

**SUNAPEE SELECTBOARD  
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING  
TOWN OFFICE MEETING ROOM  
JANUARY 12, 2026, 6:30 p.m.**

**Present:** Chair Suzanne Gottling; Vice Chair Jeremy Hathorn; Selectboard Members Fred Gallup, Aaron Whipple, Anthony Dolan

**Absent:** None

**Also present:** Shannon Martinez, Town Manager; Allyson Traeger, Land Use Administrator

**1. CALL SELECTBOARD MEETING TO ORDER**

Chair Gottling called the public hearing to order at 6:30 p.m.

**2. BOND PUBLIC HEARING:**

**To raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$1,300,000 for the installation of a solar array and the implementation of energy efficiency measures at the Wastewater Treatment Plant.**

Bette Nowack of the Energy Aggregation Committee offered an overview of this proposal, noting the availability of a low-interest loan from the State Clean Water Revolving Fund that would replace the cost of the power used at the plant. There is loan forgiveness of \$250,000 available for completing energy efficiency upgrades. They also may qualify for a Federal Direct Pay Benefit of \$300,000 of credit. The project is sized to supply energy to the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

An RFP was put out for the solar array in October 2024 and Revision Energy was selected. Revision Energy is working on the upfront tasks. The next step is the residents voting on the warrant article; the bond cannot be obtained without voter authorization.

Ms. Nowack explained the cost would be offset by the savings over time. She also explained the role renewable energy credits will play in paying for this project.

Chair Gottling opened public comment.

**Patrick Fine** asked about the percent of the low-interest loan, the generating capacity, and the Town's annual payment on the loan. He suggested showing on the warrant article an estimate of what funds would need to be raised.

**Jeff Seifert, 1110 Lake Avenue, Georges Mills,** said the terms of the bond should be listed on the warrant article.

Ms. Nowack noted the NHMA advises not to include the terms of the loan on the warrant article, as this cannot be guaranteed until the loan closes. The Board agreed, and reviewed the information that should be prepared for the Deliberative Session to explain that this project will more than pay for itself.

**Chris Whitehouse** spoke to the cost of the project without the incentives.

**A resident** asked about the impact of any additional loan costs on her water and sewer bill.

Ms. Nowack explained the term of the loan would be designed to match the cost of the payment with the value of the power being obtained.

**Lisa Hoekstra** noted the need for residents to know what the cost of obtaining the bond will be.

**Dave Bailey**, Water and Sewer Superintendent, explained they are trying to be good stewards of the residents' money and save money on electricity costs.

**Susan** suggested wording that could be used on the warrant article to clarify the request without citing specific details.

**A resident** spoke in support of moving toward renewable energy.

**Catherine** (sp) spoke in support of this proposal.

**Linda**, Lower Main Street, expressed support for improving the plant and stressed the need for energy resilience.

Chair Gottling closed the public hearing and the Board began deliberation. They agreed on the need to inform the residents about the details of this proposal. They noted this will impact New London sewer users.

**MOTION to move the \$1.3 million installation of a solar array and the implementation of energy efficiency measures at the Wastewater Treatment Plant to the ballot made by Selectboard Member Dolan, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

### **3. BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

**To review the proposed 2026 operating budget as well as any petitioned or governing body warrant articles.**

Chair Gottling opened the public hearing.

#### **Budget**

Town Manager Martinez reviewed the role special warrant articles play in the budget, noting that while there is no law that says they must be included in the operating budget, the warrants stated this would be done. She explained the challenge of providing service and

moving the Town forward with limited staff and a lean budget. She noted the proposed budget is focused on stability instead of growth.

She presented the proposed budget and explained the reasons for the increase over last year, which include special warrant articles voted on by the residents and increased costs over which the Town has no control. She noted the Town operated on a default budget in 2025, which was effectively the 2024 budget. She reviewed notable changes in line items/departments and provided background on each.

Chair Gottling opened public comment.

**Susan Fine** recognized the work done to present a budget that respects citizens' concerns about cost increases. She agreed the cost of warrant articles should be integrated into future operating budgets. She asked how the reduction in staff in the Land Use/Planning Department will impact service, and about wage increases in the Police Department and the Library.

Town Manager Martinez stressed that the Town does not have the internal capacity to support growth. The Library wage increases reflect that it is now fully staffed. Police Chief Cobb noted the benefit of retaining experienced officers and the stability in staffing over the past two years.

**Phil** asked about hydro being self-funding, the increase in the Library operating budget, and the intent to return to 2024 staffing levels.

Town Manager Martinez explained hydro is a standalone entity and pays for itself through the energy generated. She said some staff positions are being refilled to improve service. A Library representative explained the majority of the Library budget is personnel; it does not reflect the cost of programming, which the Friends and Foundation support. However, programs require staffing.

**Patrick Fine** asked about the Library wage increases. Library representatives noted the impact of high turnover in staff, an increase in part-time hours, and hiring the new director.

**Chris Whitehouse** asked about revenues and the forecast for tax relief in 2026. He spoke to why the budget failed in 2025. He questioned the need for COLAs and spoke to the cost of providing retirement and benefits. He questioned increases in specific line items and the Town's priorities.

**Lisa Hoekstra** questioned the difference between the Library and Fire Department budgets. She questioned the amounts of specific line items, including the Highway Department, Welfare, the Safety Services building, and legal fees.

**Catherine Bushueff** spoke to the age of the Town infrastructure and the need for a strong Library.

**Patrick Fine** said this is a lean budget that reflects the will of the people to control costs and deserves the residents' support.

A **resident** asked about the increase in the cost of ambulance and Dispatch, and Town Manager Martinez explained how these were beyond the Town's control.

Town Manager Martinez explained how the budget equates to the percentage increase in the tax rate.

### **Warrant Articles**

Town Manager Martinez reviewed the warrant articles and their impact on the budget.

### **Solar Array**

**The Board recommended moving forward with the \$1.3 million installation of a solar array and the implementation of energy efficiency measures at the Wastewater Treatment Plant with a vote of 5-0-0.**

### **Operating Budget**

The Board spoke in support of the proposed annual operating budget as presented.

**The Board recommended moving the proposed annual operating budget to the ballot with a vote of 5-0-0.**

### **Full-Time Fire Chief**

Josh Trow, Fire Wards Chair, explained the need for a full-time fire chief and provided background on this warrant article. The last two chiefs have worked full-time hours, even though they filled a part-time role.

Chair Gottling asked for public comment; members of the public asked clarifying questions.

The Board spoke in support of the need for a full-time fire chief and to professionalize the department.

**MOTION to recommend the full-time fire chief warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

### **Additional Police Officer**

**Chris Whitehouse** asked how this would impact the part-time budget and Chief Cobb explained.

A **resident** asked why a full-time police officer is needed. Chief Cobb reviewed the increase in call volume, state mandates, and regulations. He also spoke to the safety concerns of only one officer replying to a call.

**MOTION to recommend the addition of an additional police officer made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 4-0-1.**

Fire Apparatus Capital Reserve Fund

Mr. Trow spoke to the cost of replacing fire trucks and the need to fund a capital reserve fund to address this.

**Lisa Hoekstra** asked how often the ladder truck is used and Mr. Trow replied.

**Chris Whitehouse** questioned the need for a ladder truck and suggested neighboring towns share equipment. Mr. Trow addressed this.

**Patrick Fine** suggested this line item could be reduced, questioning whether the amount in this fund should be doubled in one year.

**MOTION to reduce the amount placed into the Fire Apparatus Capital Reserve Fund from \$294,000 to \$200,000 made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup.**

**Discussion:** The Board discussed whether this amount should be lowered, noting the fund has taken a hit for the past two years and that apparatus is the infrastructure of the Fire Department. They discussed situations where a ladder truck is important. They also discussed the possibility of the warrant article not being voted for at a higher amount.

**Motion failed 1-4-0, with Selectboard Member Whipple voting in support.**

**MOTION to recommend and move this warrant article to the ballot made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 4-1-0, with Selectboard Member Whipple voting in opposition.**

Highway and Transfer Station Equipment Capital Reserve Fund

The Board discussed adding \$200,000 to this fund. Highway Director Mike Martell spoke to the cost of equipment and the age of the equipment currently being used. He also explained the cost of leasing equipment.

**MOTION to recommend and move this warrant article to the ballot made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Highway Garage Infrastructure Improvement Capital Reserve Fund

The Board discussing adding \$50,000 to this fund, which would cover engineering and design as well as adding a fire suppression system to protect the equipment housed in the garage.

**Chris Whitehouse** suggested obtaining an estimate to install a fire suppression system.

**Lisa Hoekstra** asked if the equipment was insured. Mr. Martell explained it is not insured for the full replacement value.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Town Bridges and Road

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Dolan. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Dirt Road Improvement Capital Reserve Fund

Mr. Martell explained there are roads in Town that are close to where they could be paved, with adequate funds.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 4-1-0, with Selectboard Member Whipple voting in opposition.**

Georges Mills Bridge

The Board discussed adding \$250,000 to this fund from the unrestricted fund balance. Town Manager Martinez noted with this addition, there will be enough money to pay for the Georges Mills bridge work.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Paving Roads

The Board discussed adding \$100,000 to this fund from the unrestricted fund balance.

**Dave Bailey** said no money was allocated for manholes last year. The Board agreed the Highway and Water/Sewer should work together when roads are paved to help address this.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Vice Chair Hathorn, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Town Buildings Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund

The Board discussed adding \$50,000 to this fund. Mr. Martell reviewed equipment that needs to be replaced.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Dolan, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Veterans Field Capital Reserve Fund

The Board discussed adding \$25,000 to this fund.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Cemetery

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Conservation Fund

**Chris Whitehouse** spoke to the difficulty of building affordable housing when land is being purchased for conservation.

**Lisa Hoekstra** questioned building this fund in light of other needs in Town.

The Board noted the lack of infrastructure affects the ability and attractiveness of developing land. They discussed work the Conservation Commission does, such as expanding trails, aside from purchasing land.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Vice Chair Hathorn, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Hydroelectric Contract Terms

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Milfoil

The Board discussed contributing \$8,000 to this lake protection fund. All three towns contribute to this fund, which addresses other issues besides milfoil.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Lake Avenue Fund

The Board discussed the need for highway, water and sewer, and engineers to collaborate to plan for work on Lake Avenue, and the need to accumulate funds to address this. They discussed increasing the amount from \$100,000 to \$250,000, given the potential cost of the work. They agreed to change this to a capital reserve fund.

**The Board voted to recommend this warrant article 5-0-0.**

Dewey Woods and Wendell Marsh Improvements

The Board discussed utilizing \$7,000 from the Town Forest Fund for work on these properties.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Van for Water and Sewer Department

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Upgrade of Sewer Pump Stations

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Amend Dock/Boat Launch Repair Fund

The Board discussed amending this fund to allow it to be used for items other than repair and maintenance, including engineering and permitting.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Selectboard Member Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Modify Veterans Tax Credit

The Board discussed increasing the Veterans Tax Credit from \$2,000 to \$2,500.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Establishment of Public Assistance Expendable Trust Fund

Town Manager Martinez explained this would provide a means for donations to be accepted and processed, and to take back the heat and utilities fund managed by a third-party vendor.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Gallup, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

Selectboard Authority to Adopt and Dedicate Town Roads

Town Manager Martinez explained the Board is not empowered to adopt and dedicate Town roads in spite of voting to do so in 1993.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Selectboard Member Gallup. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

List of Roads

Town Manager Martinez explained this outlines the roads that need to be formally adopted by the Town per the above article and the repercussions if this does not pass.

Selectboard Member Dolan recused himself.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Whipple, seconded by Vice Chair Hathorn. Motion carried 4-0-0.**

Selectboard Member Dolan returned to the Board.

Recreation Fund

Town Martinez explained this fund is not a special revenue fund, as listed. The language needs to be amended to reflect this as well as ensure the fund is being used correctly.

**MOTION to recommend this warrant article made by Selectboard Member Dolan, seconded by Vice Chair Whipple. Motion carried 5-0-0.**

**UPCOMING MEETINGS**

- January 13: Zoning Board Meeting – 6:30 PM
- January 14: Energy Aggregation Committee Meeting – 5:30 PM
- January 14: Conservation Commission Meeting – 7:00 PM
- January 15: Planning Board Meeting – 6:30 PM
- January 21: Recreation Committee Meeting – 6:30 PM
- January 26: Selectboard Meeting – 6:30 PM

**ADJOURN MEETING**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary