

SCHOOLS & YOUTH

BUDGET

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The committee was unable to adopt the budget at their Wednesday, March 11 meeting due to budget cuts proposed to bring a budget forward with a 2.44% increase in town assessments. A level service budget with no new expenses would have risen by 8.4% or \$1.5 million, which would be impossible for the towns.

As a result the budget proposed on March 11 called for cutting two administrators, 3.2 teachers, a school adjustment counselor, and 3 instructional assistants. It would have also reduced the hours for several other positions and had some key staff paid for by grant revenue.

Driving the budget increases for next year are rising health insurance costs, Hampshire County Retirement, contractual obligations and outgoing school choice. Health insurance, in particular, has risen dramatically in the last year with a 20% increase in rates last August and a 12.48% increase for FY '27. According to Business Manager Amy Mason insurance is not expected to rise by that amount for FY '28, causing Montgomery representative Peter Degregorio to ask whether or not a one year adjustment to the amount requested for the Capital Stabilization account might be in order.

Gateway member towns agreed to continue supporting the payments they had been making on the school building project that renovated the high school and middle school and built Littleville and Chester Elementary Schools. Those projects were paid off several years ago, but the towns continued contributing about \$795,000 to a Capital Stabilization Fund to reduce the borrowing on a new roof that will soon be needed at Gateway Regional School.

School Committee members, along with teachers and parents, who attended, balked at the list of

cuts presented at the meeting. Concerns included the loss of the Assistant Pupil Services Director who staff said is needed to support a rising number of new special education teachers who are not yet licensed, cuts to the arts and cutting wood shop among others.

One parent strongly advocated for the school adjustment counselor position at Gateway Regional School. Reluctant to pass that budget, the committee asked Superintendent Melissa Matarazzo and Mason go back to the drawing board and develop several alternative proposals for consideration at a special meeting on Monday March 16. According to School Committee Chairman Jason Forgue, the district was required to submit an adopted budget to the towns by Wednesday, March 18.

Four options were prepared for this follow-up meeting. Option 1 restored many of the eliminated positions-including the Assistant Director of Pupil Services, the GSR school adjustment counselor, 2.5 instructional assistants, the wood shop teacher and music at Chester Elementary School and keep the entire Capital Stabilization deposit at \$794,195.

Option 1 did this by increasing the amount of revenue anticipated in Rural School Aid by \$318,897 (\$16 million statewide). Option 2 restored the assistant director and adjustment counselor only, and reduced Capital Stabilization by \$268,467, while still putting \$525,728 into that account. Option 3 reduced Capital Stabilization by \$303,677 (leaving \$490,518 going into that account) and restored the assistant director, music at Chester Elementary, two instructional assistants and the school adjustment counselor.

Option 4 restored all of the same positions as Option 1 except for a half-time



Turley Publications Photo by Wendy Long

Chester Selectman and Gateway Regional School Committee representative Brian Forgue, from left, Huntington Selectman John McVeigh and Gateway Regional School Committee Chairman Jason Forgue following the special budget vote on March 16.

instructional assistant. It still earmarks \$410,263 to go into the Capital Stabilization fund. In this model, RSA is projected to come in at \$652,419 for Gateway, or \$12 million statewide.

Another change noted by Matarazzo was moving positions out of Rural School Aid and moving non-personnel costs out of the General Fund and into RSA. Matarazzo noted that RSA is a risk, but the risk of not passing the budget in the towns was being weighed against that. "People impact day to day will not be felt if RSA came in short, although it would still be difficult to manage," she said.

Mason pointed out that there is always some variability over what happens in the summer and fall. New grant opportunities and multi-year grants might arise. An additional out-of-district student could enroll and increase the tuition revolving account. "These are all unknowns to us right now," Mason said.

To which Forgue asked

if those factors could also go the other way. "Can there be a grant we were expecting that doesn't get funded? Or a student who chooses not to opt in?" he asked. Matarazzo and Mason both affirmed that possibility.

Several questions from committee members were about how to restore the amount going into the Capital Stabilization Account if the budget takes a favorable turn this summer. Former Assistant Superintendent Stephanie Fisk was on the line and said that grant and RSA funds could not go directly into the Capital Stabilization fund during the upcoming fiscal year. While this will still be explored, it might be possible in a year with good financial news to hold onto a surplus through the year and move money into the excess and deficiency fund. Once certified, money might be able to go from E and D into the Capital Stabilization account.

Matarazzo and Mason recommended Option 1 to

the School Committee, which retained the full amount of \$794,195 going into the Capital Stabilization fund and created funding to restore positions by budgeting RSA at \$16 million statewide and \$971,316 to Gateway. Lisa Goding made a motion to vote for Option 1. A straw poll revealed no interest among the committee for Options 2 and 3. The motion for Option 1 was defeated and a new motion for the Option 4 budget passed unanimously.

In the end, Forgue said that the roof gets more expensive to replace every year that they hold off. "No matter what, we'll have to borrow money. The payment difference could be as low as \$600 a year," Forgue said.

Forgue also said that part of the problem was trying to cram something we could have discussed over eight weeks into two weeks and called for starting the budget process earlier next year.

The meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

COLLEGE NEWS

Paul Davis receives degree from Georgia Tech

ATLANTA, GA – Paul Davis of Worthington earned a Grad Cert in systems engineering and architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.

Davis was among approximately 7,200 undergraduate and graduate students to be presented Georgia Tech degrees during the Institute's 269th Commencement exercises Dec. 11 to 13, 2025 at McCamish Pavilion (Ph.D. and Bachelor's and Bobby Dodd Stadium (Master's).

The Georgia Institute of Technology, or Georgia Tech, is one of the top public research universities in the U.S., developing leaders who advance technology and improve the human condition. The institute offers business, computing, design, engineering, liberal arts, and sciences degrees, as well as professional development and K-12 programs for fostering success at every stage of life.

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PUBLIC NOTICES

TOWN OF BLANDFORD PLANNING BOARD NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

In accordance with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, Section 5, the Blandford Planning Board will hold a Public Hearing at the Blandford Town Hall, 1 Russell Stage Road, Blandford, MA 01008 at **6:00 PM on April 3, 2026**. The nature of this hearing is to present and discuss the proposed replacement of the Blandford Zoning Bylaw pertaining to Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic installations. The proposed by-law will include Section VIII 8.1 - 8.15.

Section V111 - Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Installations

8.1 Purpose and Intent, 8.2 Definitions, 8.3 Applicability and Permitting, 8.4 General Requirements for all Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Installations, 8.5 Dimension and Density Requirements, 8.6 Design, Site, and Operational Standards, 8.7 Safety and Environmental

Standards, 8.8 Monitoring and Maintenance, 8.9 Special Permit Criteria, 8.10 Outside Consultant Fees, 8.11 Severability, 8.12 Enforcement Remedies, 8.13 Appeals, 8.14 Effective Date and Applicability, 8.15 Waivers.

Copies of the proposed By-law change will be available for review at the Public Hearing and at the Town Hall by appointment only. Contact the Planning Board at Planning@townofblandford.gov to make an appointment during regular business hours.

Greg Garfield, Chair
Blandford Planning Board
03/19, 03/26/2026

Chesterfield Planning Board LEGAL NOTICE

Public Hearings will be held starting at 6:30 PM on **Monday, April 6, 2026** in the Davenport Town Offices, 422 Main Road, Chesterfield, MA to consider the following Zoning Bylaw changes. The full proposed changes to the bylaw can be found on the town website, www.townofchesterfieldma.com, and in the Town Clerk's Office.

Section V: SPECIAL USE REGULATION: Amend Section 6.1.3 Accessory Dwelling Unit Standards to delete paragraph which is non-compliant with State Laws that requires ADUs in a Water Supply Protection District (WS) cannot require a Special Permit Review; amend Section 6.1.3.3 to comply with State Laws which do not allow a Special Permit Granting Authority to require more than one parking space.

Section 7.4 SITE PLAN APPROVAL: Amend Section 7.422 Application to explicitly allow Special Permit Granting Authority to request funding of studies under Special Permit Review (MGL Ch 44, Sec.53g).

Section 6.3.4 GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL LARGE-SCALE GROUND MOUNTED SOLAR PANEL INSTALLATION (LSGM-SPI): Amend Section 6.3.4.1 Compliance with Laws, Ordinances and Regulations to require the construction and operation of all LSGMSPI be consistent with all building and

fire codes in addition to other requirements.

Sarah Hamilton
Acting Chair, Planning Board
03/19, 03/26/2026

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS THE TRIAL COURT HAMPDEN, Div. Probate and Family Court HD26E0007PP

To Deborah A. Davignon, Hampden County, Brian J Murphy, Gallatin County (MT), Dennis G. Murphy, Hampden County, Yolanda Murphy, Hampden County, and to all other persons interested.

A petition has been presented to said Court by Paul D. Murphy, of Hampden County, representing that they hold as tenants-in-common in an undivided part or share of land lying in Chester, in the County of Hampden, setting forth that they desire that all of said land may be sold at private sale or public auction for not less than Two Hundred and Eighty Thousand Dollars (\$280,000.00), and praying

that partition may be made of all the land aforesaid according to law, and to that end that a commissioner be appointed to make such partition and be ordered to make sale and conveyance of all, or any part of said land which the Court finds cannot be advantageously divided either at private sale or public auction, and be ordered to distribute the net proceeds thereof after full adjudication of the equitable claims contained in said petition and supplemental memorandum filed with the Court.

If you desire to object thereto, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection in said Court at **Springfield** on or before 10:00 A.M. on the return date of **April 27th, 2026**.

Witness, **Claudine T. Stou-demire**, First Justice of said Court, this 2nd day of March 2026.

Rosemary A. Saccomani, Register
03/26, 04/02, 04/09/2026

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