

MINUTES OF TOWN OF BERKLEY SELECTMEN'S MEETING OF 05/20/2026

SELECTMEN IN ATTENDANCE: Tabitha McCrohan-Chair, Jennifer Vincent, Clerk

TOPIC		ACTION
Call To Order	Board of Selectmen - Called to Order at 6:30PM in the Moitoza-Petty Hearing Room	
Appointments:	Board to appoint Kevin Partridge to the Board of Registrars as a temporary member; review of matter; votes may be taken.	Motion to appoint: TMcCrohan motioned; JVincent second; Motion approved
New Business:	<p>Board to discuss and potentially approve Capital Improvement Plan proposals for FY2027 and future fiscal years; review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>During the discussion on the Capital Improvement Plan, the board reviewed and prioritized key FY 2027 capital needs and how to fund them within tight constraints. Matthew Chabot explained that the plan feeds into the budget "front sheet," with about \$460,731 in free cash currently allocated to capital, and emphasized that the overall plan is underfunded compared with the town's actual needs. Top priorities include creating well redundancy for Berkeley Middle School and municipal buildings (about \$110,000 for a second well and related work), purchasing a new police cruiser after two years without a replacement, upgrading criminal-justice-connected police computer systems (\$40 45K) to maintain state and federal compliance, and acquiring a medium-sized dump truck for the highway department (around \$100,000). The BMS bell and PA system was also highlighted as a security-driven school priority, though recent quotes of roughly \$127-137K exceed what the capital program alone can support, so capital funds would only partially cover it. Matthew described how a fully built-out plan would map anticipated capital spending through FY 2028-2031, noting that FY 27 department requests alone approached \$5 million and therefore required strict prioritization based on whether items are essential to operations, legal compliance, or acute safety, with efficiency improvements ranked lower. He also outlined the role of non-exempt debt—such as for replacing a fire tanker, explaining that it does not require a tax rate increase, allows mid-sized projects to be spread over multiple years, and avoids over-reliance on free cash or debt exclusions. Board members and residents asked clarifying questions about the availability of free cash and the impact of non-exempt debt on future budgets, and Mr. Chabot confirmed that the town has the free cash needed for the identified FY 27 capital items while larger or mid-sized purchases will be managed through carefully structured borrowing and future capital allocations.</p>	Motion to approve: JVincent motioned; TMcCrohan second; Motion approved
Old Business:	<p>Board to consider recommendations of the Finance Committee regarding the FY2027 operating budget and potentially vote on a final recommendation to Annual Town Meeting; review of matter; votes may be taken. During the discussion on the FY 2027 operating budget and the Finance Committee's recommendations, the board focused on how to balance school needs, health insurance costs, and overall fiscal risk. Ms. Vincent explained that after open enrollment closed on May 15, actual health insurance enrollments and plan shifts (particularly more employees moving to the high-deductible plan) produced savings relative to what had been budgeted. Combined with a lower than expected Bristol Aggie assessment, this created room to restore two K-8 teaching positions, which both Jennifer and Tabitha supported in response to residents' concerns about class sizes. Matthew noted that the town had originally budgeted health insurance with a 7.5% buffer over expected actuals to protect against mid-year qualifying events and to support OPEB contributions if there was an overage; he cautioned that reducing this buffer carries some risk and diverts money that would otherwise go to OPEB. They also discussed uncertainty in unrestricted general government aid, traditionally \$8-10K and agreed that relying on higher state figures before the conference committee finishes would be risky, so the budget goes to town meeting reflecting conservative revenue assumptions.</p>	Motion to approve: TMcCrohan motioned; JVincent second; Motion approved

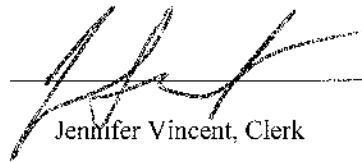
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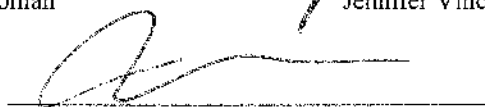
	<p>On the expenditure side, Mr. Chabot requested restoration of the moderator's expense line to cover warrant printing and mailing, setup, sound, and handbooks, arguing that anything below roughly \$4,500-\$5,200 effectively runs town meeting at a deficit. The board agreed to restore this line. They then walked through specific Blue Cross Blue Shield lines for school and town, implementing about \$20,000 in reductions on the school side and a larger reduction on the town side, while still leaving a modest buffer. The savings from these health insurance adjustments, combined with the Bristol Aggie reduction and prior changes (including zeroing out the Board of Selectmen stipend line), were redirected to the K-8 operating budget to help maintain staffing. Mr. Chabot updated the "front sheet" so the prior surplus was essentially zeroed out, yielding a final FY 2027 operating budget of \$27,681,237, which the board formally voted to recommend, with the understanding that it will be revisited at town meeting on June 1.</p>	
<p>Meeting Mail:</p>	<p>Discussion - response to communication via email and messenger from Wendy Cochran. The Board briefly discussed how to handle communications related to Ms. Cochran's presentment letter, emphasizing the need to respond to residents without jeopardizing the Town's legal position. On Jennifer Vincent's motion (as amended at Tabitha McCrohan's request), the Board voted to instruct Town Counsel, in conjunction with the Town Administrator, to draft a written response to Ms. Cochran's recent communications for review and approval by the Chair, and to follow this same protocol for any further communications while the presentment letter remains in effect. This establishes a clear, legally vetted process for responding on this matter.</p>	<p>Motion to instruct: JVincent motioned; TMcCrohan second; Motion approved</p>
<p>Public Input:</p>	<p>The recycling center (transfer station) discussion focused on how its operation is tightly integrated with the Highway Department, and how years of budget cuts and union constraints on staff schedules have forced reductions in Saturday hours, even though fee revenue itself is not the core problem. Ms. McCrohan and Mr. Chabot explained that options like turning it into an enterprise fund or a standalone department would significantly increase indirect costs and trigger union/impact-bargaining issues, because highway staff and resources (mechanics, tools, building maintenance, and waste-oil heat) are shared. Highway and transfer station staff noted that while the budget shows roughly a \$30,000 shortfall, avoided costs (e.g., heating and town-wide trash disposal) make the net impact much closer to a wash. The Board acknowledged residents' concerns about access and environmental benefits and committed to gathering better cost and usage data and revisiting long-term options for the transfer station in public meetings later in the year.</p>	<p>Discussion Only, no votes taken</p>
<p>Adjournment:</p>	<p>Meeting adjourned at 7:48 pm</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*Next Scheduled Meeting is Wednesday, May 27th, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.*</p>	<p>Motion to adjourn: TMcCrohan motioned; JVincent second; Motion approved</p>



Tabitha McCrohan, Chairwoman



Jennifer Vincent, Clerk



Matthew Chabot, Town Administrator