed staff, noting that the Board repeatedly consulted counsel and was told the investigation and many details were protected as personnel records, and that redactions were necessary to protect victims as well as the accused. She described the Board's dilemma between protecting staff from further harm, minimizing costly legal escalation (including threats of defamation suits), and the desire for openness. Several residents questioned how voters can make informed choices about elected officials if the Town does not clearly disclose substantiated findings that involve taxpayer-funded investigations or legal expenses. Mr. Chabot explained that the personnel exemption under the public records law applies to both appointed employees and elected officials, and that missteps in disclosure could expose the Town to additional legal risk.</p> <p>Ms. Vincent proposed revisiting prior matters in executive session with the current Board to explore what additional information might lawfully be disclosed and whether the Town's practices can be updated to improve transparency going forward. Mr. Horsfall expressed skepticism that further consultation with existing counsel would change outcomes but remained firm that the Town should not shy away from releasing information on misconduct by public officials when legally permissible. No formal vote was taken; the consensus direction was for the Board to continue reviewing options—with counsel as needed—to balance legal constraints, employee protections, and the public's right to know.</p>	
<p>Meeting Mail:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SRPEDD Annual Report 	<p>Motion to file; TM moved, JV seconded; approved</p>

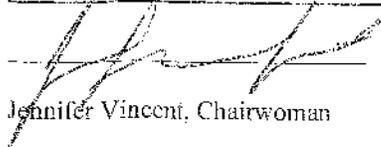
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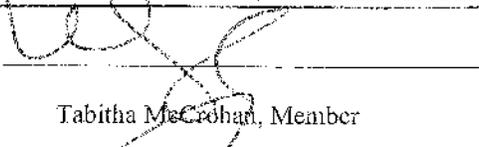
<p>Meeting Minutes:</p>	<p>Board to approve Executive Session Minutes of January 7th, 2026 Board to approve Meeting Minutes of January 12th, 2026 Board to approve Meeting Minutes of January 28th, 2026 Board to approve Executive Session Minutes of January 28th, 2026</p>	<p>Motion to approve; TM moved, MH seconded; minutes approved</p>
<p>Town Administrator Report</p>	<p>Under "Infrastructure and Safety," Mr. Chabot reported that the federal government has awarded the Town \$850,000 for pedestrian safety improvements in the area between Berkley Middle School (BMS) and the Town Common. He noted that this outcome followed several prior efforts, including an unsuccessful Safe Routes to School grant application, participation in MassDOT's LEAP program for planning and design support, and state earmarks for sidewalks and culverts. The new funding will support construction of a safer walking connection—potentially including graded walkways, crossings, lighting, and benches—between BMS, parking areas, and the Town Hall/Common. Superintendent Ryan joined to highlight that the project grew out of a middle school civics "civic action" project, praising students and staff for their sustained advocacy and thanking Mr. Chabot for extensive behind-the-scenes work with legislators and agencies. Mr. Chabot also noted that Representative Auchincloss's federal community project funding portal is expected to open again soon and invited additional project ideas (including from students), particularly larger capital needs such as police vehicles or water line extensions, so the Town can be ready with strong submissions.</p>	<p>No action taken</p>
<p>Public Input</p>	<p>During public input, a resident from Raynham with long experience in local and school governance addressed the Board about the structural underfunding of state local aid and its impact on property taxes and services in towns like Berkley. He argued that, since Proposition 2½ limits local levy growth, inadequate and unpredictable state aid has forced recurring cuts and local overrides, while the Legislature has not prioritized fully funding Chapter 70 and other aid categories. He emphasized that all state revenue ultimately comes from residents and businesses in cities and towns, yet only a portion returns as local aid, and he criticized both majority and minority party legislators for accepting "what's left" instead of tying aid to a fair formula. Using his own regional school district's recent layoffs after a failed override as an example, he urged local officials across Massachusetts to collectively demand a change so that local aid is calculated as a fixed percentage of state tax revenue generated by each community, rather than a residual amount after state-level spending. He concluded that, until that change occurs, local officials will continue to face pressure to raise property taxes and cut services for problems largely created at the state level, and he encouraged the Board to press its legislative delegation for reform.</p>	<p>No action taken</p>
<p>Executive Session</p>	<p>Board to enter into Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board entered into Executive Session, not to return to Open Session at 8:20 PM</p> <p>*Next Scheduled Meeting is Wednesday, March 4th, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.*</p>	

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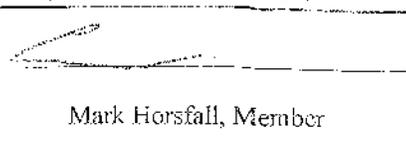
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Jennifer Vincent, Chairwoman



Tabitha McCrohan, Member



Mark Horsfall, Member



Matthew Chabot, Town Administrator