

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

Overview

The intent of this section is to provide more details around the town departments based on the Budget Task Force's discussions in the fall of 2025. The following metrics are included to add additional context:

- "xx% is for salaries" helps show which departments have more of their costs based in personnel versus other elements. A good example of this is IT, which is a department of ONE but has low salary costs due to most of the budget being used for technology and related infrastructure
- "Comparable towns average" represents a composite of staffing levels from Belchertown, East Longmeadow, Easthampton, Ludlow, Longmeadow and Wilbraham. This item is not included for the Department of Public Works, Police Department and Public Schools as those departments do not represent a true "apples to apples" comparison to the comparable community group.

Some helpful files to review in advance of this section are the Fiscal Year 26 Budget Book and Department Questionnaire with Responses. The Town Administrator provided a standard set of questions to all departments to be answered in advance of the Budget Task Force's conversations. Elements from the Questionnaire were included in the overall report and following Department Discussion section.

Key Links:

- *Fiscal Year 26 Budget Book*
- *Department Questionnaire with Responses*

Department Discussion:

Administration

FY '26 Budget: \$206,269, 82% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 2, comparable towns average 2.7

Department Description

The Town Administrator shall serve as the chief administrative officer under the direction of the Selectboard and shall perform the duties that are assigned to the Town Administrator by the Selectboard. The Town Administrator oversees day-to-day operations of town government and the implementation of town policies.

Key Insights

- Staffed at lower levels versus comparable towns. Assistant town administrator is also head of Human Resources

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

Accounting

FY '26 Budget: \$206,269, 82% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 3, comparable towns average 3.4

Department Description

The Accounting Office keeps the town's books (i.e. General Ledger) and prepares warrants for payment of bills and payroll, prepares balance sheets for town and all various state schedules which are required, and works closely with the Town Administrator and Appropriations Committee in assisting with the budget process.

Key Insights

- Typically receives clean audits with good opinions
- Generally comparable in size with other towns as other towns may have additional duties within their department

Assessors

Budget & Staffing

- *FY '26 Budget:* \$199,124, 85% is for salaries
- *FTEs (Full-Time Employees):* 2, Comparable towns avg 2.9

Department Description

The Board of Assessors works to deliver fair and equitable assessments on all real and personal property within the Town. The Board of Assessors must discover and list all property, maintaining accurate ownership and property information. The department establishes the "full and fair cash value" of each of the town's approximately 7,500 real estate parcels and approximately 650 business personal property accounts. The assessed valuations are the basis of the distribution of the town's annual property tax levy. The department also administers the motor vehicle and boat excise taxes; exemptions for property and persons; chapter land valuation programs as well as a cyclical inspection program.

Key Insights

- The Assessor's office is responsible for the generation of revenue from taxation as well as other sources.
- The department ensures the town receives reimbursement from the Commonwealth for state owned land, property tax exemptions, and issuance of the E911 grant based on the office providing locational data.

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

- Current staffing is at the minimum level in comparison to comparative communities based on number of parcels, budget and population.

Building Commissioner (Inspection Services)

Budget & Staffing

- *FY '26 Budget:* \$228,112, 88% is for salaries
- *FTEs (Full-Time Employees):* 3, Comparable towns avg 3.5

Description

The Inspection Services Department, better known as the Building Department, provides a range of services associated with administering and enforcing state and local gas, plumbing, wiring, and building codes. In addition, the department is responsible for zoning enforcement of the town's comprehensive zoning bylaw. Services include providing homeowners, builders, contractors, and business owners with information and help needed to complete permit applications, timely wiring, plumbing, gas, and building inspections, certificates of inspection for all multi-families, and annual safety inspections of restaurants, bars, nightclubs, theaters, churches, schools, child and adult care facilities, galleries, and dormitories. Additional services include handling zoning complaints and violations as they arise. The department works closely with other town officials and departments tasked with similar missions to ensure compliance with regulations aimed at maintaining and improving the health and life-safety conditions of all local buildings.

Key Insights

- Department stable but staffing capacity affects ability to support growth
- Staffing model has limitations that constrain balanced growth relative to safety and health needs
- Department generates revenue to cover its expenditures through incoming fees, excess flows to the general fund

Department of Public Works (DPW)

FY '26 Budget: \$1,635,013, 59% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 24

Department Description

It is the mission of the South Hadley Department of Public Works to provide residents, businesses and visitors with reliable infrastructure while continuing to find efficient and innovative ways to improve services.

Divisions

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

- Wastewater
- Highway
- Parks
- Solid Waste
- Administration

Key Insights

- Divisions are very lean compared to historical levels
- Total department shares resources/services across all divisions and other relevant departments within town (Fire, Water, etc)
- Aging workforce; division heads nearing retirement
- Hiring challenges for CDL/Operators (cannabis testing barrier)
- Difficulty securing snow contractors
- Roads remain in strong condition (80th percentile rating)
- Town dump could generate savings if reopened; 23 acres permitted
- Tree management is becoming increasingly more difficult due to extreme weather and disease

Facilities

FY '26 Budget: \$418,470, 25% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 1, Comparable towns avg 3.3

Department Description

The Facilities Department oversees the repair and maintenance of all town and school buildings and manages subcontractors and construction projects for these buildings.

Key Insights

- New position within the last few years. Scope covers both town and school facilities.
- Capital planning and other departments have cited this role has been integral in allowing the town to outline capital needs over 5+ years and effectively prioritize projects

Human Resources (HR)

FY '26 Budget: \$178,660, 82% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 1.5, Comparable towns avg 2.6

Department Description

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

The Human Resources Department works toward promoting a welcoming, safe environment whereby both external and internal customers are treated with respect and provided with services that exceed their expectations. The department is committed to the continual improvement of individual and organizational effectiveness by attracting and maintaining a highly talented, diverse workforce who strive to contribute to and serve the Town with purpose and pride. The Department works to improve our services by promoting continuous learning and professional development and by continually reevaluating the ways in which they can help all departments strengthen our collective core values of inclusion, excellence, integrity, fair treatment, responsibility, collaboration, teamwork, and trust.

Key Insights

- Hybrid position, also supports town administration, staffed at lower levels compared to other communities.
- Concern on succession risks across departments with tenured employees reaching or at retirement eligibility: Finance, DPW, Building Inspectors

Human Services

FY '26 Budget: \$936,108, 57% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 8.5, Comparable towns avg 13.1

- COA: 5.5, Comparable towns avg 7.9
- Recreation: 2, Comparable towns avg 4.2
- Veteran's Affairs: 1, Comparable towns avg 1.1

Department Description

The mission of the Human Services Department is to serve the well-being of all residents by supporting inclusivity, community connectedness and enhanced quality of life through programs and services.

Vision

SH is a community where everyone can thrive. Residents know and care about their neighbors. Residents of all ages are involved in community activities and programs. Residents work together to make the town a better place for everyone. All residents believe they are heard, seen and acknowledged. Residents live in a healthy, resilient and sustainable natural, physical and economic environment.

Council on Aging (COA)

- *Division Description*

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

The Council on Aging is the community focal point for residents 60 years and over. The COA supports the well-being of the older adult community by providing services to support their nutritional, emotional, social and recreational needs. The COA provides information, referrals, and support programs for older adults and is considered the go-to resource for residents of any age with concerns about aging relatives, neighbors and friends.

- *Key Insights*
 - The COA is staffed at lower levels versus comparable communities and operates with less hours. Some are open on weekends.
 - Reduction and/or elimination of services could create a compounding effect across other departments. Difficult to quantify a direct financial impact due to the department functioning as a public good
 - Currently supported by over 200 volunteers for various activities
 - Generates \$67K in revenue to fund activities and programming not covered in the Town's budget across class fees and donations
 - Patrons are independent and the COA does not provide hands-on care services and therefore MassHealth coverage does not apply.; café staffed entirely by volunteers

Recreation

- *Division Description*

Mission Statement: To provide a wide range of recreational programs and activities through the utilization of tax dollars and self-support. We hire seasonal staff as program directors, program counselors, officials and event staff. We largely rely on parent volunteers for much of what we do for coaching and fundraising.
- *Key Insights*
 - Department largely self-sustaining through fees as all program costs are self-funded via revolving accounts
 - Direct costs of the yearly July 4th fireworks are funded through sponsorships

Veterans Services

- *Division Description*

The mission of the South Hadley Veteran Services Office is to advocate on behalf of all South Hadley Veterans and provide them with quality support services.
- *Key Insights*
 - Town has over 1000 veterans, 200 receive the abatements

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

- Works to ensure veterans are receiving all services and benefits available to them, at times this can save costs for the town if applicable services are available from the state and/or federal government
- Many departments operate with one staff member
- State authorizes one additional part-time role (not yet staffed)
- Opportunity for shared resource across Human Services

Information Technology (IT)

Budget & Staffing

- *FY '26 Budget:* \$463,792, 18% is for salaries
- *FTEs (Full-Time Employees):* 1, Comparable towns avg 2.7

Department Description

The IT Department endeavors to equip the town with the technology, tools, and policies necessary to operate efficiently and in a cost-effective manner. The IT Department is charged to protect and ensure the integrity of the town's computer systems and information. The IT Department also strives to ensure that technology is leveraged to create and maintain a network and data infrastructure that will position the town for future technology trends and advances.

Key Insights

- Severely under-staffed versus comparable communities. Department only has one person to maintain the town's IT infrastructure and protect against security threats
- Majority of budget dedicated to technology infrastructure, hardware, licensing, and security
- Difficult to share resources with schools due to incompatible software platforms; would require investment

Planning & Conservation

FY '26 Budget: \$264,069, 81% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 3, Comparable towns avg 1.9

Department Description

The Planning Board and staff assist the community in efforts to achieve balanced growth, quality development and preservation of community assets through effective development regulation, assisting in obtaining funding resources for community projects and long-term planning. The Conservation Commission administers the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and regulations, and our local Wetlands Bylaw. Our mission is

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

to assist the public in understanding and following the wetland laws, to protect, and manage land for conservation and passive recreation purposes, and promote conservation of South Hadley's wonderful natural resources. Department staff also provide staff support to a number of other boards including the Redevelopment Authority, Affordable Housing Trust, and Tree Committee.

Key Insights

- Reduced staffing limits permitting and grant-writing and creates strain on zoning/housing redevelopment work
- Archaic bylaws and lack of cohesive business growth strategy are a barrier
- Growth opportunities:
 - Staffing to focus on urban renewal work, partnering with developers and growth

Police Department

FY '26 Budget: \$3,824,118, 93% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 36

Department Description

The South Hadley Police Department is staffed by 29 full time sworn staff and the Communication Center is staffed by 5 full time and 2 part time dispatchers. Police personnel responded to 19,950 calls for service in calendar year 2022. The South Hadley Department is committed to professionalism, organizational excellence, community engagement, partnerships and procedural justice in the manner that the community is served.

Key Insights

- 2024 staffing study cited current officers per thousand (1.6) in South Hadley is below state average for comparable communities (1.9)
- 15,000 actionable calls/year (22,000 total), 2,000–2,500 medical calls (selective response criteria). Most arrests require 2–3 officers, ~6 hours per call
- Crypto fraud cases are increasing and typically time-consuming and frequently cannot be resolved under current regulations.
- OUIs decreasing due to targeted enforcement
- MHC impact minimal; they provide their own public safety
- Leveraging traffic modernization efforts can help drive efficiencies
- Regional dispatch is also a potential source of savings
- Cuts will reduce shift staffing + school coverage

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

Public Libraries

Budget & Staffing

- *FY '26 Budget:* \$842,923, 68% is for salaries
- *FTEs (Full-Time Employees):* 10.4, Comparable towns average 9.4

Department Description

South Hadley Public Library serves as a safe community gathering space where all library patrons are welcomed with dignity and respect. The library's collections, programs, and services will reflect both the town of South Hadley and the world at large. The library will collaborate with community partners to provide a comfortable environment that is reflective and responsive to the recreational, educational, and cultural needs of our library users.

Services & Responsibilities

- Early learning and after-school programs filling community gaps
- Inter-library loan activity: borrow twice as many books as loaned

Key Insights / Issues

- Current budget is at minimum level for state accreditation. Loss of accreditation would eliminate state funding, ability to use other local libraries + inter-library transfer. Residents receive twice as many books as our library sends to other communities
- Currently supporting 7th–8th grade services due to lack of middle school librarian
- Provides early childhood educational programs
- Provides services for those with limited access and/or limited knowledge of how to use technology
- Main library is used as a safe space for students to go after school. Students can wait for pickup, get help with schoolwork, and use library services.
- Gaylord building & grounds expenses covered by Gaylord Association trustees; staffing costs paid by town; approximately \$40–\$50K annual operating cost

Public Health

FY '26 Budget: \$311,878, 76% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 3.5, comparable towns average 3.8

Department Description

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

The mission of the South Hadley Health Department is to respond and act on situations that may affect the health and safety of the community.

Key Insights

- Staffing levels are somewhat lower compared to similar communities but job responsibilities are significantly more than typical Health Departments (typical include food, housing, camps, pools, septic, wells, funeral homes, etc)
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- Other work South Hadley Health Department does in addition to the state mandates:
- Supervision of Animal Control
which is contracted out (including required quarantines, rabies testing, sheltering, 2x/daily feeding and exercising the animals)
- Opioid program:
We are working in the community and schools to address needs; i.e., awareness campaigns, disposal programs, training, naloxone access, harm reduction.
- Emergency Management:
Which includes writing grants, tabletop exercises, drone program and drafting several town emergency plans that are updated annually.
- Disease Surveillance:
Because we lost funding for the Public Health Nurse, these nursing responsibilities are undertaken by the Director and include Follow up for over 90 communicable diseases, which require minimum daily contact with the MAVEN; a secure web-based disease surveillance and case management system and follow up and monitor active cases..
- The Health Department proactively has gone above and beyond state standards as we identify and react to the needs of our community. Some of these include flavored tobacco sales targeting minors, rental registry, sharps program, drug take-back program, noisome trades, drinking water, body art, etc.
- Receive \$509K regional coverage grant but cannot be used to supplant local staff.
- Received \$209K tobacco control grant
- Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) ADA Improvement Grant
- Various other grants: DEP air sensors, emergency management (hazard mitigation, drones, road message boards, lighting, cameras (PD), lithium battery response, etc.).

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

Public Schools

FY '26 Budget: \$25,771,460

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 287.8

Key Insights

- School budgets must rise by at least 4–5% annually to cover cost increases like COLA, mandatory step ups, and contracted services. Contracted services for software, curriculum and transportation are seeing at least 5-10% annual increases.
- Although enrollment numbers are comparable to similar communities, class sizes at all grade levels are 50% larger and exceed the state's recommended averages by approximately 20%. Apart from teachers, staffing levels for specialists, psychologists, and elementary personnel are below recommended standards, whereas nursing and administrative staff meet best practice guidelines.
- Over the past 10 years the school budget has only increased by 2.8% per year. Resulting in the following eliminations:
 - *Administration*: Curriculum Director, Business Administrator, Facilities Director, Assistant Principal
 - *Teachers*: Reading (3), Math (1), Therapists, etc.
 - *Support Staff*: Custodians, CNAs, tutors
 - *Programs*: French, remediation, bus routes, stipends
- School choice is net negative by \$2.5 million dollars annually; this number has increased significantly post the pandemic.
- Special Education costs now account for 38% (vs 25% in FY17) of the overall school budget. FY26 Special Education costs are projected to be nearly \$10 million, representing a 92% increase vs FY17. This is compared to the overall school budget only increasing by 24% vs FY17.
- The way the state's special education funding model works, the town is often billed above forecasts. This can cause cuts in year. Additionally "over-budgeting" for special education can take funds away from other positions. To address this the town has set up a special education stabilization fund. This will be used to fund any potential overages in billing from the state.
- Efficiencies adopted:
 - Shared services with town
 - Enrollment-based staffing
 - Energy efficiency work
 - IEP standardization
 - In-house transportation (saves \$600K + generates revenue)
 - Vocational expansion reducing tuition costs

Budget Task Force Recommendations (Feb 2026)

Appendix: Town Department Discussions

Town Clerk

FY '26 Budget: \$180,333, 92% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 2.25, Comparable towns avg 2.4

Department Description

The Town Clerk's office provides a variety of services as defined by South Hadley bylaws and State statutes. The Town Clerk's office serves as the Official Record Keeper for the Town, Chief Election Official, Registrar of Vital Records, Licensing Official, Public Records Access Officer, Conflict of Interest and Open Meeting Law Liaison, and administers the Annual Town Census.

Key Insights

- Frontline public access = "gateway to government"
- ~20 daily in-person interactions
- Serves 13,600 registered voters (~18,150 residents)
- Elections administration (limited physical efficiency options on election day due to regulations)

Treasurer Collector

FY '26 Budget: \$206,269, 78% is for salaries

FTEs (Full-Time Employees): 3, Comparable towns avg 3.7

Department Description

The Treasurer/Collector is responsible for managing and directing the tax collection process and for planning, coordinating, and directing the Town's cash management. We provide billing and collection services for Real Estate, Personal Property, Motor Vehicle Excise, Trash and Sewer. This office ensures that tax and other bills are created and distributed correctly to enhance timely and accurate collection. It is our mission to ensure efficient and timely collection of all monies due to the Town while providing courteous and professional service to all. It is the responsibility of this office to safeguard the monetary assets of the Town through accounts payable, payroll and bank account maintenance and reconciliations and to work in conjunction with the Town's financial advisor to maximize opportunities for debt borrowing, refunding and payments.

Key Insights

- Understaffed vs comparable towns. Part of one position is funded through a grant (ARPA)