

TOWN OF WEST TISBURY
FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, August 11, 2026 • 5:00 p.m. • Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Greg Orcutt, Chair; John Christensen, Vice-Chair; Clark Rattet; Skipper Manter

Committee Member Absent: Kim Angell

Staff Present: Chelsea Joiner, Town Accountant; Shawn Ramoutar, Administrator

Public Participant: Tara Whiting

Call to Order

Chair Greg Orcutt called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and, hearing no objection, proceeded with the posted agenda.

Approval of July 14, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Manter moved to approve the July 14, 2026 Finance Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Rattet seconded the motion. Mr. Orcutt invited discussion; none was offered.

Roll Call Vote: Greg Orcutt—Aye; Clark Rattet—Aye; John Christensen—Aye; Skipper Manter—Aye. The motion passed unanimously. (4–0)

New Business

Association of Town Finance Committees Membership

Mr. Orcutt reported that the Town had received a \$174 invoice for annual dues to the Association of Town Finance Committees. He said the dues were included in the budget, thanked Ms. Joiner for bringing the invoice forward, and recommended payment.

Mr. Manter moved to approve payment, and Mr. Rattet seconded the motion.

Discussion: Brief discussion about the amount of the dues; the Chair began to move to the next item. Committee members noted that the pending motion had not yet been voted on. Mr. Christensen called for the question, and Mr. Orcutt conducted the roll call.

Roll Call Vote: Greg Orcutt—Aye; Clark Rattet—Aye; John Christensen—Aye; Skipper Manter—Aye. The motion passed unanimously, 4–0.

Town Administrator Transition

Mr. Orcutt referred to the reported retirement of Town Administrator Jen Rand and asked whether the Town expected the outgoing and incoming administrators to work in tandem during a transition period, which would require salary funding for both positions.

Mr. Manter said the matter had not yet been discussed. He anticipated some overlap and said the cost would have to be paid, but he believed it would likely be handled at Annual Town Meeting rather than through the regular budget because part of the expense would occur in June. He noted that a short overlap between outgoing and incoming administrators is not uncommon.

Mr. Orcutt said he wanted the Committee to be aware of the personnel cost. Mr. Christensen said he hoped to have thorough documentation of Ms. Rand's duties by the transition so the next administrator could begin with a

clear record of the work. Mr. Orcutt observed that town governments across the Island were experiencing significant turnover and that West Tisbury would not be immune to it. No action was taken.

Old Business

School Budget Planning for Fiscal Year 2028

Mr. Orcutt reported that he was still waiting for material from Mark Friedman before reconvening with the chairs of the Chilmark and Aquinnah Finance Committees to develop an agenda for a joint discussion. He said he continued to work on arranging the meeting.

Mr. Christensen said he had come around to Mr. Manter's approach of setting a maximum percentage increase. As an initial example, he suggested 3.5 percent, while emphasizing that he had selected the figure only as a starting point. He recommended discussing a limit first with the other Up-Island Finance Committees rather than presenting it immediately to the School Committee. Mr. Rattet said 3.5 percent appeared to be about right. Mr. Christensen compared the approach to setting a firm organizational spending target that requires departments to find efficiencies.

Mr. Manter said the joint meeting had been discussed for three or four months and was moving too slowly, while preliminary school budgets were likely to be available within a month. He recommended that West Tisbury lead by example, establish a percentage, and send it to the other two Up-Island Finance Committees for their consideration. He estimated that West Tisbury bears approximately 70 to 75 percent of the Up-Island Regional School District expense.

Mr. Orcutt said the Committee could discuss the percentage under the posted school budget planning agenda item. Mr. Manter said 3.5 percent might be too low and suggested a 5 percent increase in total school spending. He emphasized that the limit should apply to school spending rather than the Town assessment because revenue offsets reduce the assessment while the underlying spending drives per-pupil costs and the tax rate. Mr. Rattet preferred beginning with the lower figure, but Mr. Manter said the Committee should identify its top limit and hold to it rather than negotiate upward.

Mr. Christensen asked whether the proposed figure was a maximum increase or a requested reduction and whether it should be based on actual spending. Mr. Manter clarified that he recommended the Committee not support a budget exceeding a 5 percent increase over the prior spending level.

At the Committee's request, Ms. Joiner discussed whether a cap was advisable. She said the Committee could try the approach, although she was unsure whether the District could comply. She recommended comparing the budgets from the prior several fiscal years, reviewing trends in actual spending rather than assessments, and using those data to support a reasonable cap.

Ms. Joiner then reviewed the Up-Island Regional School District budget. She identified the total for Parts A, B, C, and D before offsets as \$19,971,581.19 and calculated that this represented a 10.49 percent increase over the prior year. She calculated 5 percent of the current total as \$998,579, or approximately \$1 million. She noted that the preceding increase had been approximately \$1.895 million, so limiting the next increase to 5 percent would reduce it by roughly \$900,000. Mr. Manter and Mr. Orcutt stressed that the proposal was not a cut to the budget, but a smaller increase.

Mr. Christensen asked how the school-spending increase compared with the change in the Town's tax levy and said it would be preferable for school spending not to rise faster than the amount the Town was charging itself. Ms. Joiner responded that the Town's taxes had increased by approximately 20 percent over the referenced period. Mr. Christensen observed that the comparison remained a moving target because school costs are included in the levy.

Mr. Orcutt summarized the proposal as notifying Chilmark and Aquinnah that West Tisbury was working from a maximum 5 percent increase for the Up-Island Regional School District. Mr. Manter said the Committee should begin with the Up-Island District, where the three towns might have influence, and treat the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School budget as a separate matter. He suggested expanding the approach later if the Up-Island effort proved successful.

Mr. Manter moved to recommend a Fiscal Year 2028 Up-Island Regional School District budget in which total school spending, before offsets, increases by no more than 5 percent. Mr. Rattet seconded the motion.

Discussion: No further comments were made.

Roll Call Vote: Greg Orcutt—Aye; Clark Rattet—Aye; John Christensen—Aye; Skipper Manter—Aye.

The motion passed unanimously. (4–0)

Mr. Orcutt asked Mr. Ramoutar to send him the finalized motion language the following morning so he could forward it accurately. Mr. Manter asked Mr. Orcutt to inform the Chilmark and Aquinnah Finance Committee chairs of the vote, request that their committees consider the same motion, and advise West Tisbury when the matter would appear on their agendas. He said West Tisbury members could attend to explain the position if requested. Mr. Orcutt agreed.

Mr. Christensen said the action properly prioritized the Town's largest expense and avoided waiting until the end of the budget process for a yes-or-no decision. Mr. Rattet said it was a worthwhile effort. Mr. Manter noted that the School Committee could still present any figure it chose, but said new administrators and a new superintendent might make the discussion more productive. Mr. Orcutt agreed and expressed hope that the new superintendent would work constructively with the towns.

Mr. Christensen also raised the longstanding idea of reducing the number of schools in the Up-Island District to one, but he did not offer a motion. Mr. Manter said consolidation had been discussed for approximately 22 to 25 years, particularly as student enrollment declined.

Other Business

Robert's Rules of Order Clarification

Mr. Christensen corrected a statement he had made at the prior meeting. He said that, in a large body such as Town Meeting, discussion generally follows a motion and second. In a small, less formal committee, however, discussion may occur before a motion when members need to understand the matter and develop the motion's language. He acknowledged that his earlier statement that the Committee could not discuss an item before a motion and second was mistaken. Mr. Manter thanked him for the clarification.

Public Comment

Tara Whiting thanked the Committee, from a taxpayer's perspective, for beginning the school budget discussion in August. She said the Town budget had grown significantly due to the circumstances facing the Town and

expressed appreciation that the Committee was again seeking to hold the school budget accountable. She also welcomed the broader idea of establishing spending limits for Town boards and committees and thanked the members for undertaking the work.

Adjournment

With no further business, Mr. Orcutt called for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Manter moved to adjourn. Mr. Rattet seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Greg Orcutt—Aye; Clark Rattet—Aye; John Christensen—Aye; Skipper Manter—Aye.

The motion passed unanimously. (4–0)

The meeting adjourned at 5:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shawn Ramoutar, Board Administrator