ALTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes
March 24, 2026
(Approved – April 28, 2026)

Chairman P. LaRochelle convened the meeting at 6:00 PM.

P. LaRochelle led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a Moment of Silence. The following staff members were present:

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Paul LaRochelle, Chairman
Drew Carter, Vice-Chairman
Andrew Morse, Selectman, Excused
Richard Shea, Selectman
Jack Sleeper, Selectmen
Ryan Heath, Town Administrator

Reorganization of the Board

D. Carter made a motion to nominate P. LaRochelle as Chairman and R. Shea seconded with all in favor of the motion.

P. LaRochelle made a motion to nominate D. Carter as Vice-Chairman and R. Shea seconded with all in favor of the motion.

	2025	2026
Board of Selectmen, Chairman	Nick Buonopane	Paul LaRochelle
Board of Selectmen, Vice Chairman	Paul LaRochelle	Drew Carter
Budget Committee (Must vote the wishes of the Selectmen)	Drew Carter Andrew Morse, Alternate	Drew Carter Andrew Morse, Alternate
Capital Improvement Program (CIP)	Andrew Morse	Andrew Morse
Conservation Commission	Drew Carter	Drew Carter
Cyanobacteria Mitigation Steering Committee (CMSC)	Paul LaRochelle	Paul LaRochelle
Facility Committee	Richard Shea Paul LaRochelle, Alternate	Richard Shea Paul LaRochelle, Alternate
Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)	Richard Shea	Richard Shea
Master Plan Committee	Paul LaRochelle Nick Buonopane, Alternate	Jack Sleeper Richard Shea, Alternate
Milfoil Committee	Richard Shea	Richard Shea
Old Home Week Committee	Paul LaRochelle	Jack Sleeper
Parks & Recreation Commission	Andrew Morse	Andrew Morse

Planning Board	Nick Buonopane Drew Carter, Alternate	Jack Sleeper Drew Carter, Alternate
Water Bandstand Committee	Paul LaRochelle	Paul LaRochelle
Zoning & Ordinance Committee (ZAC)	Drew Carter Nick Buonopane, Alternate	Drew Carter Richard Shea, Alternate

D. Carter made a motion to approve the reorganization of the Board and the representation of the committees and R. Shea seconded with all in favor of the motion.

Agenda Approval

R. Heath stated that Old Business #2 needs to be removed from the agenda.

R. Shea made a motion to approve the agenda as amended and D. Carter seconded with all in favor of the motion.

Announcements

- The Public Participation Policy applies to all Selectmen meetings. A copy of it is on the back of each agenda, posted outside this meeting room, and on our website.

Public Input I ***(limited to 3 minutes per person on agenda items only)***

P. O'Brien approached the table. He read a statement:

My name is Patrick O'Brien. I'm both a resident and a full-time employee of the Town of Alton. This will be in reference to the discussion on Revised Operating Budget. A little long winded to start, but I promise I'll get to my point. We have all felt the squeeze of inflation has put on our everyday lives from groceries to heating oil to fuel for our vehicles dependent care and housing. This has forced many to only find a part-time job but in some cases two or three part-time jobs to maintain the same quality of life that we maintain with just one five years ago. We are certainly not exempt from that fact and surely understand your decision to restrict budget funding in an attempt to ease that burden. I feel confident in speaking for the Alton Firefighters at this point when we say we continue to remain mission focused and community driven. Our profession is built with core values of sacrifice where we knowingly agree when duty calls, we may sacrifice everything up to and including our lives in support of it. No amount of compensation can be offered for that. We are in no way solely driven by compensation however we do require the tools necessary to complete that mission. The single largest tool in our arsenal is staffing. Our department has exhausted nearly all possible staffing models over the past twenty years in an attempt to avoid the burden of full-time staffing and we did not get to this position by choice. In fact, it was more so out of necessity due exponential growth and calls over that time frame and a nation-wide decline in volunteerism. In an effort to change the narrative from my previous use of the word burden in the sense of full time staffing have all previously mention full time positions filled ensures two full time career trained firefighters are in the station and responding to your emergency at a moments notice reducing the precious minutes in comparison to those responding from home or even other communities. They are certainly not alone in the staffing crisis and our mutual aid partners are battling their very own unique staffing challenges. Your Alton Firefighters take your emergency personally and consistently work to improve themselves and others around them in an effort to make sure that you go home to your loved ones or that you have a home to go home to. Sadly, our call volume is increasing at a rate in which we cannot seem to catch up with. Forcing the request of four addition firefighters last year on the ballot. This was supported despite the cost we have all faced proving the community truly believes in our mission and more importantly our firefighters. While municipal budgets can be incredibly confusing, many do not realize that a no vote on this year's budget despite the notifications that did not allow for the funding of these positions which we so desperately need to meet the rising needs of our community. Should the revised operating budget be an option proposed by the Board of Selectmen, I strongly ask for your support in passing the budget and retain and fill all of the so desperately needed positions. Now we stand ready to help our neighbors in their times of need to the best of our ability. Thank you for your continued support, it is our pleasure to serve you.

R. Wentworth approached the table. He stated that he sat here before Town Meeting and stated that they needed to be the leaders. They needed to sell their budget. They failed this budget. Talking with a few people and employees that came into the store upset because the budget didn't get passed. But the people have seen a 10/11% budget. They were feeling the squeeze on their taxes. Property taxes are still going up even on a default budget last year. That hurt a lot of people. If they went for a special town meeting he would back them. He would have no problem if they came in at the 7%. If they come in over 10% most people in the community will fail it.

S. Lydon approached the table. He is a very strong advocate of public safety. He was a 38 year career firefighter. My son-in-law is a firefighter. He sees these guys go out everyday and put their life on the line. His understanding is the way the budget has been constructed over the past couple of years that people think they pay raises when everyone else did. His understanding is that they didn't. They are like three years behind like 4% each year. He's not sure of the numbers. With each failed budget they don't catch up. Like other municipalities you get a raise promised to you that's retro. He has seen since he has been here a transient department because there is so much turnover. You can't rely on mutual aid.

Appointments

None

New Business

1. Assessing Department – Revaluation Contract

R. Jutton, Assessor, approached the table. This contract is from Whitney Consulting. It is $110,000.00. It has to be done. RSA 75;8a, we have to reval the Town a minimum of every 5 years. It is not optional. If we do not get it funded it comes out of the budget anyway. R. Shea asked if there were any concerns. R. Jutton stated that he did not. We have been in great hands since 2018. P. LaRochelle asked if this is the same contract that we have had all along. R. Jutton stated that this is the end of the 5 year cycle to perform the revaluation. R. Heath wanted to make it known that Whitney Consulting have been contracted services currently and have been for several years. R. Jutton explained that Whitney Consulting has been with the Town since 2018. They performed the beginning of the cyclical revaluation at that time then they performed the 2021 revaluation. They have performed the 2021 to current and they are on to do the revaluation for 2026. P. LaRochelle asked what would happen or the penalty if we were to fail and not do the reval. R. Jutton stated that ultimately he could not say other than it is against the law not to which means the Department of Revenue would cite us to the Board of Land and Tax Appeals. They would issue an order that would be enforceable by the State Supreme Court. It would also come with a significant fine. D. Carter asked if there was any competitive bidding for this contract. R. Jutton stated that he has been operating under that Whitney did 2021 and all the way through. There is no competitive bid. The time to do that would be 2027 going forward. He explained how the tax rate is set for the public.

D. Carter made a motion to authorize the signing of the contract to get this revaluation done and finding the money wherever we can find it to make it happen to include waiving the requirements to go to competitive bid and R. Shea seconded with all in favor of the motion.

Old Business

1. Revised Budget - Presentation and Discussion

R. Heath stated that there are 2 documents on the table. Most of the Department Heads are here tonight. One of the documents is the overall budget, line item by line item. It is a revised operating budget that if this were something that the Board chose to with, it would change the bottom line proposal to $10,132,064.00. In comparison, the proposed operating budget that was defeated at march's election was $996,079.00 above the Default Budget. The new proposed Operating Budget the difference between the new and the default would come down to $336,503.00. It would be an overall reduction of $659,576.00. They ended up focusing on 6 positions. There are 2 identified out of DPW, 2 out of Fire, and 2 identified out of Police. With those 6 positions identified there is a significant saving in benefits of $135,256.00, Police retirement is $1,083.00, Employee Retirement is $112,851.00, and Fire Retirement is $33,526.00. That is reflecting the change with the vacant positions. The next change on the next page is the Assessing Department. This is the increase for the contracted services. This is where we usually put all services contracted especially the reval. We attempted to create a Capital Reserve that did fail. The Police Department there is a reduction of the reallocation of full-time wages. The reduction id $102,360.00. There is holiday pay without those positions filled. There is a savings of $6,250.00. Fire Department is the next one in line. The full-time wages with those 2 positions is a savings of $156,297.00. Benefit buyout line there is a savings of $6,695.00. The Department of Public Works positions that would not be filled there is a savings of $190,260.00. On over-time wages $27,823.00. On the last page there is the Parks and Rec Department.

They made some concessions on Old Home Week with a savings of $2,999.00. There was a reduction in the number of concerts saving a total of $800.00.

There would be an additional $336,503.00 more than the Default and that would cover the expenses that we would need including the reval and also honor the 4% merit increase for the employees.

R. Heath highlighted any changes to the Administration budget. R. Shea asked if there were any areas that more savings could be made. He realizes that there are time constraints. R. Heath stated that through the budget process this year the Department Heads very closely level funded most all of their operating lines. There were a few small increase for utilities, fuels, and some reductions in electric.

J. Collins, Town Clerk/Tax Collector approached the table. She stated that her department is pretty much bare bones. R. Shea asked if she was fully staffed. J. Collins stated that she was and the she has a part-timer that is we are at the Default Budget, that position goes away.

R. Heath stated that Planning and Building would be the next two. There were no significant changes to them. They are relatively small budgets in their entirety. There main increases is wages. There is a part-time position that is funded through a warrant article that is there. That is the only Building Inspector right now who is conducting building permit issuing, assisting with code enforcement, and regular inspections they are keeping up nicely right now. Those part-time wages are gone if we stay at Default.

R. Heath stated that the next department is Assessing. The reval contract is included. R. Jutton, Assessor, approached the table again. He stated that the only other thing in his budget is the 4% wage increase. P. LaRochelle asked if within the new proposed budget the reval contract is included. R. Heath stated that it is.

S. Garland, DPW Director, approached the table. He stated that they are removing funding for three positions. Those positions are Lead Mechanic, Grounds & Maintenance Laborer, and a proposed floating truck driver position. All of these positions are currently vacant. Eliminating them reduces the line by $90,216.00. They would be able to support the 4% wage increase for all applicable employees. He explained what lines have decreased.

K. Troendle, Parks & Recreation Director, approached the table. She submitted a request to the Trustees of the Trust Funds asking if they would consider funding concerts at $800.00. They have approved that request. So she was able to reduce that line. There is also no Old Home Week Committee, so they were able to reduce that line as well.

T. MacDougall, Police Chief, approached the table. He stated that there were two lines that were affected with this revised budget. One being the full-time wages and the other being holiday pay.

J. Reinert, Fire Chief, approached the table. He explained that the two areas that were initially cut were the wages full-time for not filling the two vacant positions and then the benefit buyout. He asked the Board is they would consider funding atleast one more of the four vacant positions. That would be a total of three instead of two.

P. LaRochelle opens it up to Public Comment at this time.

L. Carr approached the table. He asked for the revised budget amount. He feels that the people are going to ask why didn’t you do this before. He is glad it is happening. That the Board is not just going to accept it like last year. A lot of these things are getting lumped together. He asks the Board to look at page 11 in the Town Report.

D. Carter made a motion to pursue a Special Meeting to review this revised Operating Budget for the total of $10,132,064.00 and J. Sleeper seconded with all in favor of the motion.

2. <u>Town Hall Roof Bid - Update</u>

Removed from the agenda

<u>Town Administrator Report</u>

R. Heath stated that he would like to ask the Board for a possible waiver of fees for a Zoning Board case. It was brought to his attention from the Planning Department that there was a case last month Loon Cove Road map 50 Lot 36 where there was an issue of a non-conforming structure/lot. The Zoning Board chose to continue that application because of pending changes at the vote. Those changes did go through and effectively changed the Zoning Ordinance so that application is now null and void because it was originally for a variance. With those changes required a special exception it has to be re-noticed Legal's recommendation was because the Board's recommendation was not to continue it based on the facts and changes that we waive the noticing fees and postage for the new special exemption.

P. Larochelle made a motion to wive the fees for Loon Cove Road Map 50 Lot 36 and R. Shea seconded with all in favor of the motion.

R. Heath stated that the other thing is for information purposes. The Water Department emailed a letter from DES. We have successfully awarded roughly $369,000.00. Those funds are from PFAS mitigation. C. Mitchell, Water Superintendent, approached the table. The money will sit in an account to help plan for the development of PFAS mitigation. This is just a fragment.

Selectmen Reports/Questions

J. Sleeper has nothing to report.

D. Carter has nothing to report.

R. Shea has nothing to report.

P. LaRochelle stated that he has a follow up on the Dam project from Fish & Game. Through the help of a former Selectman, we had a chance to talk to Representative Joe Kenney. They are trying to set up this week a meeting to show him the project.

Approval of Minutes

None

Consent Agenda Approval

D. Carter made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda for March 24,, 2026 as presented and R. Shea seconded with all in favor of the motion.

1. **Assessing Consent Items**

Veteran's Credits

Porter Street Realty Trust; Map 64 Lot 21; 184 Smith Point Road; $750

Timber Tax

Kania; Map 9 Lot 32; 275 New Durham Road; $217.42

Discretionary Action on Requests for Appointments (No discussion, majority vote required to allow/not allow appointment)

None

Public Input II ***(limited to 5 minutes per person on any Governmental/Town Business)***

R. Wentworth approached the table. He presented the Board with new American flags for the Cemetery to replace existing flags. As a past Selectmen, the comment of "Good Old Boys" was insulting. The only people who say that are people who have moved into the community and haven't been part of it for many years. He feels that was very disrespectful. R. Shea apologized. He did not mean it in that way. He stated that these are things you are seeing on the internet. R. Wentworth stated that you should not believe everything you see on the internet. He asked how many positions are there in the IT Department. R. Heath stated that there is only one. R. Wentworth asked if pay raises were given last year. P. LaRochelle stated that there wasn't. R. Wentworth asked how the IT Department full-time wages go from $77,000 to $86,000. L. Parker stated that he did not get any merit or COLA increase. As per the Personnel Policy, when you hit 10 years, you get your extra buyout at the end of the year. That is what is happening with the salaried employees. Plus, one of the years had 53 pay weeks, not 52. R.

Wentworth stated that the Board and Town Administrator needs to sell the budget. If you can't answer the questions then you can't sell the budget.

L. Carr approached the table. He is glad that they are tackling the dam situation. He thinks that there needs to be a community get together like they did for the rumble strips.

J. Collins approached the table. She wats the Board to keep in mind for the Special Meeting and Election that we don't have a schedule at the school. They have already done their school calendar. It is very important to advertise if there is a change of location.

R. Finethy approached the table. He stated that he has been told repeatedly on Social Media to get facts. He ran into a road block. He was told to ask the Selectmen to release that information because it is not in Town Hall. There was an investigation in 2010/2011 that the Town spent $53,025 on. There are supposedly answers with that investigation that would be what he wants. He would like the Selectmen to request that information from MRI. P. LaRochelle asked what information he was looking for and R. Finethy stated that it was irrelevant. R. Finethy stated that MRI has it on file and just need the Selectmen's permission to release it to the Town.

Non-Public Session

P. LaRochelle moved at 8:30 pm to enter nonpublic Session under RSA 91-A: 3, II, a (personnel) and l (Legal). D. Carter seconded. Roll call vote:

P. LaRochelle – yes	J. Sleeper – yes	R. Shea – yes	
D. Carter – yes	A. Morse – Excused		Roll call vote carried unanimously.

At 8:30 pm Chairman P. LaRochelle convened the nonpublic session with the following people present:

P. LaRochelle, Chairman
D. Carter, Vice-chairman
R. Shea, Selectmen
A. Morse, Selectmen
J. Sleeper, Selectmen
R. Heath, Town Administrator
T. MacDougall, Police Chief

P. LaRochelle moved at 9:00 pm to exit the nonpublic session. D. Carter seconded. Roll call vote:

P. LaRochelle – yes	J. Sleeper – yes	R. Shea – yes	
D. Carter – yes	A. Morse – Excused		Roll call vote carried unanimously.

P. LaRochelle moved to 'not divulge' item two of the minutes because divulgence of the information likely would adversely affect the reputation of any person other than a member of this board or render the proposed action of the board ineffective. D. Carter seconded. Roll call vote:

P. LaRochelle – yes	J. Sleeper – yes	R. Shea – yes	
D. Carter – yes	A. Morse – Excused		Roll call vote carried unanimously.

Adjournment

P. LaRochelle moved at 9:00 pm to adjourn. R. Shea seconded. **Motion carried.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Stacy Bailey

Recording Secretary