MINUTES

City of Concord Finance Committee Meeting
May 18, 2026 @ 5:30 PM
City Council Chambers

Present: Mayor Byron Champlin, City Councilors Stacey Brown, Mark Davie, Nathan Fennessy, Jeff Foote, Michele Horne, Aislinn Kalob, Jennifer Kretovic, Judith Kurtz, Jim Schlosser, Kris Schultz, Ali Sekou, Amanda Grady Sexton, and Brent Todd.

Excused: City Councilor Fred Keach.

The Mayor opened the meeting at 5:30 PM.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the May 14, 2026 Finance Committee meeting. The minutes were approved with a unanimous voice vote.

Manager Aspell indicated that tonight's FY 2027 proposed budget review will cover General Government, Police, Fire, and General Services. He began with review of the General Government section of the budget, which includes the City Manager's Office, Legal, Assessing, Human Resources, Finance, Information Technology, City Council, City Clerk, and General Overhead.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT:

City Manager's Office: No revenues were budgeted in FY 2027. The revised budget and projected amount in FY 2026 is for revenue received from the Opioid settlement and was transferred to reserve for future use. Budget to budget, expenses are down $122,000, or 16%, mainly due to the $150,000 Event Grants Program budgeted in FY 2026 not being included in the FY 2027 proposed budget. The other decreases are due to wage, benefit and other operational changes.

Legal Department: Revenues are up $2,400, or 3%, and reflect fees collected from the Towns of Bow, Dunbarton, and Loudon for prosecutorial services provided by the City. Expenses, budget to budget, are up $64,000 or 4%. This is due to wage and benefit increases and changes to other operational expenses.

There was a brief discussion about the increase in Right-to-Know requests being received by the City Solicitor's office. Specifically, Councilors asked if the department is tracking the different types of entities (media, residents, corporations, in-state vs. out-of-state, etc.) that are making requests, as well as the number of hours staff are spending on preparing responses. City Solicitor John Conforti indicated that Right-to-Know requests are continuing to increase. He noted that the Department hasn't been formally tracking the requests, but plans to do so starting in FY 2027. He noted that the requests are received from a variety of entities, with the biggest single requestor being the Concord Monitor. He noted that about 20% of the requests are from out-of-state corporations looking for data for their own benefit. Councilor Kretovic requested that the Department track how many requests are being received from City Councilors. Councilor Kurtz asked if the Department can charge a fee for Right-to-Know requests. City Solicitor Conforti indicated that, per statute, we cannot make a profit from them, and that we don't charge for electronic responses, which make up the majority of our responses. He noted that Right-to-Know requests are a legal right.

Assessing: Budget to budget, revenue is up $364,000, or 43%. Three new PILOT agreements are driving this increase: Dartmouth Hitchcock, $155,000; Kearsarge Old Turnpike Road, LLC, (solar array on Old Turnpike Road), $99,000; and LSE Urse Minor, LLC, (new solar array on West Portsmouth Street), $83,000. The remaining increases are due to additional changes in other PILOTs. Expenses, budget to budget, are up by $32,000 or 4%, due to regular wage and benefit changes, insurances, training and professional services.

Human Resources: Budget to budget, revenue is up $40,000 due to increased revenue from Harvard Pilgrim to support the Wellness Program. Expenses, budget to budget, are up $27,000 or 3%. This is due to annual wage and benefit increases; an increase in the use of $40,000 from Harvard Pilgrim for the Wellness Program; and a reduction of $86,000 for Paid Family Medical Leave premiums that are now distributed to all departments and funds.

Finance: Budget to budget, revenue is up $3.3 million or 5%. The main drivers of this increase are property tax revenue being up $2.7 million; motor vehicle registrations are up $125,000; investment income is flat; use of Fund Balance is up $300,000; and Rooms and Meals Tax revenue is up $100,000. Expenses, budget to budget, are up $291,000, or 11%, due to wage and benefit changes, as well as an increase of $90,000 in the software/hardware maintenance agreement to move to a cloud-based subscription. This transition will improve redundancy to minimize downtime, save improvement funding by freeing up server space that can now be used for other resources, and decreases in staff time with updates and refreshes.

This budget also provides for a change in the citywide copier replacement and maintenance program by managing and funding copiers in the Purchasing Division at a cost of $92,000 in the Software/Hardware Maintenance line.

Councilor Todd asked about the PCR for a cloud-based ERP server, specifically why it was needed. Deputy City Manager – Finance LeBrun explained that, earlier this year, the City experienced a Munis shutdown, which affected everything from payroll to accounts payable to accounts receivable. It took 2-3 weeks to resolve the matter. A cloud-based server would make it quicker and easier to resolve such issues.

Information Technology: No revenue is budgeted for FY 2027. Expenses, budget to budget, are up $126,000 or 7%. This is due to wage and benefit increases, as well as a $47,000 increase in software/ hardware maintenance.

Councilor Todd noted the unfunded PCRs for advanced malware protection and on-call pay. He asked where the City stands as far as IT security. IT Director Johnathan Smullen indicated that we are in good shape; however, you can never have too much security. He stated that the advanced malware protection would provide another layer of protection. As for the PCR regarding on-call pay, IT Director Smullen indicated that there is currently no additional pay provided for IT staff who are on-call. He indicated that a staff person must be available 24-hours a day, seven days a week, due to the City's varied IT needs.

City Council: Expenses, budget to budget, are up $4,000, or 9%. Last year, the City Council approved a blanket cut to its budget in the amount of $5,000, which limited its ability to support Council needs. This increase partially returns some of that funding.

Councilor Brown noted the ICLEI membership that is paid for out of the City Council budget, and asked if all City Councilors could have access to the membership. City Manager Aspell indicated that the members of the Energy and Environment Committee are the main users of the membership, and that he would look into City Council members that are not on the Energy & Environment Committee being granted access.

City Clerk: Budget to budget, revenue is up $11,000, or 11%, due to an increase in dog licenses and fees, recording fees, vital record, and notary fees. Expenses, budget to budget, are up $49,000, or 8%. The majority of the change is due to wage and benefit increases (part-time wages are up due to the number of elections this year). The other increases are for maintenance of ballot counting devices, software, and rent for polling locations.

Councilor Todd asked about the unfunded PCR for additional signage at the election polls. City Clerk Janice Bonenfant indicated that the request was for additional signage inside the polling locations to improve efficiency for voters and election workers at each polling location.

General Overhead: Budget to budget, revenue is up $1.6 million or 31%. This is due to the following:

- A reduction in Cable TV revenue, a trend we've continued to see in recent years.
- Retiree health insurance reimbursements are up $140,000, and the expense side is up by $347,000, due to several employees retiring that are under the City's Legacy Retiree Health Insurance Program.
- Transfer-in from Trust is up $621,000, due to a $150,000 reduction from the Economic Development Reserve for the Event Arts Grant Program; a $449,000 reduction from the Community Improvement Reserve, which was used in FY 2026 for the cleanup of Healey Park and to offset the tax rate increase; a $90,000 increase from the Opioid Reserve for the Police social worker positions; a $5,000 increase from the Recreation Reserve for repairs and maintenance to the snow grooming machine at Beaver Meadow; a $245,000 increase from the Recreation Reserve for debt service for the clubhouse project at Beaver Meadow Golf Course; a $500,000 increase from the Community Improvement Reserve for debt service for the new police station; and a $380,000 increase from the OPEB Trust to help offset retiree health insurance.
- Other changes in General Overhead transfers from Enterprise and Special Revenue funds.
- An additional $250,000 is included from the Golf Fund for the Beaver Meadow clubhouse debt service costs.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up $2.6 million or 17%. This is due to the following:

- Retiree health insurance costs are up $347,000;
- Special programs are down $21,000 due to not funding the McKenna House ($31,000) and a proposed increase in Concord Area Transit funding back to $181,000.

- Debt service is up $2.4 million. Of this amount, $1.7 million is for the new police station and $494,000 is for the Beaver Meadow clubhouse project. Manager Aspell noted that he is using $200,000 from fund balance and $500,000 from the Community Improvement Reserve to offset the costs for the police station. He is also using a $250,000 transfer from the Recreation Reserve to pay for the clubhouse debt service.
- The transfer out to Capital is down $53,000. Manager Aspell noted that he used $140,000 from the Equipment Reserve to support the Capital purchase of police cruisers; reduced copier replacement funds by $32,000, and increased the transfer for annual technology purchases by $172,000.

All other Special Programs and Agencies are level funded for FY 2027.

Councilor Brown asked if the social service agencies are required to provide a report each year on their use of the funding the City provides. City Manager Aspell indicated that City Council has never asked for such a report. It was noted, however, that this information is provided in the annual funding application each agency submits.

There was a brief discussion about the funding for Concord Area Transit, which has been level for many years. Councilor Kalob suggested the City find ways to better support them. Councilor Foote noted that there are many private businesses that benefit from the CAT buses stopping at their locations and suggested that CAT consider requesting funding from those entities.

PUBLIC SAFETY:

Police Department: Revenue, budget to budget, is up $55,000, or 11%, due to increases in special duty services, cruiser rental fees, other revenues, and School District payments from both the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up $1.2 million, or 7%, due to a $1.1 million increase in wages and benefits, which includes a reduction of $250,000 for attrition. Also included in this budget are increases in the amount of $6,700 for software and hardware, including the Graykey subscription, which extracts data from cell phones during a criminal investigation and was previously funded through a grant; a decrease of $27,300 for communications due to the new phone system; an increase of $11,900 for electricity; an increase of $49,000 for liability insurance; and an increase of $5,000 in Professional Development for firearms instructor training.

This budget continues the emphasis on public safety and support resources for working with the City's most vulnerable populations, training, continued support for non-lethal options when dealing with offenders, and police officer wellness and support for traumatic situations.

There was a brief discussion about staffing and overtime. Councilor Schultz suggested, on behalf of a constituent, that the City consider reducing its commitment of time and coverage, perhaps stagger shifts, and change its staffing to save money on overtime. Interim Police Chief Barrett Moulton indicated that the Police Department does stagger its shifts, and has more officers on duty during the daytime hours when it is busier. He noted that the Department receives an excessive amount of calls and often officers are spread thin in responding to these calls. He noted that, often, things like traffic

control get put on the back burner. He also noted that the writing of reports can take an officer off the street for many hours, as does officer court appearances.

Councilor Todd suggested the Police Department identify responsibilities that could be handled by administrative staff, rather than sworn officers. Interim Chief Moulton indicated that the Department is looking into this.

Fire Department: Revenue, budget to budget, is up $280,000, or 6%, mainly due to a $135,000 increase in ambulance charges, a $105,000 increase in alarm box revenue, and an increase of $32,000 from other government agencies.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up $1.3 million or 7%. The main increase is due to wages and benefits in the amount of $1.4 million; a decrease of $59,000 in Professional Development; a $32,000 increase Departmental Supplies; and a $29,000 increase in Liability Insurance.

Also included in the FY 2027 Fire Department budget are:

- $17,000 increase in wages and benefits at Fire Headquarters to upgrade a full-time position;
- $2,800 increase in Fire Prevention for an iPad laptop and phone;
- $2,100 increase for ambulance coder privacy training;
- $2,500 increase for peer support training;
- $64,000 reduction in Professional Development for removal of prior year PCRs that are no longer needed; and
- $4,7000 increase for tools, equipment, and departmental supplies.

Councilor Kurtz asked if the Fire Department has any concerns with the new free-standing Emergency Room being opened in the city, specifically if it will affect the City's ambulance revenue due to the diversion of patients from our ambulances to theirs. Fire Chief John Chisholm said he does not feel there will be an impact to the City's ambulance revenue.

Mayor Champlin asked if the City's participation in the Mutual Aid Compact is worthwhile, specifically asking if we are overly relied upon and giving more than we receive. Chief Chisholm indicated that being a part of the Mutual Aid Compact is worthwhile. He explained that there is give and take. We rely on the smaller towns to help us when needed, which leaves them depleted; and, being a larger community, the smaller towns rely on us from time to time.

There was a lengthy discussion about Fire Department staffing and excessive overtime costs. City Councilors expressed concern about burnout and fatigue of our fire personnel and stressed the importance of the City finding ways to resolve this ongoing issue.

Councilor Todd noted the unfunded PCR for putting Engine 1 back into service. Chief Chisholm indicated that he feels it is imperative that Engine 1 be put back into service. However, in order to do so, it will require 12 additional full-time equivalent positions. The unfunded PCR was for four FTEs for just half a year. This endeavor will need to be phased in over time due to the costs involved.

GENERAL SERVICES: Revenue, budget to budget, is up $198,000 or 17%. This increase is due to transfers-in from the Parking Fund, TIF Districts, and Water and Wastewater Funds.

Expenses, budget to budget, are up $943,000 or 7%. The majority of the increase in the General Services budget is for wages and benefits ($686,000), an increase in Professional Services ($25,000), a decrease in Communications ($11,000), an increase in Property Liability and Auto Insurance ($46,000), an increase in winter treatment supplies ($27,000), and an increase in the Solid Waste Fund transfer ($145,000).

This budget also supports increased funds for:

- Outdoor dining concrete barriers, $15,000; and
- Increased training for servicing fire apparatus, $5,000.

Also included under General Services are two supplemental reports – one on Downtown Services and one on Snow and Ice Control. For Downtown Services, expenses, budget to budget, are up $139,000, due to wage and benefit increases and professional services; and for Snow and Ice Control, expenses are up $132,000, due to wage and benefit increases and winter treatment supplies.

Councilor Horne inquired about the type of road salt we use, to which Highway Superintendent Kevin Demers provided an explanation.

Councilor Todd noted the public testimony that was received regarding the need for painting of sharrows, and asked if we could use thermoplastic polyurethane for the sharrows, as it lasts longer than paint. Superintendent Demers indicated that if the City were to use thermoplastic, we would have to bring in a subcontractor, as our staff does not have the expertise in working with that material. Costs would have to be determined. Councilor Kretovic suggested the City apply for federal Highway Safety funding for the painting of sharrows. Councilor Kurtz suggested some research be done as to the cost to paint a sharrow and how long it lasts.

With no further discussion, the Mayor opened up a public hearing at 7:54 PM.

Terri Paige, Director of Transportation at Concord Area Transit, thanked the City Council for its continued support. She answered many of the questions that were raised earlier in the evening pertaining to CAT's required funding matches and she explained the things CAT has been doing to try and raise funds. She indicated that a local match of $502,000 is required each year by the feds. She said the State has been providing a match, although they recently made some cuts; and that CAT relies heavily on the funding from the City of Concord. She said that they have reached out to Dartmouth Hitchcock and Concord Hospital seeking funding, with no success. They also have applied for some private grants which were not funded. Most recently they received a sponsorship from the Fisher Cats, whereby $5.00 of every Fisher Cats game ticket sold goes to CAT. She indicated that CAT will soon be trying to procure a new full-size bus, which costs about $500,000. She noted that CAT provides a quarterly status report to the City's Transportation Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC).

Councilor Fennessy asked if any other municipalities or the county contributes to CAT, to which Ms. Paige's response was no.

Ms. Paige explained that ridership, which is free, has continued to increase, with 116,000 riders last year. She noted that charging fees wouldn't help because the total funds collected from fares is then deducted from the amount of funding the feds provide.

Jessica Martin, Executive Director of Intown Concord, thanked the City Council for its continued support. She encouraged the City Council to continue funding the Event Arts Grant Program, as the associated events add to the quality of life in Concord, bring people downtown, and help support the community's merchants, hotels, etc.

Ward 5 resident Alan Robidas expressed his opinion that the City should not be influenced or impacted by other fiduciary boards that it is not responsible for, such as the School District. He expressed his opinion that if the School District wants autonomy, they should bill the residents directly instead of it being lumped into the tax rate with the City. He indicated he would fully support the School Districts and City being combined as one entity.

Alex Stoyle, owner of Revelstoke Coffee, thanked the City Council for its support of the annual Northeast Coffee Festival and encouraged them to continue funding the Event Arts Grant Program.

Ward 7 resident Lily Wellington, who is also the Executive Director of the NH State Commission on Aging, spoke in support of Concord Area Transit and its importance to the community's elderly and disabled population. She indicated that the Commission recently conducted a transportation needs assessment, the results of which will be released in the very near future.

Concord resident Roy Schweiker suggested that, in the future, a public hearing be held after each section of the budget, instead of one public hearing at the end of the night. He expressed his opinion that CAT could find a smaller, cheaper bus than one that costs $500,000; he expressed frustration that the CAT bus route doesn't stop at either of the City's senior centers; and suggested each CAT bus have a donation box. He expressed concern that people living in mobile homes will be paying 50% more when the new assessments come out, but businesses will be paying 10% less. He expressed his opinion that if the events downtown are helping the merchants, they should be paying for the program, not the City. He suggested that if the City's IT infrastructure switches to the cloud, a reduction in staffing should be considered. He feels that $120,000 for new handguns for the Police Department is outrageous. He suggested that the Human Services Department be relocated to the new Police Station when it is done. He does not support putting Engine 1 back into service, as there are very few structure fires. Instead, he would like to see an additional ambulance added.

Penacook resident Brennan Bourque presented an elaborate and well thought out plan to bring much needed revenue to the Everett Arena through the hosting of concerts.

With there being no further public testimony, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

At 9:39 PM a motion was made and seconded to go into non-public session for the purpose of discussing compensation adjustment. The motion passed with a unanimous vote. Councilor Brown recused herself.

The committee came out of non-public session at 9:52 PM. A motion was made and seconded to seal the minutes. The motion passed with a unanimous vote. Councilor Brown was not present.

With no further discussion, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting adjourned at 9:54 PM.

A true copy, I attest,

Sue Stevens, Executive Assistant