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School Committee OKs reduced budget

By Paula Ouimette
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NORTH BROOKFIELD – Superintendent Timothy McCormick gave an updated budget presentation to the School Committee for fiscal year 2026.

At the May 19 meeting, he said the initial proposed increase from FY 25 to FY 26 was just shy of \$1 million or about a 14% increase. He said this updated version of the proposed budget is level service, and does not include the addition of new staff for a sub-separate classroom.

“The cost of sending students out of district, although often necessary, is expensive and if we can build those programs internally, it’s better for their families, it’s better for our teachers as well,” McCormick said, when explaining the need for a sub-separate classroom.

He said the amount of out of district costs not being reimbursed by Circuit Breaker have been over \$200,000 for the past couple of years.

McCormick said without the new positions, staff salaries increased by \$268,842 over the prior year.

He said that Chapter 70 funding increased from what was projected previously, and the town is now receiving about \$41,000 more.

McCormick said the town’s net school spending has decreased from year to year, with the Finance Committee suggesting the school district budget at 100% for the coming fiscal year, which is the minimum required.

The budget drivers continue to be out of district tuition, transportation and staff salaries.

He said with staff realignments and offsets, the proposed budget will be reduced by \$108,000 since the last update he provided. He said the high school has also received a \$40,000 grant to be used for curriculum supplies.

These, including other offsets, have reduced the proposed budget by \$480,311.50, without reducing any staffing positions.

“Unfortunately, when we’re talking about reductions...the most money’s involved with salaries,” McCormick said.

Another cost saving measure is eliminating one bus and reconfiguring the bus routes. He said this will increase students time on the bus by about 15 or 20 minutes.

McCormick said while he understands that this is a small school district with a declining student enrollment, the elimination of positions is “very challenging.”

He provided a list of positions that could be removed, including an art teacher,

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2025 MEMORIAL DAY

A Day of Reverence and Prayer



Turley photos by Eric Goodhart

This man reads the names on the Vietnam Memorial located on the Hubbardston Common

By Eric Goodhart
Correspondent

HUBBARDSTON – Several long-time residents of Hubbardston said the Memorial Day turnout was one of the largest they had ever seen.

It was particularly special because 2025 marks the 250th anniversary of “the shot heard around the world.” Those words were first written in 1837 in the opening stanza of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s poem, “Concord Hymn.”

Although the exact dates vary, marking the first Memorial Day to commemorate the sacrifices of

Civil War soldiers, we now give thanks and our prayers to all the men and women who gave their lives in all the many conflicts that Americans have participated in.

The participants on the bright sunlit day promptly began at 11 a.m. at the Curtis Field north of town central and marched, walked, drove and peddled down to the historic Town Common. The names of honorable Hubbardston citizens, who participated in the Revolution, the Civil War, the Spanish-American

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This youngster has a great view of the Hubbardston Memorial Day parade from her mother’s shoulders.

Select Board have public hearing for National Grid/Verizon petition

By Ryan Drago
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HARDWICK – Select Board Chair Eric W. Vollheim led discussion about the fiscal year 2026 budget.

At the May 27 meeting, Vollheim said there is a newer budget that has come before the town to be discussed. Some significant changes have been identified after the last budget discussion

the Select Board had during a joint meeting with the Finance Committee.

Select Board Vice-Chair William Tinker spoke about reopening the budget and said the board already agreed on a budget. Tinker believes this discussion should be in new business because it is a new agenda item. It shouldn’t be considered old business when that business was already discussed and agreed on.

Select Board Clerk Jeff

Schaff wanted to know what the significant changes are that bring the budget back to the Select Board. Vollheim said it has to do with expenses and insurance accounts being reviewed and the figures brought the town to a different amount.

There was also an overlay account for surplus. The Assessors declared an overlay surplus and helped reduce the budget by approximately \$62,000. There is also money for sta-

bilization as well.

Schaff did inform the rest of the board that when it comes to discussing and forming the budget, it can change and be looked at right up until the day of the Town Meeting.

“This can change,” Schaff said even if it is discussed by the board again. “Even at the meeting it can be changed.”

The Select Board mem-

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Oakham gathers agains a BESS in their town

By Ellenor Downer
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OAKHAM – At least 70 people and probably more gathered on Oakham Common on Friday, May 30 at 1 p.m.

They came carrying both homemade and commercially printed signs. Their purpose was to voice their disapproval of a proposed Battery Energy Storage System on property on Coldbrook Road. The proposed site was a former “junkyard” and later under new owners was known as Amherst/Oakham Recycling. Their message was clear “No Battery Park.”

The land, not only is near to Oakham Center School and the Town Common area, but contains forests, wetlands and is located near



Turley Publications photo by Ellenor Downer

About 70 people gathered on the Town Common to protest the proposed Battery Energy Storage System in Oakham.

an aquifer. Several people spoke at the rally. Oakham Fire Chief Timothy Howe said the town’s fire department did not have the resources to combat a fire caused by the lithium battery

storage system.

The Oakham Planning Board sent a bulk mailing to residents recently. The letter said in 2022 Oakham voters unanimously passed a zoning bylaw that prohibits lith-

ium battery storage and the Attorney General approved the by law in 2023. They said, “Now the state has changed its position and will allow the Energy Facilities Siting Board to overrule our

voter-approved prohibition and permit this project to be forced on Oakham.”

Five years ago, in 2020 Oakham residents united

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All articles pass at town meetings

By Ryan Drago
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NEW BRAINTREE – Both the special and annual town meetings were held on June 2, with all articles receiving approval from voters.

Serving as the moderator during the two meetings was Jeff Howland. There were a total of five articles on the special town meeting warrant and nine articles on the annual town meeting warrant.

Special town meeting

Article 5 asked voters to transfer \$10,000 from available funds to the New Braintree Historical Commission to hire a consultant to prepare the Town Center for a National Register Nomination. This article required a two-thirds majority vote in order to pass.

Several residents had questions regarding this decision. Deb Morrison of the Historical Commission spoke on the topic and said this is an additional \$10,000 to hire a consultant to prepare the Town Center to be nominated in the National Register. When asked about the outcome of this decision, Morrison said it is to “preserve and make aware of the historic significance.”

Annual town meeting

Article 4 required a lot of review at the annual town meeting. It was stated in a written document shared with the voters that this year’s budget was difficult to create with the uncertainty of state and federal funds that the town and the school districts received.

The town does continue to put funds into stabilization with financial uncertainty moving forward. If approved, the town will have over \$500,000 in stabilization.

With 10 students attending Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School, the assessment for

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SPORTS



Submitted photos by Gregory A. Scibelli
Kelsey Allen hits the ball on the ground.

Panthers fall at home to Gardner

BARRE – The Quabbin Regional High School softball team had a non-playoff game on Monday, May 26. With all the rain this spring, Memorial Day was used to make up games prior to the state tournament. Quabbin was defeated by visiting Gardner 12-1 in the holiday matchup.

Kai Schuster tries to get back to first.



Jordan Blanchard makes the throw to first.



The Panthers were in action on Memorial Day last week.



Lianna Leger makes a phenomenal play and throw to first from her knees.



Submitted photos by Brianna Whitelaw
Zachard Thompson, Kayla Curren, and Trinity Los compete in the 100 meter dash.

Unified track league meet

BARRE – Once again, Quabbin Regional High School had the privilege of competing in the Mid-Wach League meet with multiple

other schools. Quabbin was the host school for the league meet, the third time the school has been able to hold the meet. Unified track has been a very successful program since it began at Quabbin.



Brady Williams completes an attempt in the long jump.



Bailey Burke goes for a throw in the shotput.

Pioneers make quick work first tourney opponent

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

PALMER—Just like they did a year ago, the Pathfinder Tech softball team didn't have very much trouble defeating a charter school from Boston in a Division 5 state tournament home game. The 25th-seeded Lady Pioneers exploded for 13 runs in the second inning enroute to a 22-0 victory over the 40th-seeded Neighborhood House Charter School in a preliminary round game, last Friday afternoon. The contest ended after 4 ½ innings due to 12-run mercy rule. "The girls have worked very hard all season long and they deserve to celebrate a postseason victory," said Pathfinder Tech first-year head coach Phil Gallo. "We didn't know very much about our opponent, and



Taylor Thorton hustles for first base.

they probably didn't know anything about us either." The victory improved the Lady Pioneers overall record to 13-5. They beat Boston Collegiate Charter School, 19-4, in last year's prelimi-



Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli
Kendra Burke sends a pitch to the plate.

nary round home game. During the regular season, the Lady Pioneers scored ten or more runs in nine games. The 22 runs is a new season high. They posted a 21-0 home win against

the Renaissance School in the middle of May. The Neighborhood House Charter School, which is in Dorchester, opened its doors

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Emma Thompson and Madeline Oliver compete in a heat of the 100 meter dash.



Christopher Howes, Colby Hill, and Samantha Breault race.



Turley photo by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com
Oskar Kaufmann grabs a quick stop.

After pair of big wins, Pioneers draw in home opener

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

LUDLOW—Putting the ball into the back of the net wasn't a major issue for the Western Mass. Pioneers in their first two regular season matches. The Pioneers, who outscored Boston City and the Albany Rush, 15-0, on the road, played a 1-1 draw against the Seacoast United Phantoms in the home opener at historic Lusitano Stadium

on May 23. "I thought it was a very good game tonight," said longtime Pioneers head coach Federico Molinari. "Seacoast won the championship last year and they're a very good team again this year. They defended very well against us. We did play much better during the second half than we did in the first half." The Pioneers first home match was played on a miserable night weatherwise.

Eleven different players scored a goal in the Pioneers' first two road matches. Israel Neto led the way offensively with three goals. Matt Cence and Robbie Lyons both scored two goals. The other goals for the Pioneers were scored by Oskar Kaufmann, Aiden Kelly, Austin Bush, Jose Suarez, Jose Bustamante, Gustavo Barbosa, and Mamadi Jiana, who's a former member of the Chicopee boys' soccer team.

The Phantoms (0-1-1), who are the defending USL League Two National champions, had won the previous three matchups between the two rivals held at Lusitano Stadium. The home team had an opportunity to take an early lead, but a breakaway opportunity by Kaufmann in the second minute of the match was saved by Seacoast goalie Jahn Tobias. **See PIONEERS, page10**