
Commission Meeting Public Comment - September 8, 2026: For the Public Record

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In lieu of my inability to appear this evening, I submit this public comment for the record.

I want to begin by saying that I appreciate the difficult responsibility this Commission has in developing a budget. But I also believe residents deserve more than 180 seconds **at a Commission meeting** to comment on complicated financial decisions.

I would respectfully ask this Commission to create more opportunities for meaningful dialogue with residents before major budget decisions are finalized. Public comment should be more than a series of three-minute sales pitches. It should be part of an ongoing conversation about our town's priorities.

I'd like to offer five observations.

First, Richard presented the Commission with several dozen town activities and expenses and asked you to prioritize them. That's a useful exercise. But I have to ask: why weren't residents given the same opportunity? We are stakeholders too. I encourage the Commission to conduct a similar resident prioritization exercise before next year's budget is developed.

Second, I remain concerned about the way the recent CRA RFP award was ultimately handled. Whatever the intentions may have been, the process created the perception that the rules changed at the last moment to accommodate a particular request. That's not a message we want future businesses and investors to take away from our town. I would encourage the Commission to review that process and establish clear, consistent RFP procedures that apply equally to everyone and stick to it.

Third, employee compensation is our largest recurring expense, yet I don't see enough discussion about how merit increases should actually be earned. A COLA and a merit increase are two different things. One recognizes the cost of living; the other should recognize demonstrated performance. I would encourage the Commission to **charge the Town Manager** to establish clear performance standards and measurable criteria before awarding across-the-board merit increases.

Fourth, I keep asking myself a simple question: what are YOU saying "no" to? Reducing an expenditure is not the same as eliminating or postponing one. At some point, responsible budgeting requires us to identify priorities and make difficult choices. I would ask the Commission to identify

specific expenditures that can be deferred, or eliminated rather than relying primarily on incremental reductions.

Fifth, we may be facing significant financial uncertainty later this year, particularly if changes to the Homestead Exemption affect our future revenues. In that environment, I question whether adding new fees—such as library room-use fees—is the best expression of fiscal responsibility. Residents already contribute to the library through their taxes. Before adding another fee, I would ask the Commission to demonstrate that all other reasonable spending alternatives have been thoroughly examined that can effectively position us for a uncertain fiscal future.

So my request tonight is not simply to criticize this budget. It is to ask for a better process., To do better. Give residents an opportunity to prioritize.

Create meaningful budget workshops where residents and commissioners can exchange ideas.

Establish objective standards for individual merit compensation.

Identify what we are actually willing to defer, reduce, or eliminate.

And develop a financial contingency plan before making new recurring commitments.

The strength of a small town is that residents and elected officials are close enough to one another to actually listen and work together. I respectfully ask this Commission to take advantage of that strength.

When residents feel heard, even when we disagree with the final decision, trust is strengthened. When residents feel that decisions have already been made without meaningful public dialogue, that trust is weakened.

I believe this Commission has an opportunity tonight to begin rebuilding that trust through a more open, collaborative, and financially disciplined process.

Thank you.

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