

**Town of Barkhamsted
Board of Finance
Regular Meeting
Tuesday March 17, 2026 7:00 pm
Barkhamsted Town Garage Meeting Room**

Chairman Richard Winn called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm Present were:

<u>Christopher Buck</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Matthew Kelly</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>David Moulton</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Salvatore Tartaglione</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Scott Thomas</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Richard Winn</u>	<u>Present</u>
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<u>Juan Jaramillo (alt)</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Mark Hemenway (alt)</u>	<u>Present</u>

<u>First Selectman Meaghan Cook</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Mark Mahoney Board of Selectmen</u>	
<u>Superintendent Erica Sacharko</u>	<u>Present</u>
<u>Danielle Radhe Principal Barkhamsted El</u>	
<u>Robert Brainard BOE Chairman</u>	
<u>Amanda North, Jenn Kreske, Tim Garand</u>	
<u>Laura Carl, Holly Krouse, Lila Tuxbury</u>	
<u>Terri Collins, Linda Gosselin, Julie Burnell</u>	

Also Present

Motion to seat Mark Hemenway for Salvatore Tartaglione
By Dave Moulton Seconded by Matthew Kelly
Vote: Unanimous Yea

Review of General Government, Capital and Board of Education expenditures to-date

General Government review led by Selectwoman Cook, with overages in road salt and legal fees line item, expected to continue to grow, due to zoning issue

Elementary School review led by Superintendent Sacharko, with overages in their lighting project, heating oil and the repair of one of the burners. She added that there is a new State Grant for roughly \$39,000 that has been applied for that will hopefully help with a few of the maintenance item costs.

Discussion of FY 26/27 budgets, including General Government, Education,
Capital and Revenue Sheet

A review of the general Government proposed budget listing the possibility of
lowering the Rec Dept Director's salary line item and utilizing monies within their
bank account. A one year fix for that line item as there aren't enough funds
generated to cover this year.

Motion to forward the proposed budget to the town hearing

By Matthew Kelly Seconded by Chris Buck

Vote: Matthew & Chris Yea Mark, Rich, Dave & Scott Nea

Motion failed

Discussion regarding school board increases in their proposed budgets and
superintendent / Curriculum Coordinator, which was a lengthy discussion also
discussed the increase in the Administrative Assistant line and finally the Spanish
teacher line item.

Discussions continued with a review of Capital Budgets for all areas and a
rundown of the Revenue Sheet for the upcoming hearing.

A decision was made to hold a Special Board of Finance meeting on
March 31, 2026 to finalize prep for the Public Hearing

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of February 17, 2026 with correction of the header
date and the signature date being the wrong year.

By Matthew Kelly Seconded by Chris Buck

Vote: Unanimous Yea

Correspondence

Letter from Holly Krouse (attached) Previously mentioned in above discussions

Any other business legal and proper to come before said meeting

None

Motion to adjourn at 8:47 p.m. by Matthew Kelly

Seconded by Chris Buck

/ Unanimous

Respectfully submitted

Date: *March 17, 2026*

Secretary - BOF

Statement for the Special Town Meeting – March 10, 2026

Before I begin, I would like to make it clear that I am in no way making light of the responsibilities, job functions, or appropriate compensation of any individual employed by Barkhamsted Elementary School. The work performed by school administrators and staff is important, and fair compensation for those roles is appropriate. However, I believe there are several points that residents should be aware of regarding the request being made by the Board of Education to use funds from the Town's Undesignated Fund—essentially the Town's savings account—to cover increased costs associated with the outplacement of a special education student/s.

In May of 2025, the Town approved the elementary school budget for the 2025/26 year. Within that budget, the Superintendent's salary was approved at \$79,106, with the contract specifying that the position would not exceed 104 working days per year (approximately 5 months or 2 days per week). The Curriculum Coordinator position was budgeted at \$36,429. While the specific number of hours or days associated with that role was not clearly stated in the budget documents, those were the approved figures at the time the budget was adopted by the Town. The only contract on file in the Town Clerk's office (which expired on July 1, 2024) had the Curriculum Coordinator position combined with the Language Arts/Reading position for 186 days.

On September 2, 2025, the sitting Superintendent retired. Following that retirement, the individual who had been serving as the Curriculum Coordinator was hired by the Board of Education to assume both roles—Superintendent and Curriculum Coordinator. A new employment contract was subsequently signed by the Board of Education and the employee to run from November 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028. I had to call to ask about this contract, as it had not been filed by the school with the Town Clerk and put onto the town website as required by law. Under this new agreement, the salary for the Superintendent position increased to \$98,885, representing an increase of \$19,779 (25%) over the amount approved in the BOE budget. The Curriculum Coordinator salary was also increased to \$51,429, which represents an additional \$15,000 (41%) above the originally budgeted amount. Under the new arrangement, the employee would work full-time in the school building, dividing responsibilities equally between the two positions—half-time as Superintendent and half-time as Curriculum Coordinator—for no more than 200 working days per year (approximately 10 months – unclear as to how many days per week goes to which job).

With these combined changes, the salary increases for these administrative roles total \$34,779 beyond what had been approved in the budget for the current fiscal year. In addition to these increases, the contract also included an **annuity contribution of \$6,184**, (which the previous Superintendent contract did not have). The budget for the Curriculum Coordinator annuity is \$1,185, however there is no determination between how much the annuities are for each position. This should be corrected in the budget for full transparency and separation of benefits. This brings the total amount of additional compensation that was **not originally budgeted to approximately \$40,000** for administrative salaries during this budget year.

Learning this raised several questions for me.

First, where would that additional \$40,000 come from, and how can an approved budget line be increased in the middle of the fiscal year without broader discussion or approval? If the town can't spend more than \$20,000 above the budget without approval from both the Board of Finance and a town meeting, how can the Board of Ed be allowed to do so? Was the school administration and BOE aware of or even thinking about how contracting these higher salaries would affect the budget? Was the Board of Finance aware of these changes, and did they have any input or oversight regarding the decision made by the Board of Education to increase these salaries?

To better understand the situation, I reviewed the BOE minutes for their meeting of September 2, 2025. There was no Board of Finance representation present and any discussions about the newly hired Superintendent and the signed contract was held under executive session. I then reviewed the minutes of the Board of Finance meeting held on September 16, 2025. Both the retiring Superintendent and the newly hired Superintendent were present at that meeting. In those minutes I found **no** reference to any salary adjustments. What was discussed at that meeting, however, was an **anticipated shortfall of \$162,000 related to the outplacement costs for special education students.**

Again, I want to emphasize that my intent is not to criticize the individuals involved or the importance of their roles. Rather, I believe that **the residents of Barkhamsted deserve full transparency regarding financial decisions that were made which affect the Town's budget and its long-term fiscal health.** For many years, our Town government has worked diligently to keep taxes as low as possible while still maintaining the services that residents depend on. It has worked hard to keep the Superintendent position at our elementary school to part time only. While there is currently money available in the Undesignated Fund, it is important to recognize that this fund serves as the Town's financial safety net. If it is used regularly to cover expenses of this magnitude that were either not anticipated or not clearly communicated during the budgeting process, those funds could be depleted quickly.

Furthermore, decisions that increase salary levels in administrative positions do not affect just a single budget year. Those increases become part of the baseline for future budgets, meaning they will continue to affect taxpayers in the years ahead. Already, the proposal for the 2026/27 budget year Superintendent and Curriculum Coordinator salary lines include increases bringing the pay for Superintendent to \$101,852 (an increase of \$2,967) and Curriculum Coordinator to \$52,972 (an increase of \$1,543) which is approximately a 3% increase. The annuity line was increased to \$6,370 – also an increase of 3%.

For these reasons, I believe it is important that residents fully understand what has occurred before voting on this fund transfer and how these financial decisions may impact the Town moving forward. Transparency and accountability are essential to maintaining the trust of the residents that live in town and fund these budgets through their paid taxes.

Regards, Holly Krouse, Barkhamsted Town Clerk