

Special Town Meeting
Tuesday, March 10, 2026
Barkhamsted Senior/Community Center
7:00 PM

First Selectman, Meaghan Cook called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM with approximately 50 residents in attendance.

Matt Kelly nominated Ray Pech as Moderator and it was seconded by Deb Brydon. There were no other nominations and Ray Pech was elected Moderator. John Lavieri nominated Holly Krouse as Secretary and it was seconded by Deb Brydon. Motion carried to close nominations and Holly Krouse was elected Secretary.

Holly Krouse, Town Clerk read the warning for the meeting.

Resident John Lavieri moved to open item 1 for discussion, seconded by First Selectman Meaghan Cook, to consider, discuss, and vote upon a transfer from the Undesignated Fund to the Board of Education for Fiscal Year 25/26 in an amount not to exceed \$220,000. Erika Sacharko, Barkhamsted School Superintendent gave her presentation (attached) about the current needs for additional funds to cover outplacement costs for Special Education services. Then the floor was opened for questions and discussion. As the following paragraphs show, there were many questions asked and then answered by the school Superintendent, the Board of Education, or the Board of Finance.

Question asked if the students are district directed placement students and how are they determined? The Barkhamsted Elementary PPT meeting (Planning & Placement Team) meets to discuss and decide needs. How many students are currently needing these services to need that amount of funding? The number would not be confirmed due to family privacy. Is any funding reimbursed by the State? The school may be reimbursed by the State depending on costs based on a formula the State deems. That happens later in the spring and there is not a way to determine what that amount would be and when it would be received from the State. Are these services required in all towns? It is a State and Federal requirement for all schools to have these services available. Rich Winn, Board of Finance Chairperson took some time to explain the long standing agreement between the BOE and the BOF. This verbal agreement is that the BOE does not put in a budget for any special education outplacement services and transportation as it is not feasible to know in advance how much will be needed. The BOF is regularly informed of the totals and then covers that amount every year. This year it is a tough hit, but the town's current surplus is currently at 16% of the total budget and as the auditor recommends a surplus of between 10-15% for a healthy savings, we are in pretty good shape. That dollar amount is approximately \$2,380,000. The question was asked if the school has ever researched the costs getting a teacher or team of teachers to have these services provided in-house. The answer was that as it would most likely require more than one or two employees and could potentially become a financial hardship. A resident made a point that if you have fixed expenses for these employees, what would happen to those employees if there is a reduction in the amount of students requiring these services from one year to the next. Two BOE members spoke with regard to outplacements usually being the best outcome for special education students as it ensures that they receive these services in the least restrictive environment as possible. Another resident who is familiar with special education processes spoke about students being like "snowflakes" in that not one of them is the same as another. Another town resident who had a special education student attend both the elementary and high school asked if there could possibly be some new programs put in place for those students, perhaps in conjunction with Shared Services? The response was that while it was a good idea, it might not be financially prudent to offer those at this time. The question was asked if anyone shops around for better costs for these

programs. The answer is that it would be a difficult process as different students require different programs. The admission processes are very complex and these programs are located all across the state. Question from a resident was if the increase in the amount asked for in September of \$165,000 to the new amount of \$220,000 now was due to more students requiring outplacement services. It was answered yes. A question was asked in reference to how the school anticipates a budget for multiple students that are currently placed, what services are missing and where are the gaps? The answer is that there is no way to anticipate. People move in to town, move out, and needs can increase or reduce without notice. That is why the BOF and BOE have the agreement with regards to covering whatever monies are needed every year. A question was asked if those totals included transportation. Yes, they do. The question was raised in regards to previous years and what happened if all the transferred money did not get used? R. Winn stated that the Town typically gets back some money every year from the BOE. He did not have the exact figures in front of him, but from his recollection, the amount has usually been \$35,000 or less. A resident inquired how this transfer might affect any of the projects set by the Capital Project Committee. R. Winn stated that the capital project list gets re-visited regularly and any new projects could be put ahead of other projects if deemed necessary, so this is not an issue. As there were no other questions, it was moved by M Kelly and seconded by K Archer to move for the vote. The motion passed and the ayes were in favor.

John Lavieri moved and it was seconded by Rich Winn to open item 2, to consider, discuss and vote upon a transfer from the Undesignated Fund to the General Government Fund for Fiscal Year 25/26 in an amount not to exceed \$5,100. First Selectman Cook spoke to the attending public about a drone light display that has been planned for the 250th America town wide Celebration that is being held on June 6th of 2026. A contract was signed last fall by the previous Administration for an amount totaling \$25,000. The Board of Finance had authorized and approved a total amount of \$19,900 for this light show at a meeting on September 16, 2025 and the plan was to raise funds for the remaining amount. The Board of Selectmen's reason in asking for this transfer is to have a safety net in case the fund raising goal falls short and to ask for this now so another special town meeting would not need to be held if the money will be needed. Discussion began about the different types of fundraisers that are being held. A question was asked and then discussion ensued in reference to what the differences are between a fireworks display vs a drone light show and the areas in Barkhamsted where they can safely and legally be held. A resident thought that maybe the location could be moved to Riverton and charge for parking. A resident asked if the town was making any money from this event as it seems to be quite a large amount of money to spend. First Selectman Cook stated that there will be no charge for any of these events and the location has been determined by the 250th Celebration Committee. J. Lavieri pointed out that he personally is in total favor of this project as it is his honor to live here and he's hopeful that he will still be alive to enjoy this 250th celebration of the birth of our Country. It was moved by K. Archer and seconded by M Terzini to vote on the motion to authorize the transfer of up to \$5,100 from the Undesignated Fund to the Town Government fund if necessary. Motion passed with only 1 nay vote.

The meeting was then adjourned at 8:00 pm on a motion from Matt Kelly and seconded by Rich Winn.

Regards,

Holly P. Krouse, CCTC
Barkhamsted Town Clerk