

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**

The council met in a workshop session on Monday, March 18, 2026, and called to order at 6:30 p.m. This meeting was held in person at the Town Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Council Chairman, Nathan Calouro  
Vice-Chairwoman, Mary Parella,  
Councilman, Antonio "Tony" Teixeira  
Councilman, Timothy Sweeney  
Councilman, Aaron Ley

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator, Steven Contente  
Town Treasurer, Carl Carulli

**704 FIRE**

**Michael DeMello- Chief**

Fire Chief DeMello presented an overview of the department's budget, highlighting several key areas of increase. He noted that special details are rising for the first time in over a decade, primarily due to expanded EMS coverage for the Independence Park concert series and events at the college.

Chief DeMello also discussed an increase in the EMS incentive (stipend) program, which he described as highly successful. The program has enabled the Town to consistently staff two rescues daily, rebuild membership following COVID, and reduce reliance on mutual aid. Councilors also questioned the growing EMS stipend line and the impact of mutual aid, and the Chief noted that Bristol now often provides more mutual aid than it receives, which helps revenue but also adds stipend costs.

Vehicle maintenance costs have also increased, with the goal of aligning the budget to a three- to five-year average of approximately \$120,000 annually across a fleet of about 20 vehicles. Chief DeMello emphasized that repair costs for fire apparatus are significant—citing examples such as \$5,000 for brake work—and noted that much of the spending is focused on preventive maintenance to extend the lifespan of increasingly costly equipment.

Additional increases across the budget are largely attributed to rising costs for medical and fire supplies and equipment, particularly after many lines were held flat for nearly a decade and can no longer absorb inflation.

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**

On the revenue side, EMS third-party billing continues to perform strongly. The projected revenue has been increased from \$1.1 million to \$1.125 million, which staff believe is achievable based on current trends and collections, currently at approximately 70% of the year-to-date target.

Chief DeMello also explained the "physician consultant" line, which funds a contractual service with Brown Medicine. This service allows the department to order medications and equipment requiring physician authorization, provides physician-led training and quality review of critical calls, and offers 24/7 access to an emergency physician (M-Doc) to support crews and assist with complex patient care decisions in the field.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**801 HUMAN SERVICES**

Director Ed Carusi presented the Human Services budget. He explained that program activities and partnerships remain consistent year to year, including support for school supplies and clothing, an annual Christmas drive serving about 125 families, and coordination with local organizations such as churches, East Bay Community Action, the Health Equity Zone, and school social workers. He also continues to connect residents with state home repair and CDBG/HOME programs.

He noted that financial pressures on clients have significantly increased, driven by rising costs for rent, utilities, and especially heating oil, leading to more severe hardship cases. The Town's emergency assistance funds are leveraged with local partners to help cover large utility bills, though many of those partners are also facing funding limitations.

He also reported that the older "dialer" emergency alert program is being phased out, as it only works with landlines and has been discontinued, and that he is exploring alternative options while distributing remaining units.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**805 HUMAN RESOURCES**

Chairman Calouro noted that certain budget items under Human Resources were informed they were not required to be present

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18,2026**

during the grant budget request discussions and assured them that their absence would not impact their consideration. He clarified that while attendance was not mandatory, anyone wishing to address the council was welcome to do so, but there was no obligation to speak. Noting that the majority of the requests were level funded.

**(A) Woman's Resource Center of RI**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(B) East Bay Center (EBCAP)**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(C) EBCAP- East Bay Community Action**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(D) Visiting Nurse Home & Hospice**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(E) Community String Project**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(F) King Philip Little League**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(G) Franklin Court Tenants Association**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(H) Boy Scouts of America**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(I) Bristol Art Museum**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(J) Saint Elizabeth Adult Day Centers**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**

**(K) The Samaritans, INC.**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(L) Coggeshall Farm**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(M) Meals on Wheels**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(N) Art Night**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(O) Bristol Rotary Charities Foundation**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(P) East Bay Food Pantry**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(Q) Benjamin Church Senior Center. Inc.**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(R) Bristol Garden Club**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(S) Eastern RI Cons. Dist.**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(T) Benjamin Church Resident's Association**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(U) Friends of Toms Grove**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(V) Bristol Middle Passage Marker Project**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**

**(W) Special Olympics of RI/Bristol County Baysiders**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(X) East Bay Softball**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(Y) Friends of St. Elizabeth Food Pantry**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(Z) Friends of Linden Pace**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(AA) Bristol Historical & Preservation Society**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(BB) Wildlife Rehab Association of RI**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(CC) Mosaico, CDC**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**(DD) Bristol Land Conservation Trust**

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**601-43220 Tourism/Promotion- (continued from March 16, 2026)**

During the Tourism/Promotion budget discussion, representatives from Explore Bristol, including Alayne White and Jeff Hirsh, outlined how their efforts have significantly increased Bristol's visibility, web traffic, and engagement, while maintaining strong collaboration with local businesses and regional partners.

They highlighted work with PR firm Lou Hammond to host travel writers and promote national coverage, as well as the coordination required to support local businesses through shared opportunities.

Ms. White highlighted strong performance metrics, with website sessions, unique visitors, and page views increasing by approximately 2,000% year-over-year in February, and an email

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**

newsletter of about 2,800 subscribers achieving exceptionally high open rates. She also acknowledged that social media remains an area for improvement following challenges with a previous vendor and is currently being reevaluated.

Mr. Hirsh added that they recently collaborated with Providence tourism staff, who praised the Explore Bristol website and content while recommending additional blog development to strengthen search visibility. He emphasized that the initiative is continually evolving based on feedback and performance.

He also noted the significant economic impact of destination weddings, citing high volumes at venues such as Blithewold, Linden Place, Mount Hope Farm, and others, which generate substantial spillover activity for local businesses. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of regional partnerships with Providence, Newport, and ferry services, and shared consistent positive feedback from visitors regarding Bristol's welcoming community, well-maintained appearance, and supportive public safety presence—all of which contribute to the Town's reputation and tourism success.

Council members expressed strong support for the program and discussed opportunities to improve coordination of events, better connect visitors with downtown businesses, and further quantify the economic impact of tourism-related activities.

Municipal Operational Manager Dickervitz discussed several Town-supported promotional efforts that contribute to tourism and community activity. He highlighted the Black Ships Festival, noting plans to expand the event with additional vendors at Independence Park and enhanced coordination with police and other departments, potentially incorporating elements similar to Community Night.

He also pointed to the Bristol Merchants Association (BMA), whose themed events on State Street consistently draw large crowds and serve as a strong downtown attraction. Regarding the Christmas season, Municipal Operational Manager Dickervitz acknowledged prior coordination challenges but noted that recent collaboration among the Christmas Festival committee and other groups was effective. Council members discussed the possibility of shifting some Christmas activities back to the Downtown/Common area once improvements at the former Walley School building is complete.

Municipal Operational Manager Dickervitz added that a portion of the tourism budget supports targeted advertising, such as

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18,2026**

placements in Rhode Island Monthly, and emphasized that these combined efforts—Explore Bristol, the Black Ships Festival, BMA events, the Christmas Festival, and coordinated marketing—work together to keep Bristol active, visible, and vibrant throughout the year.

The Council made no changes to the budget as recommended

**405 BOARDS & COMM.**

**Bristol 250<sup>th</sup> Commission**

Alayne White, Chair of the 250h Commission, presented an overview of the Bristol 250th Commission's budget request. Ms. White explained that both the initial \$5,000 state grant for Bristol's 250th celebration and the \$5,000 previously provided by the Town have been fully allocated. She noted that the Commission's primary remaining need is funding to design and construct a 250th-themed float for the Fourth of July Parade.

Ms. White highlighted that Mike Hoffman has already committed in-kind support, including a truck, driver, flatbed, and a location to build the float; however, materials and construction costs will still require Town funding. The Commission therefore requested an additional \$5,000—also recommended by the Town Administrator—to ensure completion of a high-quality float and to support continued collaboration with partners such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Committee on related 250th programming.

**5 Year- Capital Budget Review**

The Town Administrator presented the five-year capital plan, focusing on the FY26 capital budget and emphasizing continued investment in core infrastructure, public safety, and municipal facilities, largely financed through low-interest state infrastructure loans rather than new general obligation bonds. The proposed capital program totals approximately \$1.124 million in Town funding, supplemented by Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank loans of \$1.5 million for road paving and approximately \$1.6 million for resiliency projects.

## TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

He emphasized that the FY26 capital program is intentionally focused on critical maintenance, safety, and infrastructure protection, rather than discretionary or cosmetic projects. He also noted that capital planning must account for the anticipated impact of the regional school bond, which is expected to significantly increase the Town's fixed debt costs in FY2028, thereby limiting capacity for additional borrowing in future years

Members of the council reviewed the various departmental Capital Projects status reports as presented in table chart 2 and the Fiscal year proposed capital projects for FY 2027-2031 of the Capital Projects report.

### **PUBLIC WORKS**

Director Chris Parella and Town Administrator Contente provided an overview of the Community Development capital projects report and status report for the following projects:

- Road Reconstruction & Repaving (status report)
- Fenmore Street Design & Construction
- Mack heavy-duty dump/plow/sander truck (status report)
- Sidewalk repairs Metacom/Kaines Way (status report)

Under Public Works, the capital budget includes a purchase of a new heavy plow truck to replace one of two aging frontline units nearing the end of their useful life. The Council acknowledged the need for reliable equipment, particularly for winter operations. The \$1.5 million road paving program includes both carryover work and new streets, selected based on condition, engineering readiness, and permitting. Identified roads include Evelyn, Martin, High View Drive, Wood Street, State Street, Primrose, Broad Common Road, and completion of Myrtle Path. The Director noted that projects are based on a triage approach and cannot be easily modified mid-year due to design and permitting requirements. Ongoing drainage improvements in the Barnum/Sherry/Varnum area were also noted. *(Received at meeting - preliminary list of roads scheduled for repaving)*

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

## TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18,2026

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Director Diane Williamson, Town Planner Ed Tanner, and Town Administrator Contente provided an overview of the Community Development capital projects report and status report for the following projects:

- Church Street Seawall
- Antony Ave Drainage/Design
- End of Road Public Access-Fales
- Monroe-Perry Sidewalk
- Comprehensive Plan Update
- Seawall Independence Park
- Franklin Street- Pedestrian Study
- Bristol Harbor Sign- Rockwell Park
- East Burial Ground Fence

It was highlighted that the plan includes resiliency and infrastructure projects such as the Church Street and Independence Park shoreline walls, funded through grants with local match from the resiliency loan. Additional funding is proposed for the Fales Road boat ramp and shoreline access project, which involves a full structural reconstruction to improve safety and long-term stability. Other projects include the Perry/Monroe sidewalk connection, a Franklin Street pedestrian and traffic study near Unity Park, a grant-dependent Bristol Harbor sign installation, and an endowment-funded fence at the East Burial Ground.

The Chairman questioned the size of the additional \$850,000 request related to the Fales Road Boat Ramp project, asking whether the ramp is used sufficiently to justify such a significant investment and requesting further detail on the scope of the proposed work.

In response, Town Administrator Contente, Director Williamson, and Town Planner Tanner explained that the existing ramp has deteriorated, with the end section broken off, creating unsafe and slippery conditions. They noted that the ramp is located below a steep bluff, further complicating safe access. They emphasized that the project is not a simple repair, but a fully designed and permitted structural rebuild. The proposed work includes construction of a new ramp extending into the water for small craft and shoreline access, as well as a stairway down the

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18,2026**

slope, supported by substantial foundations and anchoring systems to prevent future failure.

It was noted that Fales Road is a well-utilized public access point, with limited accesses points in the surrounding area, and framed the project as both a public safety improvement and a long-term investment in shoreline access. They cautioned that abandoning or significantly redesigning the project at this stage would result in the loss of completed engineering and permitting work, while leaving the existing safety concerns unaddressed.

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

**POLICE DEPARTMENT/Animal Control**

Police Chief Lynch provided an overview of the department's capital projects report and status report of the following projects:

- 800MHZ Communications System Upgrade
- Community upgrade

**Animal Control**

- Shed Permit

Public safety capital items include a grant-funded police radio system upgrade, improvements at the animal shelter.

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

**Harbor Department**

Town Administrator Contente and Harbor Master Marsili provided an overview of the Harbor Department's status report for the following projects:

- Harbor Vehicle- Harbormaster

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

**Fire Department**

The Town Administrator and Fire Chief DeMello provided an overview of the department's capital projects report and status report of the following projects:

## **TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18,2026**

- Radio Communication Equipment
- Rescue 1
- Protective Equipment- Airbags/Active Threat Response
- Breathing Apparatus
- Ventilators

It was highlighted that there was a phased payments for a new rescue vehicle and SCBA air packs. These investments support operational reliability and compliance with safety standards.

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

### **Rogers Free Library**

Town Administrator Contente and Library Director Dyer provided an overview of the department's capital projects report and status report for the following projects:

- Carpeting

Library Director Dyer highlighted the capital plan includes a \$50,000 local match for a Champlin Foundation grant to replace carpeting throughout the Rogers Free Library.

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

### **Parks & Recreation**

Town Administrator Contente and Director of Parks and Recreation Warren Renshausen provided an overview of the department's capital projects report and status report of the following projects:

- Vets Park Playground Renovations/Improvements
- Town Common Playground Renovations/Improvements
- Cohelo Park Basketball Surface replacement
- Sound/Paging system-Town Beach
- Baseball Field Fencing

It was highlighted that Parks and Recreation projects include a state grant application for playground improvements at Town Common and Veterans Park, with a \$41,000 local match budgeted

**TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18,2026**

and contingency plans to redirect funds if the grant is not awarded. Additional items include replacement of the Cohelo Park playground surface, installation of a new Town Beach paging and public address system to improve safety communications, and upgrades to recreational facilities.

The council members deliberated and assessed the progress of these projects.

It was noted that the capital plan prioritizes long-term infrastructure needs, public safety, and facility improvements while maintaining fiscal stability and preparing for future financial obligations.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Sweeney, seconded by Councilman Teixeira, and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 8:20 PM.

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Melissa Cordeiro, Town Clerk