



TOWN OF LEE

32 Main Street, Lee, MA 01238
www.lee.ma.us

R. Christopher Brittain,
Town Administrator

DATE: April 23, 2025

TO: All Registered Voters of the Town of Lee

FROM: Chris Brittain, Town Administrator

RE: Summary of Warrant Articles for the 2025 (FY26) Annual Town Meeting

ATTACHMENTS: Town Meeting Warrant

The Annual Town Meeting will be held on **May 8, 2025 at 7pm** in the Lee High/Middle School Auditorium. Below is a summary of each article that will be considered at the meeting.

***NOTE: Articles 1-5 have been placed in a consent agenda which allows them to be approved with a single vote. These articles are generally considered “housekeeping” matters that are continuously approved by unanimous vote each year.**

***Article 1** - Town Reports: This article accepts the town reports (provided in print and online at lee.ma.us) covering the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

***Article 2** - Salary of Elected Officials: Fix salaries of elected officials as required by law. This applies to the wages for the Select Board and Moderator in Article 4 (budget).

***Article 3** - Each fiscal year we transfer 50% of the sale of cemetery lots in to the perpetual care account. This requires a majority vote of town meeting.

***Article 4** – Blanket Grant Authorization. This article replaces the need to hold a town meeting before any grant application is submitted.

***Article 5** – Chapter 90: This article allows the town to accept money from the commonwealth for road paving. This year’s appropriation is estimated to be \$466,732.

Article 6 - Omnibus FY 24 General Fund Operating Budget: The budget contains a total increase of 5.98%. Below is an explanation of some of the larger increases. This was a particularly difficult budget season due to massive increases in health care costs along with re-negotiations with all collective bargaining units. It is important to note that \$700,000 of available funds will be applied towards lowering the tax rate. This combined with projected new growth and local revenue should bring the estimated tax impact closer to 4.5%. In order to reach this number, there has been permanent and temporary reductions in staffing at the school, DPW, police and fire departments. There have also been cuts in capital items to provide the additional tax relief. Attached is a specific breakdown of the budget by department. Below are explanations for certain departments with significant changes.

Land Use/ZBA/Planning Board/Conservation: These 4 budgets have been combined into one Land Use budget. The department will consist of the town planner and 1 assistant that will provide clerical work for the 3 boards and serve as a conservation agent.

Town Clerk: This budget shows a substantial increase due a partial shift in wages from the Treasurer/Collector budget. The current assistant collector will now become the assistant collector and assistant clerk. While there are no additional hours added to existing position, the wages will now be split between the clerk and collector. Previously they were fully supported by the collector.

IT: This includes updates to software and servers including necessary security upgrades.

School: The 5.99% increase includes a reduction of two elementary teachers in order to reduce the overall tax impact.

Employee Benefits: This year's budget saw a massive increase in health insurance rates of 16.42% over the previous fiscal year. To help mitigate this increase the Town's employees/unions voluntarily elected to adopt a new deductible plan which reduced the total impact to the town's budget to 10.92%. These increases were seen across almost every town in the state in the area regardless of health insurance plans.

Article 7 - This article includes several capital purchases to be made from the town's free cash. Free cash is a revenue source that includes a community's remaining, unrestricted funds from its operations of the previous fiscal year. Use of these funds does NOT affect the tax rate. Included below are summaries of certain projects proposed for FY26.

School: This capital expenditure is required for pre-bidding/owner's project manager work necessary to apply for state funding for school roof replacement, tennis court and paving projects.

Police Capital: These funds will be used to equip police officers with body cameras.

Fire Capital: These funds for upgrades to radio equipment to meet upcoming changes in state standards.

IT: This includes updates to software and servers including necessary security upgrades.

DPW: These appropriations will replace a 30+ year old tow behind compressor used for highway work, perform preventative maintenance on the department's truck fleet and upgrade the mechanic's diagnostic system.

HEALTH: This is a one-time capital expense related to the Tri-Town Health Department's move to Stockbridge. A portion of the expense is being paid by each of the three towns in the shared department.

Article 8 and 9 – Water and Sewer Enterprise. The water and wastewater departments appropriations (debt, operating and water capital) are fully funded through separate enterprise accounts without affecting the tax rate.

Article 10 – Omnibus Non-Departmental Budgets include several annual free cash expenditures that provide funding towards bond payments and other non-profit entities that provide services in the town such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Laural Lake Preservation Association. The annual appropriation to Greenagers will be used towards maintenance of the Ferncliff Reservation.

Article 11 – Each year a 1.5% surcharge is assessed on Real Estate Taxes. These funds must be used for projects related to housing, historic preservation and open space/recreation. State law requires that at least 10% of yearly funds be reserved or appropriated for each of these 3 categories. Each project included an application process and interview by the CPA committee before they referred to town meeting for funding. These projects can provide money for town projects or those of non-profit organizations. Below is a brief synopsis of each project

COMMUNITY GARDEN

To continue to groups mission of providing sustainable food sources for the town of Lee and provide pollinator habitat and education.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Funding request to help repair historical headstones at the Fairmont Cemetery and perform an inventory of the South Lee Cemetery.

YOUTH COMMISSION

Funding request for \$51,250 to renovate outdoor basketball courts at several of the town parks/playgrounds.

STOCKBRIDGE RD PROPERTY

To provide design services for the expansion of trails beginning at Longcope park and to address better invasive species management of the property.

LAND PURCHASE – 1235 Pleasant St.

This appropriation would be used towards the purchase of 4.2 acres of land at 1235 Pleasant Street in conjunction with Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Town of Lee would purchase the property with \$100,000 of matching funds from Fish and Wildlife. The state would provide construction of a parking area with signage and canoe/kayak access to the Housatonic for the Town. The Town of Lee would own the property and Fish and Wildlife would hold a conservation restriction on the land.

ARTICLE 12 – General Stabilization Account – Public Safety Building (2/3 Vote)

This article appropriates \$549,724 of stabilization interest towards the first bond payment of the new public safety building construction. The use of these funds will allow the bond payment to be made without any impact on the tax rate. The stabilization account generates approximately 1.1 million dollars per year of interest.

ARTICLE 13 – Tax Title Payment Plans

The Town of Lee has historically allowed payment plans for owners in tax title due to back taxes owed to the town. Due to new state regulations, the Town must now adopt a bylaw to continue this practice.

ARTICLE 14 – Waste Water Management Plan Grant

This article allows the town to accept a state grant totaling \$179,453 to provide assent management services to the town's waste water infrastructure. The town will match a portion of the grant with in-kind services and will contribute a cash match of \$21,534.

ARTICLE 15, 16 & 17: Zoning Amendments (2/3 Vote)

Zoning Reports - Provided by Planning Board.

15&16 - Amend Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)

This proposed change to the town zoning bylaw aims to conform to a 2024 state law which broadly allows the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) “as of right.”

Lee already allows ADUs, but only after the builder obtains a special permit. This proposal therefore allows for a single ADU to be constructed “as of right” on most of the lots in town. These ADUs may be attached to the principal dwelling or they may be a separate structure, so long as they meet common setback requirements. It is important to distinguish between an ADU, which is protected by state law and a two-family house, which has long been permitted of right in Lee. If someone wants to construct a second or third ADU on a lot, that will still require a special permit.

In more detail, this proposal amends the definition of an ADU to conform to the state law definition. This apparently requires removing the minimum current allowable size of 400 square feet and slightly altering the maximum size. Also, this proposal reduces parking requirements for ADUs, once again in conformity with the state law.

The proposal also states that ADUs cannot be used for short-term rentals. Lee currently has a more permissive rule now which allows attached ADUs to be rented as STRs. Making the rule more restrictive seems justified now in part based on other recent zoning changes. Today, a landowner proposing a conversion of an existing building to include a “mother-in-law” apartment can now freely choose to define the structure as a “two-family dwelling;” and this has long been an allowed use in Lee. This proposed bylaw change is also consistent with the general desire that new ADU units should provide more long-term housing. Finally, under the current bylaw, where a lot contains an ADU, the principal dwelling cannot be used for short-term rentals; and that rule remains in effect here.

17 – Short Term Rentals Amendment

In 2023, the Town adopted a bylaw to help regulate short-term rentals (STRs), including a requirement that property owners register with the Town. These updates are needed to make the bylaw easier to understand, easier to follow, and easier to enforce.

We have also added the need for a Property Manager located within 30 miles to respond to a complaint or an emergency. There are also requirements that STRs be up to date with inspections and approvals from the Fire, Building, and Health Departments. This aligns with state regulations and helps make sure all STRs meet basic safety expectations. These changes were shaped by input from our local departments and also based on what’s worked well in other Massachusetts towns. The goal is to keep the process simple for applicants while giving the Town the tools to ensure STRs are operating responsibly.

EXHIBIT A

CODE	CATEGORY	FY25 REQUESTS	FY26 REQUESTS
100	GENERAL GOVERNMENT		
114	MODERATOR	150.00	150.00
122	SELECTMEN	75,133.53	81,300.00
123	TOWN ADMINISTRATOR	109,234.00	120,235.00
131	FINANCE COMMITTEE	500.00	500.00
132	RESERVE FUND	70,000.00	70,000.00
133	COMPENSATION RESERVE	75,000.00	75,000.00
135	TOWN ACCOUNTANT	121,381.00	129,481.00
141	ASSESSOR	126,675.00	134,300.00
145	TREASURER/COLLECTOR	286,915.00	300,665.00
151	TOWN COUNSEL	50,000.00	52,350.00
155	INFORMATION TECH	109,318.00	136,640.00
161	TOWN CLERK	70,741.00	94,173.00
163	ELECTIONS/REGISTRARS	20,300.00	20,300.00
170	LAND USE DEPARTMENT	75,000.00	136,350.00
171	CONSERVATION COM.	11,850.00	0.00
175	PLANNING BOARD	8,081.00	0.00
176	ZONING BOARD	2,575.00	0.00
195	TOWN REPORTS	3,600.00	3,600.00
196	OFFICE EQUIP MAINT	13,260.00	13,260.00
197	STAFF DEVELOPMENT	4,000.00	4,000.00
	TOTAL GENERAL GOVT		1,372,304.00
		1,233,713.53	
200	PUBLIC SAFETY		
210	POLICE	1,430,520.70	1,517,423.35
231	FIRE/EMS	1,196,545.58	1,300,461.34
241	BUILDING DEPT	138,742.00	156,946.00
242	GAS INSPECTOR	6,512.94	6,681.00
243	PLUMBING INSPECTOR	8,326.30	8,548.00
244	WEIGHTS & MEASURES	8,000.00	11,216.00
245	ELECTRICAL INSPECTOR	8,883.05	9,110.00
291	EMERGENCY MGMT	2,250.00	2,250.00
292	ANIMAL CONTROL	14,203.31	29,369.31
	TOTAL PUBLIC SAFETY	2,813,983.88	3,042,005.00
300	EDUCATION		
300	SCHOOL DEPT	11,179,867.00	11,848,900.00
	TOTAL EDUCATION	11,179,867.00	11,848,900.00

400	PUBLIC WORKS		
421	DPW ADMINISTRATOR	52,795.28	57,000.00
422	HIGHWAY CONST&MAINT	458,724.30	482,549.30
423	SNOW & ICE	473,115.58	488,221.27
424	STREET LIGHTING	46,881.00	54,841.00
425	FORESTRY	47,400.00	47,400.00
433	SANITARY LANDFILL	21,700.00	33,700.00
491	CEMETERY	94,518.24	104,014.74
654	PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS	24,727.90	32,978.51
192	PUB BLDG-AIROLDI BLDG	37,497.67	0.00
193	PUB BLDG-MEMORIAL HL	63,295.19	82,191.00
	TOTAL PUBLIC WORKS	1,320,655.16	1,382,895.82
500	HUMAN SERVICES		
512	BOARD OF HEALTH	765.00	765.00
519	TRI-TOWN LEE	190,460.00	211,597.32
520	TRI TOWN LENOX	253,537.89	277,472.12
521	TRI TOWN STOCKBRIDGE	141,509.52	154,868.16
523	BRIEN CENTER	2,867.00	2,867.00
524	COMMUNITY HEALTH PRG	1,250.00	1,250.00
540	CABLE ADVISORY COMM	150.00	150.00
541	COUNCIL ON AGING	74,901.82	79,476.82
542	LEE YOUTH ASSOCIATION	62,916.00	66,062.00
543	VETERAN'S SERVICES	58,863.72	59,268.00
545	YOUTH COMMISSION	12,000.00	24,320.00
	TOTAL HUMAN SERVICES	799,220.95	878,096.42
600	CULTURE & RECREATION		
610	LEE LIBRARY	326,998.68	336,947.00
620	SANDY BEACH	61,103.00	73,653.00
691	HISTORIC COMMISSION	485.00	485.00
692	WAR MEMORIAL FLAGS	2,900.00	2,900.00
693	CULTURAL COUNCIL	4,800.00	5,200.00
	TOTAL CULT. & REC.	396,286.68	419,185.00
700	DEBT SERVICE		
710	LONG TERM DEBT (P)	111,797.26	0.00
751	LONG TERM DEBT (I)	-	0.00
752	SHORT TERM DEBT (I)	3,100.00	3,100.00
	TOTAL DEBT SERVICE	114,897.26	

800	INTERGOVERNMENTAL		
830	BERK REG PLANNING	5,050.71	5,176.98
	TOTAL INTERGOVT.	5,050.71	5,176.98
900	FIXED COSTS		
	EMPLOYEE BENEFITS		
911	BERK CTY RETIRMENT	1,128,848.00	1,148,848.00
912	WORKERS COMPENSATION	128,658.00	128,658.00
913	UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS	-	34,500.00
914	HEALTH INSURANCE	3,319,051.67	3,541,929.00
915	LIFE INSURANCE	21,410.00	21,000.00
916	MEDICARE	185,255.90	209,437.00
919	POLICE MEDICAL	-	2,033.00
		2,033.00	
	TOTAL EMPLOYEE BEN.	4,785,256.57	5,086,405.00
940	INSURANCES		
945	LIABILITY INSURANCE	134,770.00	194,000.00
	GEN/PROP/LIAB		
	SCHOOL BOARD		
946	OTHER INSURANCE	64,000.00	64,000.00
	POLICE AND		
	FIRE ACCIDENT		
	TOTAL INSURANCES	198,770.00	258,000.00
	TOTAL FIXED COST	4,984,026.57	5,344,405.00
	TOTAL BUDGET	22,847,701.74	24,296,068.22