

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

January 27, 2026

WESTFIELD CITY CLERK

The meeting was called to order by Chair Knapik at 5:30 PM. In attendance were Finance Committee members Councilor Daniel Knapik, Councilor Cindy Harris and Councilor Brent Bean. Also in attendance were Westfield Fire Department Deputy Chief Eric Bishop, Director of Public Works Randy Brown, Information Technology Manager Lenore Bernashe, Mayor Michael McCabe, City Councilor Matthews-Kane, City Councilor Burns, City Councilor Figy and scribe of the Finance Committee Karisa Zerbato.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean to allow public participation from Mayor McCabe. The motion was seconded by Councilor Harris. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES.

Mayor McCabe stated there is \$13,476,970.00 in Free Cash allocation certified by the state. Mayor McCabe provided the committee with a list of items that have been submitted to City Council for approval utilizing free cash. Mayor McCabe stated according to the Department of Local Services the city should have 5% of free cash money in the general fund and 5% in stabilization. Mayor McCabe stated there is approximately \$9,500,000.00 requests in expenditures from free cash. The city will be reimbursed an additional \$1,300,000.00 from a grant for the skate park. Mayor McCabe stated decisions will have to be made in regard to the use of free cash requests. Mayor McCabe added he asks department heads for a 5-year capital expenditure request with their yearly budgets. Mayor McCabe stated the \$2,000,000.00 from Westfield Gas and Electric for the athletic fields has to be held in free cash before it can be spent. The \$2,000,000.00 is included with the free cash total of \$13,476,970.00. Mayor McCabe stated his office is open and available to the Finance Committee members as well as City Council members for any questions. Councilor Knapik asked about the timing needed for money associated with the athletic fields. Mayor McCabe stated within the next 3 months. Councilor Knapik stated the list of requests is substantial and when looking at the amount of taxation and the increased solid waste fee the city needs to get to a point of equilibrium. Mayor McCabe stated that City Council needs to know that if they are in charge of a fee, they need to put it in long range planning and need to figure out how to walk the fee forward. Councilor Knapik stated the amount of money being spent is unsustainable. Mayor McCabe stated he thinks a policy needs to be set for a 2 ½ increase every year. Councilor Knapik stated it needs to be clear from the beginning what mark needs to be met. Mayor McCabe stated he doesn't know yet how he is going to balance the budget with free cash this year. Councilor Knapik stated he does believe a percentage of free cash should be returned to the taxpayers. Councilor Knapik stated local aid has been trending down since 2009. Mayor McCabe stated the cherry sheets were released and the city will be getting a 4.4% increase. The City of Westfield will receive approximately \$1,100,000.0 and of that Chapter 70 will be \$980,000.00. Councilor Knapik stressed the importance of getting the financial plan out to the public.

Councilor Knapik asked if anyone else would like to address the committee. No one else wanted to address the committee.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean for the approval of minutes from December 4, 2025. The motion was seconded by Councilor Harris. The motion passed 2-0 with Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES. Councilor Knapik abstained from voting due to not be a member of City Council in 2025.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean to amend the transfer of \$150,000.00 to \$75,000.00 from the Ambulance Designated Account (2100-340000) to the Ambulance Overtime Account (21002310-513000). The motion was seconded by Councilor Knapik.

Prior to the vote, Deputy Bishop stated overtime has increased for a number of reasons including staffing, vacancies and a backlog of members qualifying for parental leave. The \$150,000.00 should cover overtime to the end of the fiscal year. Deputy Bishop stated the department anticipates handling overtime costs going forward through policy changes as well as entering into a hybrid system to help fill vacancies quickly. Councilor Knapik asked how many members the department is currently down. Deputy Bishop stated there are two unfilled positions that were cut four years ago. The department is also expecting seven openings before July 1, 2026 due to retirements and members leaving. Councilor Knapik asked what the timeline is to implement the hybrid system. Deputy Bishop stated the Fire Commission meeting on February 9, 2026 will be the first implementation of the hybrid system. Councilor Knapik asked what the policy is for giving notice for retirement. Deputy Bishop stated two weeks. Deputy Bishop stated it is difficult to find individuals that want to join fire services as well as retain them. Councilor Bean asked what the department was originally budgeted for overtime. Deputy Bishop stated he thinks \$400,000.00. Councilor Figy stated he thought it was \$300,000.00 and the department stayed within that number last year. Councilor Bean stated this year with the \$150,000.00 it would be approximately \$550,000.00 for overtime compared to \$300,000.00 last year. Councilor Knapik asked what the total number of personnel paid out of the account is. Deputy Bishop stated thirty individuals. Councilor Knapik asked what the projection of the fund is. Deputy Bishop stated the fund is currently stable. Deputy Bishop stated with Noble Hospital committing to expand their emergency room he feels confident that ambulance services will continue as they have been. Councilor Knapik asked about the collection rate for services. Deputy Bishop stated the department has one of the highest collection rates in Western Massachusetts. Councilor Knapik asked what agency the department uses for collection. Deputy Bishop stated Comstar. Councilor Knapik asked if he could get an analysis from Comstar in regard to collection rates. Councilor Knapik asked if there are any communities around us utilizing hybrid hiring. Deputy Bishop stated he isn't aware. Councilor Knapik asked how long it takes for an individual to make a switch that already has paramedic status. Deputy Bishop stated if the individual was already an EMT, it would take two years to become a paramedic and then the individual must complete an additional 12 weeks at the Massachusetts Fire Academy. Deputy Bishop stated the department is anticipating raising the age limit from 32 to 39 years old which would allow the department to capture more individuals. Councilor Knapik asked if an individual from another civil service community wants to come to Westfield how long does it take. Deputy Bishop stated if it is between two chiefs approximately two weeks however it can sometimes take longer if a chief won't release the individual. Deputy Bishop stated utilizing the hybrid system an individual will go from offer to being in the ambulance in 60 days. Councilor Bean stated this is a big increase for overtime. Deputy Bishop stated parental leave was a big drive. There were five individuals just on his shift that had children approximately at the same time which led to backlogs and deficits. Currently there is no longer a backlog and he doesn't anticipate to see that many again at

the same time. Councilor Bean stated he would like to cut the request in half and see how it is managed. In addition, the department could come back if additional money is needed. Councilor Knapik asked if the parental leave is what caused a shortage in overtime. Deputy Bishop stated there were numerous people taking 9 weeks off all at once. Deputy Bishop stated the members are paid through sick time but the positions have to be backfilled. Councilor Knapik asked long \$40,000.00 would last in overtime. Deputy Bishop stated he thinks until the end of February. It is unpredictable in nature. There are two vacancies currently. There are also additional openings coming up within the department. Deputy Bishop stated the department has been holding off on sending individuals to the Fire Academy. This is problematic. There are three individuals going in June. There is no cost to the city for the Fire Academy however the individuals receive normal pay. Councilor Bean asked if there are several different reasons why individuals are leaving the department. Deputy Bishop confirmed. Reasons include how busy the department is as well as contractual issues. Deputy Bishop stated the core issues are being addressed. Councilor Bean asked how the starting pay is for a new firefighter. Deputy Bishop stated significantly lower. Councilor Bean stated he hopes that starting salaries are talked about in negotiations. Deputy Bishop stated he wants the department to be a destination. Councilor Figy stated his biggest concern is the time request for retirement. Councilor Knapik stated at one point he thought subject to appropriation was included. Councilor Harris stated she doesn't like to cut the Fire Department's budget and that they could come back if needed. Councilor Bean stated the department could come back with justification. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Bean and Councilor Harris voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Knapik to hold in committee an appropriation in the amount of \$27,321.25 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Animal Control Purchase of Services Account (12920000-520000-9900) for the replacement of the heating and cooling systems at the Animal Shelter.

Councilor Figy stated the building is rented and asked if the city is responsible for the heating. Councilor Knapik stated this is a capital piece of equipment and asked if the lease states the city must replace it. Councilor Knapik stated it seems to be abnormal that in a lease arrangement the property owner would not pay for that.

A motion was made by Councilor Knapik to hold in committee the appropriation in the amount of \$9,500.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the City Council Purchase of Service Account (11110000-520000) to reframe historic portraits of City Council in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

A motion was made by Councilor Knapik to hold in committee the appropriation in the amount of \$2,000,000.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Field Improvement Athletic Field Capital Construction Account (45138730- 589200-3215) for costs associated with the construction of the Athletic Fields.

A motion was made by Councilor Knapik to hold in committee the appropriation in the amount of \$11,900.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Health Department Purchase of Service Account (15100000-520000) for costs associated with repairs to the landfill groundwater monitoring well.

A motion was made by Councilor Knapik to hold in committee the appropriation in the amount of \$44,500.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Health Department Purchase of Service (15100000-520000) for engineering costs associated with landfill cap repairs.

A motion was made by Councilor Knapik to hold in committee the appropriation in the amount of \$170,720.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Health Department Purchase of Service (15100000-520000) for construction costs associated with landfill cap repairs.

A motion was made by Councilor Harris for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$7,158.96 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Department of Public Works Land and Natural Resources Division Capital Equipment Account (14990000-585000) for the construction of a greenhouse that will be used to grow flowers for City use. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Randy Brown stated the city purchases flowers from local farms to decorate Elm Street and along the bridges. Mr. Brown stated the department has an opportunity to work with the Westfield Technical Academy Horticulture department. Mr. Brown stated the department will purchase the greenhouse that will be stored at the Westfield Technical Academy. The department will provide the seeds, flower pots and soil medium and every spring the horticulture class would grow the flowers. Mr. Brown stated currently the department pays approximately \$9,000.00 a year to purchase flowers. Mr. Brown stated this project will provide savings for the city and is a great opportunity to work with the school. Councilor Knapik asked who would build the greenhouse. Mr. Brown stated workers from his department along with help from the Horticulture class would assemble the greenhouse. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean for the approval an appropriation in the amount of \$24,314.43 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Department of Public Works Land and Natural Resources Division FY26 Capital Equipment Account (14990000-585000) for the purchase of a zero-turn lawn mower. The motion was seconded by Councilor Harris.

Prior to the vote, Randy Brown stated the department has several mowers in the fleet that are aging out. Mr. Brown stated he wasn't working for the city last year when this item came up in the budget however the mayor had suggested waiting for a free cash opportunity. Councilor Knapik asked if the item made it to the budget. Mr. Brown stated no. Councilor Knapik asked if a local vendor is being used. Mr. Brown stated he has a quote from Turf Products for a Toro mower. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES

A motion was made by Councilor Harris for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$66,505.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Department of Public Works Waste Collection Division FY 26 Purchase of Services Account (14330000-520000) for costs associated with curbside leaf collection. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Randy Brown stated curbside leaf pickup resumed this year. Mr. Brown stated the item was not in the budget however he told the mayor that he would proceed with the program but it would be need to be funded. The program ran for 6 weeks between October and

November. Mr. Brown stated a contractor needed to be hired to complete the tasks as the department doesn't have the resources or equipment to do curbside collection. Councilor Knapik asked where the leaves went once collected. Mr. Brown stated 360 Recycling and Raymakers took some as well. Councilor Knapik asked if residents are able to bring leaves to the landfill. Mr. Brown confirmed. Councilor Knapik asked if this would be included in next year's budget. Mr. Brown confirmed and stated he would be asking for an increase. Mr. Brown stated this year the program ran for 6 weeks and was cut short due to snow. Mr. Brown stated next year he would like to run the program longer and is taking into account increases in costs. In addition, Mr. Brown added that he is hoping next year more residents will take advantage of the program. Councilor Knapik asked how many collection points there were. Mr. Brown stated there were three collection points. Councilor Harris asked if the time frame for collection could be reduced from 6 to 4 weeks. Mr. Brown stated he could look into it however he does have some concern that all the bags could be picked up in a shorter time frame. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES

A motion was made by Councilor Bean for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$270,000.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Department of Public Works Highway Purchase of Service Account (14210000- 520000) for the milling and overlaying of Park River Drive and Park River Circle. The motion was seconded by Councilor Harris.

Prior to the vote, Councilor Knapik asked about the sewer system. Randy Brown stated he believed the residents made improvements to the sewer system. A resident stated that last year, the neighborhood funded improvements and are connected to city sewer. Councilor Knapik asked who owns the pumping equipment. The resident stated the neighborhood does. Councilor Knapik asked about long-term maintenance. Councilor Burns stated there have been quite a bit of communication between the city and the residents. Councilor Burns stated at first, they tried to get it accepted as a public way however due to the sewer situation it wasn't going to pass the sniff test. Councilor Burns stated this situation has been going on for a very long time. Councilor Burns stated it cost the residents of the neighborhood over \$100,000.00 to complete the sewer improvements. Councilor Knapik asked if the residents have a neighborhood association. The residents confirmed. Councilor Burns stated the street is not going to be accepted and this is a reason why the ordinance was changed to read 30 years instead of 50 years. Councilor Burns stated it is a regular neighborhood that is plowed and has trash pickup. In addition, school buses and ambulances go down there. Councilor Burns stated there are 29 houses in the neighborhood. Councilor Burns asked how free cash be spent on a non-city street. Councilor Burns stated the ordinance now states 30 years. Councilor Bean asked if any other work needs to happen. Councilor Burn stated not that he is aware of. Councilor Bean stated the council has been told without a city accepted street, city money can't be used. Councilor Figy and Councilor Burns stated this is why the ordinance change was done. Councilor Figy stated this provides an alternative to accepting a street. Councilor Knapik asked if police will be able to enforce rules on the streets. Councilor Knapik asked who would do the paving. Mr. Brown stated a city contractor. Mr. Brown added he is not aware of any drainage issues. Councilor Figy stated he thinks this is a worthy project however his concern is how it got picked. Councilor Figy stated he has multiple private ways that he has tried to get services for and thinks the city needs to come up with a procedure how a street is picked and addressed. Mr. Brown stated the prior city engineer did not grate rate any of the private roads. Mr. Brown stated he is looking to update the program. Mr. Brown stated there is no funding mechanism for this road or any other road. Mr.

Brown stated there are city roads that aren't addressed so how do you prioritize this project above others. A resident stated that they all used their hard-earned money to make repairs. Councilor Burns stated this was the first petition sent thru and he has another street waiting. Councilor Knapik asked how many residents need to sign off. Mr. Brown stated 66%. Councilor Burns stated this is a long process and there needs to be a funding mechanism. The vote passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Harris for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$51,321.48 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Technology Center Purchase of Service Account (11550000-520000) to upgrade radio infrastructure throughout the municipality. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Lenore Bernashe stated this is to upgrade the software in regard to the radio infrastructure for the Microwave system that is used by public safety and the rest of the municipality's radio system. Ms. Bernash stated she was notified in December that the update must be completed by May 2027. Ms. Bernashe stated she pays for the annual maintenance out of her budget. Councilor Knapik asked if once this is completed if it will be good until the next upgrade. Ms. Bernashe confirmed. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES

A motion was made by Councilor Harris for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$60,000.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Technology Center Replacement Equipment Account (11550000-587000) for the purchase and installation of replacement switches to support the network infrastructure at the Technology Center. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean.

Prior to the vote, Lenore Bernashe stated the virtual infrastructure has two switches that help distribute all the traffic between workstations. The network switches are ten years old and approaching end of serviceable life. Ms. Bernashe stated the switches are a critical piece of equipment. In addition, the new switches will allow faster throughput and faster speeds. Councilor Knapik asked if the new switches will last ten years. Ms. Bernashe confirmed. Ms. Bernashe stated she has been notified by Cisco that due to tariffs and increase in artificial intelligence RAM, memory and storage components will be increasing significantly. Ms. Bernashe stated the quote she has for the switches is only good to February 19, 2026. Ms. Bernashe added that this item was on her department's capital plan.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$88,706.00 from the Free Cash account (1000- 359000) to the Technology Center Purchase of Service Account (11550000-520000) for the purchase and configuration of an upgraded Permit and Code Software System for the City. The motion was seconded by Councilor Harris.

Prior to the vote, Lenore Bernashe stated this is replace the city's current permitting system. This is an e-permitting system that is cloud based. Ms. Bernashe stated it will start with Building, Planning and Zoning, Fire and Code Enforcement. Ms. Bernashe stated the system can to expanded in the future to be used by other departments. In addition, the systems makes use of the State Contractors database. Councilor Knapik asked if this is a Munis based system. Ms.

Bernashe stated no. Councilor Knapik asked what the cost will be going forward. Ms. Bernashe stated the \$88,706.00 is for the software and implementation costs for the first four months. Ms. Bernashe stated there will be a line item in her budget for approximately \$125,000.00 to cover the annual fee, which is also subject to a 5% increase. Ms. Bernashe stated this covers unlimited licensees. Councilor Knapik asked what happened to Munis. Ms. Bernashe stated it didn't evolve. Councilor Knapik asked if this system would communicate with Munis. Ms. Bernashe stated yes. Ms. Bernashe stated she is looking to implement this in March for the new building season. It will be more efficient and communicate with other departments automatically. In addition, the system will integrate with GIS and the Assessors databases. Councilor Bean asked what the number would be to have all departments included. Ms. Bernashe stated it would be large and we would have to pay from day one even if departments aren't using. Councilor Knapik asked when the last time fees were looked at in building. Councilor Matthews-Kane and Councilor Figy stated not that long ago. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES.

A motion was made by Councilor Bean for the approval of an appropriation in the amount of \$130,000.00 from Free Cash (1000-359000) to the Technology Center Capital Project Account (11550000-580000) to replace the In Row Cooling Rack system located at the Technology Center, which has reached the end of its serviceable life. The motion was seconded by Councilor Harris.

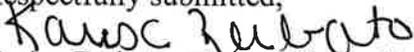
Prior to the vote, Ms. Bernashe stated the technology center has two rows of racks that have servers in them. In between the racks there is in row cooling that keeps the cold air circulating in the room. Ms. Bernashe two years ago the power panel was replaced. Councilor Knapik asked how old the Technology Center is. Ms. Bernashe stated it will be 20 years old in November. Ms. Bernashe stated this is a critical part of the infrastructure. Ms. Bernashe stated it is regularly serviced however it is getting harder to find 20-year-old replacement parts. Ms. Bernashe stated this was in her capital plan for next year. Councilor Burns asked why the items were not included in the department's budget. Ms. Bernashe stated she just found about the radios in December. Ms. Bernashe stated the upgraded permitting system was looked at last year but there was no momentum to carry it forward. Ms. Bernashe stated the switches and cooling rack are in the department's FY27 budget and both were included on the 5-year capital plan. Councilor Knapik asked what the most pressing urgent need for capital equipment that the City Council isn't aware of for her department is. Ms. Bernashe stated the items she just presented. In addition, she stated water heaters are on her capital plan for next year that are over 20 years old. Councilor Knapik asked how much a rack costs and how long the servers have been there. Ms. Bernashe stated approximately 6 years. Ms. Bernashe stated the server room alone is worth well over \$1,000,000.00. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES

Councilor Figy stated he would like to address the committee on item #6. Councilor Figy stated he has been working on this project since 2000. Councilor Figy stated Westfield Gas and Electric has made good on their deal. The money was put into free cash. Now that the work is nearing completion and the city will be going out for the bond sale it would be in the best financial interest to move the money so it is available. Councilor Figy stated they have been working all winter long and he thinks the project will be completed ahead of time. Councilor

Knapik asked what the payment schedule is. Councilor Figy stated he didn't know. Councilor Knapik stated he would like additional information on the borrowing schedule and conversion.

A motion was made by Councilor Harris to adjourn at 7:00 PM. The motion was seconded by Councilor Bean. The motion passed 3-0 with Councilor Knapik, Councilor Harris and Councilor Bean voting YES.

Respectfully submitted,


Karisa Zerbatto, Finance Committee Scribe