




2026 Town Meeting Warrant Guide

Welcome to your simplified guide to the **May 9, 2026, Annual Town Meeting Warrant**. This document outlines the decisions you'll be making regarding how your tax dollars are spent and how the town is governed.

 **Location:** Shutesbury Elementary School Gym

 **Meeting Starts:** 9:00 a.m.

 **Annual Town Election:** 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

 **Note on Mail-In Ballots:** Per state law, you can return your Vote-by-Mail (VBM) ballot to the Town Hall drop-box until the minute polls close at **3:30 p.m.**

Important Notes

- **Childcare:** Free childcare is available during Town Meeting from **9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.** (signup deadline: May 2).

Pro-Tip for Newcomers

- If you are confused during the meeting, you can always stand up and say, "**Ms. Moderator, a point of information!**" This is a request for a simple explanation of what is currently happening or what a specific term means.
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Article 1: Reports

- **Action:** To hear and receive reports from town officers, committees, and boards.
- **Summary:** This is the formal opening where the town accepts the written annual reports of various departments.

Article 2: Regional School District Budget

- **Action:** Approve a total budget of **\$38,845,229** for the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District.
- **Summary:** Shutesbury's specific share for this year is **\$1,793,663** after applying unspent funds from the prior fiscal year to reduce the assessment. This pays for Shutesbury students attending the regional middle and high schools.

Article 3: Town Operating Budget

- **Action:** Approve **\$8,327,288** for town expenses, salaries, and school operations.

- **Summary:** This is "THE" budget that keeps the town running. It is funded by \$8,109,038 in taxes, \$208,250 from "Free Cash" and \$10,000 from the Septic Betterment Fund.
 - **What is "Free Cash"?** This isn't a gift; it is a surplus built up when the town spends less than it budgeted or collects more in local revenue (like motor vehicle excise taxes) than expected. Once the state "certifies" these surplus funds, it can be spent at the Town's discretion.

Article 4: Elected Officials' Compensation

- **Action:** Set the salaries for the Select Board, Town Clerk, Moderator, and Constable.
- **Summary:** These amounts are contained within the budget. For context, these are typically stipends for. State law requires the town to vote on the specific salaries of its elected leaders every year.

Article 5: Compensating Balance Agreements

- **Action:** Authorize the Treasurer to enter into specific banking agreements.
- **Summary:** This is a routine administrative task that allows the Treasurer to maintain bank accounts that use interest to offset banking fees.

Article 6: Grant Authorization

- **Action:** Allow the Select Board to apply for and spend state and federal grants.
- **Summary:** This gives the town permission to accept "free" money from the state or federal government if it doesn't require the town to spend extra tax dollars.







Articles 7 & 8: Dual-Role Appointments



- **Action:** Approve Catherine Hilton (Board of Health) and Walter Tibbetts (Cemetery Commission) to work as paid consultants/groundskeeper for their respective departments.
- **Summary:** Because they are also elected officials, the town must vote to allow them to be paid for these specific roles to avoid a conflict of interest under state law.

Article 9: Revolving Fund Spending Limits


- **Action:** Set limits for 10 different revolving funds (e.g., Dog Licensing, Recycling, Library).
- **Summary:** These funds are "self-fueling"—money collected from fees (like dog tags) goes back into the program. This vote just sets the maximum amount each department can spend from those fees in FY2027.

Articles 10 – 16: Capital Items (Using Free Cash)


- **Action:** To spend "Free Cash" (surplus savings) on specific equipment and services.
-  **Summary:** These are one-time purchases that do not add to your tax rate. The following information is provided to help residents understand the current condition of town assets and the technical rationale for the FY2027 requests. This information was generated from capital request forms submitted to the Capital Planning Committee.
-  **Article 10: Highway Tractor (\$64,318)**
 - **Proposed Action:** To transfer and appropriate \$64,318 from the certified Free Cash account for the procurement of a tractor for the Highway Department.
-  **Article 11: Highway Sprayer (\$10,630)**
 - **Proposed Action:** To transfer and appropriate \$10,630 from the certified Free Cash account for the procurement of a sprayer for the Highway Department.
-  **Article 12: School Parking Lot (\$15,800)**
 - **Current Status:** The driveway and lot surfaces have exceeded their service life.
 - **Proposed Action:** "Phase 1" engineering and surveying to perform substrate testing in order to determine excavation specifications. This data is intended to assist in state grant applications.
-  **Article 13: School Snow Blowers (\$6,000)**
 - **Proposed Action:** Replacement of two industrial snow blowers used for school walkways and emergency exits. The current units have reached the end of their mechanical life cycle.
-  **Article 14: Gym/Stage Curtain Mechanism (\$15,000)**
 - **Proposed Action:** Replacement of mechanical hardware and tracks for the stage and center dividing curtains in the school multi-purpose room.
 - **Summary:** The original hardware is no longer compliant with modern operational standards and requires replacement to maintain the functionality of the divided space.

-  **Article 15: Electronic Voting Clickers (\$5,700)**
 - **Proposed Action:** Transfer \$5,700 from Free Cash to acquire a clicker-based voting system for Town Meeting.
 - **Summary:** To automate the tallying of votes, particularly for articles requiring a two-thirds majority. The system provides digital recording of votes and replaces manual hand-counting.
-  **Article 16: Data Digitization (\$15,725)**
 - **Proposed Action:** Procurement of professional services for the scanning and digitization of physical municipal records.
 - **Summary:** To provide digital redundancy for permanent paper records and to facilitate the processing of public records requests.

Article 17: Dam Repairs

- **Action:** Transfer **\$83,845** from the Stabilization Fund for dam repairs.
- **Summary:** These repairs are mandated by a Dam Safety Order issued by the Commonwealth on December 3, 2025. This article covers repairs scheduled for Fiscal Year 2026.
 -  **Note:** A two-thirds majority vote is required for approval.

Major Capital Highlight: Fire Truck (Article 18)

- **Proposed Action:** Authorization to borrow \$800,000 for the procurement of a replacement fire engine to maintain municipal fire suppression capacity
- **Summary:** Engine 2 is a 1996 model year vehicle (30 years in service). National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards recommend the retirement of frontline engines after 20 years of service. Mechanical parts for the 1996 chassis are not readily available.
 -  **Note:** A two-thirds majority vote is required for approval.

Articles 19 – 21: MLP (Broadband) Operations

- **Action:** Approve the budget and reserves for the town's internet service.
 - **Summary:** This budget is funded entirely by Shutesbury internet subscribers. It has **no impact on taxpayers** or residents who choose to get service from private companies like Verizon or Comcast.
 - **Art 19:** Puts \$117,463 from last year's earnings into a reserve for emergencies.
 - **Art 20:** Sets the \$379,330 operations budget.

- **Art 21:** Uses \$290,000 from the Broadband Fund to upgrade subscriber equipment.

Article 22: Personal Property Tax Exemption

- **Action:** Raise the minimum taxable value of personal property from \$1,500 to **\$6,500**.
- **Summary:** This eliminates the need for the town to send out very small tax bills that cost more to process than the revenue received.

Article 23: Senior Property Tax Exemption

- **Action:** Reauthorize the means-tested senior tax break.
- **Summary:** This continues a program that helps lower the tax burden for qualifying seniors who meet specific income and asset limits.

Articles 24 – 29: Community Preservation Act (CPA)

- **Action:** Direct CPA funds (from the 1.5% surcharge on tax bills) toward specific projects.
- **Summary:** These funds can only be used for Open Space, Historic Preservation, Recreation, or Community Housing.
 - **Article 24:** Distributes CPA revenues to their appropriate accounts
 - **Article 25:** Sets aside CPA funding for administrative costs
 - **Article 26:** Cancels an old Community Garden grant (\$20,000) and returns the money to the CPA fund.
 - **Article 27:** \$5,000 for a regional housing coordinator.
 - **Article 28:** \$9,000 to restore the shed and gazebo at Elliott Park.
 - **Article 29:** \$89,000 to purchase 9 acres between Wendell and Locks Pond Roads to add to the South Brook Conservation Area and for a potential affordable housing site”

Article 30: Quabbin Watershed Resolution

- **Action:** Accept the "Quabbin Watershed Resolution".
- **Summary:** A formal request to the state for more "just recompense" (better payments and board representation) because Shutesbury protects the state's water but cannot develop that land for its own profit.

Article 31: School District Agreement Amendment

- **Action:** Amend the regional agreement to allow the School Committee to execute leases.
- **Summary:** This is a technical update to the four-town school agreement to clarify leasing authority.

Article 32: Personnel Bylaw Changes

- **Action:** Update the rules for town employees.
- **Summary:** Adds rules for remote/hybrid work, extends the new-hire review period, makes bereavement leave more inclusive, and updates the vacation schedule to help with staff retention.

Article 33: Citizen's Petition Safe Community Bylaw

- **Action:** A citizen petition to replace the 2025 bylaw.
- **Summary:** A citizen petition to clarify that town resources and staff (including police) will not be used to enforce federal civil immigration laws unless required by a judicial warrant.

General Meeting Terms

- **The Warrant:** The official "agenda" for the meeting. It lists every "Article" (proposal) that will be discussed and voted on.
- **The Moderator:** The elected official who runs the meeting. Their job is to keep order, recognize speakers, and announce the results of votes.
- **The Quorum:** The minimum number of registered voters required to be present for the meeting to legally conduct business.
- **The Floor:** When the Moderator says, "you have the floor," it means it is your turn to speak at the microphone.
- **Consent Agenda:** A group of routine "housekeeping" articles voted on all at once to save time. Any voter can ask to remove an item from the bundle if they wish to discuss it separately.

Financial Vocabulary

- **Fiscal Year (FY):** The town's "budget year." In Massachusetts, the fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. Article 3 covers **FY2027**, which begins July 1, 2026.

- **Free Cash:** This is not actually "free," it is money left over from the previous year's budget or from actual revenues that exceeded estimates. It is often used for one-time "Capital Items" like tractors or repairs.
 - **Stabilization Fund:** The town's main savings account. Using this money usually requires a higher "2/3rds vote" because it is meant for emergencies or major projects.
 - **Raise and Appropriate:** This means the town will collect the money through your local property taxes to pay for a specific budget item.
 - **Enterprise Fund:** A separate accounting fund for a specific service that is intended to be self-supporting through fees, such as the **MLP (Broadband) Enterprise Fund**.
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Types of Voting

- **Majority Vote:** Requires more than half (50% + 1) of the voters present to pass. Most articles fall into this category.
 - **2/3rds Vote:** Required for more "serious" financial actions, like borrowing money (Article 18) or pulling from the Stabilization Fund (Article 17).
 - **Voice Vote:** The Moderator asks everyone in favor to say "Aye" and those opposed to say "No." The Moderator then "calls" the vote based on what they heard.
 - **Hand Count:** If a voice vote is too close to call, the Moderator will ask voters to hold up their hands (or "clickers" if Article 15 passes) to be counted individually.
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Parliamentary Procedures

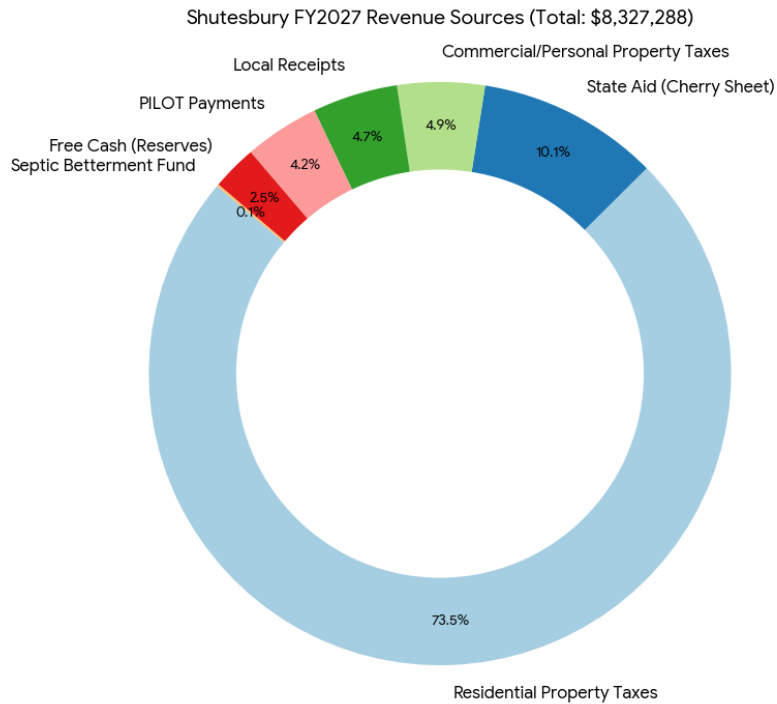
- **Move/Call the Question:** A request to stop the debate and vote immediately.
 - **To Table:** A motion to temporarily set aside an article to discuss it later or at a future meeting.
 - **Indefinite Postponement:** A polite way of "killing" an article. If a meeting votes to "indefinitely postpone," it means they have decided not to act on that proposal at all this year.
 - **Point of Order:** A request to the Moderator to clarify a rule or to point out that the meeting's procedures aren't being followed correctly.
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Where Your Revenue Comes From

Revenue Summary: While property taxes constitute the majority of Shutesbury’s income, the budget is balanced using a combination of state support, local fees, and certified surplus funds.

- Property Taxes: \$8,109,038
- Free Cash (Certified Surplus): \$208,250
- Septic Betterment Fund: \$10,000

The following chart illustrates the funding sources for the proposed \$8,327,288 town operating budget.



The Revenue Breakdown: For Every \$1,000 Collected

The table below displays how each source contributes to every \$1,000 of the town's total revenue:

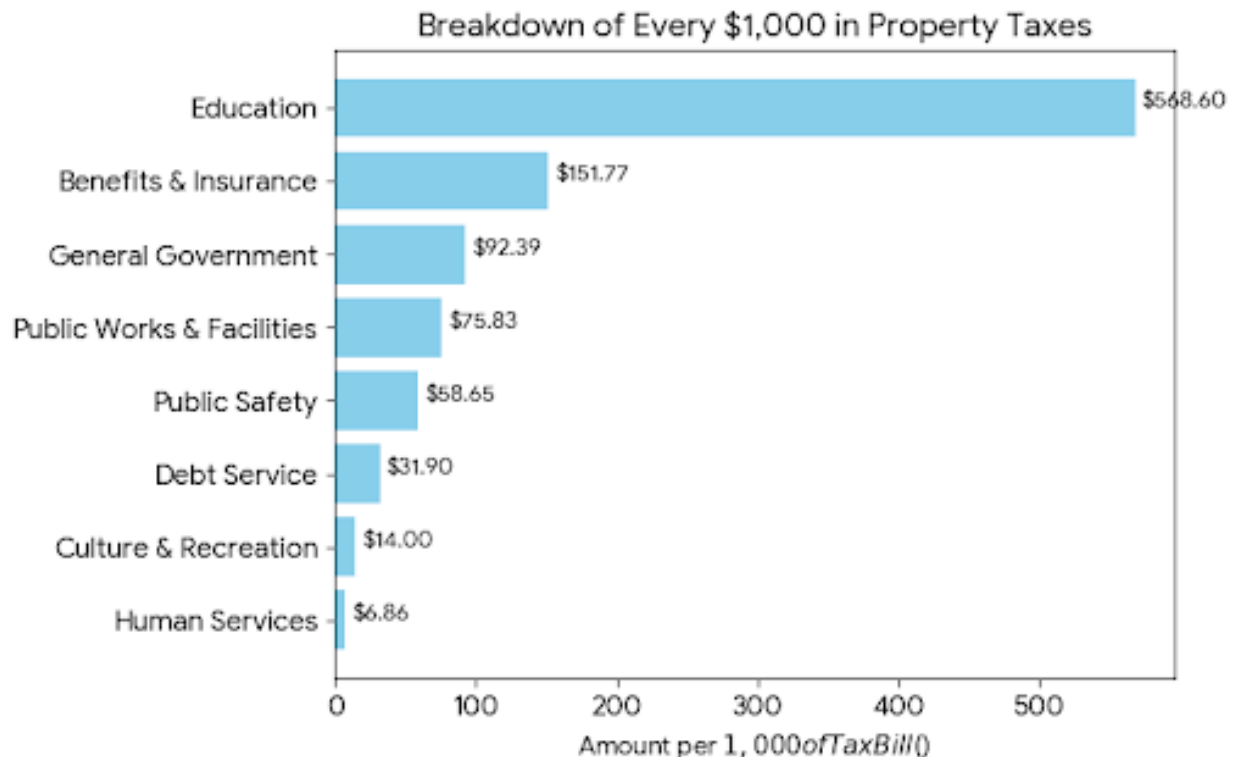
| Category | Amount per \$1,000 | Source Description |
|----------------|--------------------|---|
| Property Taxes | \$973.79 | Real estate and personal property taxes raised and appropriated from residents. |

| Category | Amount per \$1,000 | Source Description |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Free Cash | \$25.01 | Surplus funds from previous years, certified by the state for discretionary spending. |
| Other Funds | \$1.20 | Specific allocations, such as the Septic Betterment Fund. |

Note on State Aid & Local Receipts: In the formal budget (Article 3), the "Tax" figure of \$8,109,038 is the net amount the town must raise after accounting for estimated State Aid (Cherry Sheet) and local receipts like motor vehicle excise taxes.

Where Your Tax Dollars Go

Expenditure Summary: This budget covers all municipal operations, including education, public safety, and infrastructure maintenance. It is primarily funded by \$8,109,038 in property taxes, supplemented by \$208,250 from "Free Cash" and \$10,000 from the Septic Betterment Fund.



The Expense Breakdown: For Every \$1,000 Spent

The table below displays how the town distributes every \$1,000 of your tax payment across different departments:

| Category | Amount per \$1,000 | What this covers |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Education | \$568.60 | Shutesbury Elementary, Regional Middle/High School, and vocational tuition. |
| Benefits & Insurance | \$151.77 | Health insurance for town employees, retirement contributions, and general insurance. |
| General Government | \$92.39 | Town Hall operations, Town Administrator, legal fees, and financial offices. |
| Public Works & Highway | \$75.83 | Road maintenance, snow removal, town buildings, and the cemetery. |
| Public Safety | \$58.65 | Police, Fire, and Emergency Management services. |
| Debt Service | \$31.90 | Repaying loans for past major town projects. |
| Culture & Recreation | \$14.00 | The Shutesbury Public Library and recreation programs. |
| Human Services | \$6.86 | The Board of Health and the Council on Aging. |

Why does Education take the biggest slice?

In small towns like Shutesbury, education is consistently the largest expense because it includes both the operation of our local elementary school and the required assessments for the regional school district.

Impact on Your Bill

While these percentages represent how the budget is *divided*, your actual tax bill is determined by your property's assessed value. If Article 3 passes, the town will "Raise and Appropriate" approximately **\$8,109,038** from property taxes to fund these services.

Your vote is your voice. Thank you for being an active part of our community. We look forward to seeing you there! 