

School Board Deliberative Session

Friday, February 6, 2026, 6 pm

Cawley Middle School

CALL TO ORDER :

Moderator, Corri Wilson called the First Deliberative Session to Order at Hooksett Cawley Middle School Cafeteria Center at 6:08 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance.

ATTENDANCE:

School Board members :

Chair Wayne Goertel, Lindsey Laliberte, Jillian Godbout, Bob Barker, John Ciempa, James Sullivan, Amy Tremblay, Michael Dullen

Principals : Brad Largy (Memorial), Ben Loi (Underhill) Matt Benson (Cawley)

Budget Committee members

Chair Abigail Shaine, William Lynch, Germano Martins, Ernie Bencivenga, Marianne Soucy, Michael Kowack (absent), Elizabeth Spitzer, Alyssa Ehl, and Darren Greenberg.

Supervisors of the Checklist: Mike Horne, Jim Moody

Interim School District Clerk Clerk: Karina Towne (absent)

Legal Counsel: Peter Phillips

Superintendent: William Rearick

Director of Facilities : Dean Farmer

Director of Student Services : Christine Osborne

Business Administrator : Cindy Bourgeault

Dir Library Services : Justine Thain

Registered voters – 155 in attendance

Wayne Goertel, Chair, spoke to thank James Sullivan for his many years of service to the town as he will be retiring from the board, and presented a plaque in commemoration of his service.

PROOF OF POSTING

Proof of posting was provided by the Moderator.

Members of the School Board and Budget Committee were introduced as well as the SAU staff in attendance.

The Moderator reviewed the rules and procedures for participating in the Deliberative Session.

BUSINESS

To the inhabitants of the Town of Hooksett, New Hampshire, in the county of Merrimack in said state, qualified to vote in Town affairs. You are hereby notified to meet at David R. Cawley Middle School on Friday, February 6, 2026 at 6:00 pm for the first session of the Hooksett School District Meeting to discuss and amend, as required, warrant articles 2 through 8.

The final ballot vote for warrant articles will take place at David R. Cawley Middle School on Tuesday, March 10, 2026. The polls will be open from 6 am until 7 pm.

Moderator Corri Wilson read the following Warrant Articles into the record:

ARTICLES:

Article 1 : Elected Officials – will not be addressed at this session, but will be on the ballot March 10th.

Article 2: Facilities Upgrade Bond Project

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$7,250,000 for the purposes of replacing the roof and HVAC systems, installing boilers, and repairing the fire suppression system and plumbing at Memorial School; replacing HVAC units and repairing the fire suppression system and plumbing at Cawley Middle School; replacing HVAC units and repairing to the fire suppression system and plumbing at Underhill School; and to authorize the issuance of not more than \$7,250,000 of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act, RSA 33:1, et. seq., as amended; to authorize the Hooksett School Board to apply for, obtain, accept and expend federal, state or other aid, if any, which may be available for said project; to comply with all laws applicable to said project; to authorize the Hooksett School Board to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; and to authorize the Hooksett

School Board to take any other action or to pass any other vote relative thereto; and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$181,250 for the first year's payment for the bond?

Estimated tax rate impact is \$.06/per thousand. (Three-fifths vote required) The average cost-per-pupil for the preceding year (2024-2025) as calculated in accordance with RSA 189:75, I(a) is elementary: \$17,396.79, middle \$18,744.59. Hooksett School District achievement proficiency scores for the preceding year (2024-2025):

Hooksett Memorial School: ELA Proficiency: 57%; Math Proficiency: 66%; Science Proficiency: 34% David R. Cawley Middle School: ELA Proficiency: 65%; Math Proficiency: 59%; Science Proficiency: 41%

Recommended by the School Board 6-0

Recommended by the Budget Committee 9-0

Motion made by : Jillian Godbout Seconded by : Bob Barker

(Note : John Ciempa discloses a potential conflict with his employment and thus will recuse himself from discussion and voting on Article 2)

Discussion :

Jillian Godbout : This is about needs, not wants. A special committee formed for discussion feels this can no longer be ignored. Memorial lost heat today for the third time in the past few weeks. Emergency maintenance issues have cost 180,000 dollars so far this calendar year. New proposals were gathered and a second company audited the proposal. This proposal takes care of priority 1's at all three schools, and covers priority 2 and 3 at Memorial only. It will be a 15 year bond, the bond rate is the best we have seen estimated in the past few years. Our schools are our biggest asset. If this does not pass, we will only be able to use the schools for school usage due to wear and tear that the buildings will not be able to sustain, no extra curriculums or other programs.

Bob Barker: Multiple vendors were interviewed and the committee feels that an excellent selection was made. A draft plan for moving forward is available. This also includes capital planning for future needs.

Boards : no discussion

Public input : Devlin (youth) – Hooksett Memorial Student speaks in support of school funding, describing some of the day to day impact she has witnessed at the schools due to maintenance issues.

Ed Groves, 59 Sherwood Drive : Asked about the heating system that recently had issues, how many repairs were required and whether the repairs were under warranty/guaranteed as they failed again so quickly. Jillian Godbout replied explaining that the systems are past their viable age, parts are no longer available.

Dean Farmer clarified that 3 different units failed, not the same unit

Elizabeth Spitzer (budget committee): Asked for a breakdown of the tax rate for every year.

.06 this year, what would the other years be

Wayne Goertel replied : Years 2-15 principal will be paid every year, and that the interest would decrease. The 3.7 rate being quoted is excellent. Committee advises that page 8 of the voter guide contains the year by year breakdown estimation being requested. Clarification question by resident if this is worst case scenario, committee responded that until the bond is secured, it is an estimate only.

Chris Torres, 6 Autumn Run : Question School committee has discretionary spending every budget, what was the amount last year? Was it 3 million dollars? ((Point of order called to redirect to the article)). Resident clarifies he is asking why those funds were not used to fund this article instead.

Jillian Godbout responds that there is not enough in a fund to fulfil this need, and can get the number from last year for the resident.

Michael Dullen responds that when a topic goes to warrant, fund balances cannot be used to fund a project if a warrant is defeated in an election by the vote, even if funds exist. So if these repairs have been requested in prior elections, and voted against, funds cannot be allocated to this project, even if they were available.

Greg Martakos 1465 Hooksett Road – comments that he volunteered at the school his son attended (Memorial) and observed maintenance issues that need attention

Gail Brown, 32 Embassy Ave : Asked for clarification of how the Per Pupil Cost and Test results applies to the warrant. She also spoke in favor of this article based on personal history with water damage risks and liability issues if the schools do not fix this issue.

Jillian Godbout explained that this wording is a new state requirement, to include per pupil costs when certain monies are requested. William Rearick clarified that the test scores inclusion was a typo and not part of this warrant.

Richard Newhall 35 Quince Hill Drive : Speaks in support of education and is in favor of funding this article.

David Olivier 14 Andrea Avenue : was on the facility committee, has voted no in the past on this issue, but feels this year the project is being approached correctly and is strongly in support of this proposal this year. He feels that we will learn from our history and take better care of the maintenance issues in the future.

Article 2 moved to the ballot at 6:55 pm

Roberta Grady 140 Hackett Hill Road moved to restrict reconsideration Dave Levesque 29 Morrill Road seconded the motion

6:56 voice vote unanimously passed to restrict reconsideration.

Article 3: Operating Budget

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$45,851,643? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$45,360,166, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Hooksett School District or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. Estimated tax rate impact: \$10.57/per thousand (increase of \$.59/per thousand over prior year).

Recommended by the School Board 5-2

Recommended by the Budget Committee 5-4

Motion made by : Wayne Goertel Seconded by : Abigail Shaine

Discussion :

Wayne Goertel spoke in favor of this operating budget, as important for the education of the children of Hooksett. He points out a few high-level drivers in the operating budget and explains examples of the contractual obligations. He states they cut over half a million dollars from the originally proposed budget, and that this budget is only 1.1% over last year's budget. Explains which teaching positions this budget is intended to restore/add. Town demographics: school population has dropped from a peak in 2006, distribution of the students has changed. The maintenance line item is higher in this operating budget, due to the realities of the schools' condition today.

Abigail Shaine as chair of budget committee also spoke in favor of all the thought that went into the budget brought before the town, and is in support of this budget.

Discussion :

David Levesque 29 Morrill Road – asks does the school get the money allocated in two tranches, and does revenue sit in a school district account. What is the interest rate yearly?

Cindy Bourgeault clarifies that interest is part of the revenue, not the budget.

David also asks if the proposed budget includes salary raises for administrators –

William Rearick responds that yes 4% raises are included for administration.

David : Does this include raises for non union employees and what is that rate.

Rearick : it varies.

David : Is there any position in the current budget receiving full 100% paid health insurance?

Rearick : Yes 1 employee is grandfathered from a 20 year old position.

David : In the notes, we are looking to replace teachers, budgeting at a Masters Degree step 10. How many teachers hired were hired at Step 10?

Goertel answered : All of the teachers lost last year were at the bottom of the salary charts.

David : notes comparable salaries : Pembroke 70k, Concord 83k Hooksett is at 62K.

Rearick clarifies that we used to hire at Step 5, we are now hiring at Step 10, but that we competitively hire teachers above that for the best candidate if warranted.

David asks if a new hire could be paid more, with less experience, than a teacher already working in district.

Rearick responds that we pay by years of experience, and a teacher with more years of experience out of district could be hired at a higher pay than an existing employee.

Kevin Grady 140 Hackett Hill Road : previously was a teacher in a different area. Feels that if one doesn't vote for the school budget, it means you don't support the teachers. Points out that keeping experienced teachers is important and that not paying them a fair rate is demoralizing for the teachers.

Ernie Bencivenga (budget committee) 244 Whitehall Road – makes a motion to amend the warrant and reduce it by 393,747 from 45,851,643 to 45,487,896. This amount is the amount of three new proposed teachers.

Moderator : Clarifies that because this is a bottom line budget, the dollar amount may be adjusted, but the amendment cannot dictate where the reduction will be applied.

Alyssa Ehl (budget committee) seconded the proposed amendment

Bencivenga states that the student ratio should be 25-1 and that Cawley is currently 19-1, which is below the goal ratio. Suggests that we use one of the existing teachers to be the reading teacher. Notes that the ratio is 23-1 at Memorial which is below the 25-1 ratio goal. Notes that in years past, there were 2-3 teachers that were not needed at Memorial and that those positions were reallocated to Underhill to fulfil the full day kindergarten addition.

Amy Tremblay responded reminding the voters that this is a bottom line budget. Also clarifies that these are not extra positions, and that when 750,000 was cut out of a previous year's budget, they had no choice but to cut the staff noted. States that these are not extra positions, they are necessary. States that the minimum ratio is a suggestion and not a requirement, and that the difficulties of managing a large class size are real.

David Levesque – 29 Morrill Road – speaks in support of specialists in education being specialized teachers and that there are reasons why not any teacher can fill any position. He is against this amendment.

James Sullivan (School board) agrees with Amy Tremblay's note that the teachers were only eliminated due to budget. He notes the school population has since increased, especially in 2nd and 3rd grade. He notes the full day K program was approved by the voters. In regards to Cawley, since 2013 there have been teams of 4/4 for 4 core subjects, which have had to be cut in some cases to 3. He points out that at that grade level, teachers specialize in subject matter. He feels there is a rationale not to cut teachers as there is a value to the positions.

Elise Harnisch – 7 Misty Lane – Speaks in support of the talent we have at the schools and that our town should value the quality of teachers we have. Her daughter experienced the Cawley team of 3 instead of 4, and saw first hand the limitations of the lower staffing. Notes the state is increasing the state requirements for Social Studies. Feels this budget is still absolutely the minimum and trusts the judgement of the people making these budgets.

John Ciempa (school board) – speaks to what the original proposed budget was, and the rationale behind what was cut from what was ultimately put forward. Suggests that reverting to the default budget actually increases taxes, because it causes emergency spending that costs more than budgeted spending may have. 1 million in proposed spending was brought down to 400K instead. 3 years of default budgets have been very hard and the inability to restore the needed teaching positions has been hard. Because of a known bubble class coming, we need to plan for class size.

John Pieroni 44 Moose Pond Terrace : Notes that class size in the incoming 6th grade class would exceed 27 students per class, and that the 25 average class size goal cited earlier is outdated.

Ernie Bencivenga 244 Whitehall road – asked for a repeat of the ratio for next year's incoming class (reminded 27 was stated ratio). Asked about test scores (point of order called and

Moderator Wilson gave leeway to continue). Bencivenga lists score trends that after Covid, scores dropped. (Point of order called again that it is a bottom line budget and not a discussion of teachers or test scores)

Keith Judge 29 Farmer Road : Motion to call the question on the amendment proposed

Greg Martakos 1465 Hooksett road seconded.

Motion carried unanimously to call the question (needed 2/3 vote)

Vote on the AMENDMENT : Amendment failed by voice vote.

Keith Judge – moved to call the question on article 3 Germano Martins (budget) seconded

Question is called by unanimous vote

Final discussion :

Ed Groves 59 Sherwood Drive : question on transportation costs what was 2.9 million went up to 3.4 million, in comparison in 2015 it was 1.3 million for 1410 students. States we now have 10% fewer students. Asks who negotiates the contract with the bus company.

Jillian Godbout responds: there are only 2 bus companies able to service the SAU so there is a competition issue. Explains that a company used in the past had a lot of parent complaints and that thus we tried the other bus company. Also mentioned that there are special education transportation costs that happen independent of the regular bus vendors.

William Rearick clarifies it is 1900 students, not 1400. States that there was a 140K increase (3% increase) this year on regular transportation and a 650K increase for the Special Education transportation line. There is no state cap on what special education transportation can charge and that Special Education transportation is primarily driving the increase in costs.

Michael Dullen points out gas price increases of 2.43 to 3.10

John Ciempa responds that regular transportation is easier to contact, leverage charge back penalties, and manage the overall contract. There have been savings by enforcing standards with the bus company. Notes that summer transportation is also a factor in Special Education transportation, as it is year round, not school year only.

William Rearick responds that the transportation budget also includes high school students, including Special Education.

Ed Groves asks if we have a percentage of how full/not full the buses are. Rearick responds that the capacity for Middle school is 40-50%, that for other grades parent drop-off participation is higher. Rearick reminds that we have to plan for capacity as if every student will take a bus,

regardless of used capacity. Resident points out that some buses appear to be at 0% capacity for some runs. He offers to volunteer to help negotiate the bus contract.

Pam Auger 24 Casey Drive – question regarding health insurance. Noticed an “unbudgeted surcharge” mentioned in a line item and would like clarification on what that is.

Wayne Goertel explains that the insurer, due to low reserve funds, issued a non-negotiable surcharge to be paid by end of June 2026.

Auger asks if any competing companies are available to us.

Goertel responds that the Yellow Choice plan option is part of our teacher contract, and that we have been looking at alternate buying options.

Dullen responds that several vendors declined to bid on insuring us due to our low size, but that we continue to seek alternate vendors.

Auger asks if the municipal Health Trust option is an available provider

Rearick clarifies that yes it is one of the options being considered. We have one more year contracted with School Care (the current vendor).

Dullen clarifies the surcharge has to be paid legally, no matter whether we stay with the vendor or leave, we need to pay it either way.

Auger asks If the vendor has been challenged to change their reserve practices, the answer is yes.

Article 3 moves to the ballot.

Keith Judge moves to restrict reconsideration of Article 3

Greg Martakos seconded.

Motion to restrict passes unanimously via voice vote.

Article 4: HEA Union Wage Agreement

Shall the Hooksett School District approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Hooksett School Board and the Hooksett Education Association, which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level over those paid in the prior fiscal year:

Year	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
Estimated Increase	\$325,105	\$326,773	\$318,174

and further to raise and appropriate \$325,105 for the 2026 – 2027 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels?

Estimated tax rate impact 2026-2027 is \$0.10/per thousand.

Estimated tax rate impact 2027-2028 is \$0.10/per thousand.

Estimated tax rate impact 2028-2029 is \$0.10/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 5-1

Recommended by the Budget Committee 5-4

Motion made by : Amy Tremblay Seconded by : Michael Dullen

Discussion :

Amy Tremblay (School board) : In support of the agreement, the priority for this budget is retaining staff while keeping costs as low as possible. 111 employees are covered by this agreement and it represents less than 1% of the increase in budget. Several drivers are mentioned : we inherited a salary chart from prior negotiations with some real inequalities through years of iterations. A reset was needed to even out disparities. A second health insurance option has been added which allows employees choice. Reduced the retirement bonuses that could be granted per year from 6 to 5. Notes that concessions were made on both sides. Notes that town employees including teachers are in a unique position in that their income is ultimately at the discretion of the voters. Notes that the quality of the teachers makes for a stellar school system and that attracts residents to Hooksett, while acknowledging the hardship of the tax increases.

Mike Dullen : Notes some of the figures involved include both a grade increase and two added steps to the salary chart to creatively and fairly address the salary bands. Year 1 is a 1.5% aggregate increase. Notes that other districts pay more for early career teachers, and that it is still cheaper to attract newer teachers by paying more than relying on mid to late career teachers that command higher salaries. Hooksett is on the higher side for our total salary band for the state of NH, which we are proud of, but we need also to attract more early career teachers to spread out the bands for the overall budget. Notes that retaining staff is cheaper than replacing staff.

Discussion from public:

David Smith 26 Martins Ferry Road : asked for the no votes on the school board to speak to why they voted no.

Bob Barker responded he was the no vote and that his no vote was because he wanted to prioritize performance.

Elizabeth Murphy – 1627 Hooksett Road – speaks strongly in support of teachers but validates concerns about the 1% raise. Notes that teachers spend money out of pocket to support their classrooms. Ultimately supports this article.

David Levesque 29 Morrill Road – also supports the article strongly. Feels a 1% increase is tough to swallow, and fears teachers will leave Hooksett over compensation. Notes that teachers, especially senior teachers, gave a lot in this contract to make it happen. Notes that competitively, in Hooksett it takes a lot longer to get to the top of the salary steps (21 years). Notes that admin are getting 4% and teachers only 1%.

Elizabeth Spitzer (budget committee) 48 Carriage Lane – questions #5 in hourly reimbursements what is that

Michael Dullen replies those monies are payable in 15 minute increments for teachers to stay late for anything outside of their contracted positions such as activities. The hourly rate was chosen instead of an alternate per diem.

Spitzer has a question about language and workshop reimbursements

Dullen responds that continuing education is reimbursed by the district for required credits that teachers need to keep their certification, a pot of money first come first served, and it is based on UNH's credit hours (with the highest tuition rate). Wording was changed to separate workshops from course work.

Spitzer has a question about sick and personal leave increment change

Dullen responds that blocks of 4 hours used to be required, and now instead, actual hours are allowed to prevent requiring a substitute by more flexible scheduling.

Greg Martakos 1465 Hooksett Road – fully supports this contract. Points out that stability of long term teachers is desirable.

Mike Dullen : Feels that we do a good job attracting top tier, top band teachers. Points out that we replaced a lot of bottom salary tier teachers with more experienced teachers. The equitability on the bottom side needs to be the focus first.

Wayne Goertel mentions that the salary chart is important to consider in context of the overall picture, and that sheer percentages are difficult to understand without that. Examples given of how the lower step increases will add up over time. Noted the failure of contracts in the past and that the goal was a contract that will pass with the voters.

John Ciempa spoke in support of balancing a three leg stool of competing needs and that all 3 are coming due at the same time due to several years of no votes.

Bauchau Kelly 60 Whitehall Road – comes from an environment where 50-60 students per class was usual. Feels that parents should assist the teachers.

(Point of Order called that this is irrelevant).

Kelly clarifies that she supports the raise for the teachers, but that the admin raise is unfair to the teachers.

Moderator clarifies with the resident that the point being made is that resident feels the admin raise is unfair to teachers.

Kelly challenges the importance of having a union.

Moderator calls point of order that this is not relevant to the contract Warrant Article in discussion.

Kelly points out information regarding current student testing scores.

Michael Dullen responds that teacher contracts are not pay for performance on test scores, that raises are based on other criteria, and thus test scores are not relevant to the article being discussed.

Heather Rainier makes a motion to call the question

Motion is seconded by John Ciempa

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote, article moves to the ballot.

Amy Tremblay moves to restrict reconsideration of Article 4

Motion to restrict is seconded by Heather Rainier

Motion to restrict is passed unanimously by voice vote.

Moderator asks if anyone wants a 5 minute break. Audience Declined.

Article 5: Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$150,000 to be added to the Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March 2020? There is \$121,606 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. This sum to come from June 30,

2026 fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from additional taxation. Estimated tax rate impact is \$0.00/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 4-3

Recommended by the Budget Committee 9-0

Motion made by : John Ciempa Seconded by : James Sullivan

Discussion : no further commentary by John or James.

Pam Auger – asked for the current fund balances.

Rearick response : This year we got some excess revenue for high cost special needs students; 1.5 million on the operational side and 330K in excess revenue totaling \$1.9 million.

No further public comment

Article 5 Moved to the ballot

Article 6: Special Education Expendable Trust Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$100,000 to be added to the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March of 2001? There is \$336,215 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. Estimated tax rate impact is \$0.03/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 4-3

Recommended by the Budget Committee 5-4

Motion made by : Michael Dullen Seconded by : Jillian Godbout

Discussion :

Michael declined comment.

Jillian commented that special ed is about 36% of budget and needs to be planned for.

No public comment

Article 6 is moved to the ballot.

Article 7: Technology Expendable Trust Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$150,000 to be added to the Technology Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March 2008? There is \$51,866 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. This sum to come from June 30, 2026 fund

balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from additional taxation. Estimated tax rate impact is \$0.00/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 5-2

Recommended by the Budget Committee 6-3

Motion made by : Bob Barker Seconded by : John Ciempa

Discussion :

Bob declined to comment. John declined comment

No public comment

Article 7 is moved to the ballot

Article 8: To Establish Curriculum Capital Reserve Fund

Shall the Hooksett School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$150,000 to be added to the Curriculum Capital Reserve Fund previously established in March 2025? There is \$103,144 available in the account as of November 30, 2025. This sum to come from June 30, 2026 fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from additional taxation. Estimated tax rate impact of \$0.00/per thousand.

Recommended by the School Board 7-0

Recommended by the Budget Committee 9-0

Motion made by : James Sullivan Seconded by : Amy Tremblay

Discussion :

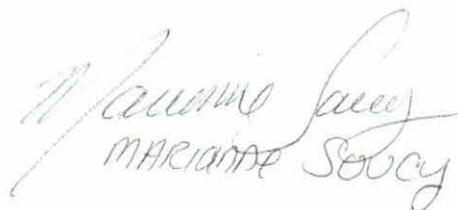
James declined to comment. Amy declined to comment.

No public commentary

Article 8 is moved to the ballot

Wayne Goertel moved to adjourn, James Sullivan seconded.

Meeting Adjourned 8:28 pm


Marianne Soboy