

# BUDGET PROCESS

This year's budget process followed a similar path as in FY25.

The budget year began with both the Advisory and Select Board adopting new town financial policies to help improve the Town's long-term financial stability, and accountability in managing the Town's funds. It is the Town's hope that these policies provide a well-defined framework for budgeting, capital planning, debt management, and reserve funds, helping Town officials make informed decisions. These policies also promote consistency in financial practices and prevents, or limits, reliance on unsustainable funding sources like free cash for operating expenses.

In late July and early August, the Town's FY26 – FY30 Financial Forecast was developed and reviewed by the Select and Advisory Boards.

Once again, this year, the Town started its budget process early in FY25, to align Dunstable's process with the GDRSD and Town of Groton. By doing so, the Town ensured an open line of communication and that important financial decisions were being made at a time where all parties – Dunstable, Groton, and GDRSD – were considered.

This year, the Town Administrator in Dunstable and Town Manager in Groton formed a Tri-Comm, similar to last year, which has worked throughout the year to develop the FY26 budget.

The makeup of the working group included the Dunstable Chair of the Select Board, Dunstable Chair of the Advisory Board, Groton Chair of the Select Board, Groton Chair of the Finance Committee, Chair of the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee, Groton Member of the School Committee, Superintendent of Schools and Director of Finance and Operations, Groton Town Manager, and Dunstable Town Administrator.

Several meetings of the Tri Comm have taken place throughout the year to review the budget and also to begin the District's review of the Regional Agreement.

During this process, the Town Administrator worked with the Select Board and Advisory Board to provide an updated financial forecast and Capital Improvement Plan and worked with individual municipal departments to finalize departmental budgets.

Through the budget process, numerous meetings of the Select Board, Advisory Board, and Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee have taken place.

At the beginning of the fiscal year, the Town Administrator created a budget calendar for

the Town to follow as an estimated a framework for the budget process. That framework is below:

### **Budget Calendar Outline**

- Summer – Select Board, Town Administrator, and Departments establish goals and priorities.
- Summer – Advisory Board, Select Board, and Town Administrator develop and review Financial Forecast.
- Summer – Town Administrator/Town Manager Tri-Comm meetings begin between the Towns of Dunstable and Groton, and Groton Dunstable Regional School District.
- Early Fall – Town Administrator distributes budget message and departmental budget worksheets.
- Early Fall – Town Administrator distributes capital improvement request sheets to departments.
- Early / Late Fall – Staff develop budget requests and submit capital requests.
- Early /Late Fall – Dunstable and Groton Select Boards, Dunstable Advisory Board, Groton Finance Committee, and Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee hold joint budget forum to review financial condition of the Towns and School District.
- Late Fall / Early Winter – Departments budgets are submitted to Advisory Board and Select Board and are reviewed.
- Early / Mid Winter – Draft, proposed Capital Improvement Plan is submitted to the Capital Improvement Committee and is reviewed.
- Late Winter/Early Spring – Following a series of meetings and discussions, FY26 Budget and Capital Plan is finalized and approved by Advisory Board and Select Board.
- Early / Mid Spring – Before Annual Town Meeting, Town officials will host a briefing to review Town Meeting articles, including a review of the FY26 Operating Budget.
- Early / Mid Spring – Information and materials on each Town Meeting warrant article will be available and distributed, including materials and information on the FY26 budget.
- Spring – Annual Town Meeting takes place the second Monday of each May.

The chart below outlines the FY26 budget process:

July 10, 2024	Advisory Board adopts town financial policies
July 16, 2024	Select Board adopts town financial policies
July 25, 2024	Finalizes FY26–FY30 Financial Forecast
August 14, 2024	Select Board reviewed and discussed Financial Forecast

August 14, 2024	Advisory Board Meeting – Preliminary review of FY26 budget and discussion
August 30, 2024	Capital Project Requests Solicitation sent to Departments
September 16, 2024	Capital Project Request Submissions Due
September 26, 2024	Department Budget Requests Sent
October 16, 2024	Department Budget Requests Due
October 23, 2024	Joint Meeting with Dunstable Select and Advisory Board, Groton Select Board and Finance Committee, and GDRSD School Committee
October 31, 2024	Budget meeting with GDRSD, Groton, and Dunstable officials
November 4, 2024	Fire budget and capital review meeting with Town Administrator
November 5, 2024	Police, Treasurer/Collector, Accounting/Water, Planning, and Conservation capital and budget review meetings with Town Administrator
November 6, 2024	Budget review meeting with Town Assessor
November 7, 2024	IT and Town Administrator budget review meeting
November 12, 2024	Highway and Health budget review meetings with Town Administrator
November 13, 2024	COA, Parks and Recreation, and Library budget review meetings with the Town Administrator
December 5, 2024	Tri Comm Meeting on budget with GDRSD and Town of Groton officials
December 9, 2024	Groton, Dunstable, GDRSD officials budget and budget schedule review
January 15, 2025	Budget review meeting with Town of Groton and GDRSD officials
January 16, 2025	Tri Comm Meeting to review Regional Agreement
January 29, 2025	Select Board Meeting – FY26 Budget Presentation and Discussion
February 5, 2025	Advisory Board Meeting

February 11, 2025	Capital Improvement Plan approved by Capital Planning Committee
February 13, 2025	Tri Comm Meeting to review Regional Agreement
February 26, 2025	GDRSD School Committee FY26 Budget Hearing
February 26, 2025	Advisory Board Meeting - GDRSD School Committee FY26 Budget Hearing
February 27, 2025	Coffee and Conversation about the FY26 Operating Budget with GDRSD
March 3, 2025	Joint Meeting with Dunstable Select and Advisory Board, Groton Select Board and Finance Committee, and GDRSD School Committee
March 4, 2025	Tri Comm Meeting to review Regional Agreement
March 11, 2025	Select Board Meeting - FY26 Budget Update
March 12, 2025	GDRSD School Committee Certifies FY26 Budget
March 19, 2025	Advisory Board Meeting to consider FY26 Town Administrator recommended budget
March 26, 2025	Select Board Meeting to consider FY26 Town Administrator recommended budget
May 12, 2025	Annual Town Meeting
May 20, 2025	Annual Town Election
July 1, 2025	Fiscal year 2026 begins