

Final Minutes

Discussion 2026 Budget for Natick Community Organic Farm

Thursday February 19, 2025

Attended by:

Phil Rooney – Chairperson of Sub Committee
Hossan Behery – Member of Sub Committee
Julian Munnich – Member of Sub Committee
Paul Carew – Veterans Services Director
Kurt McDowell – Golf Course Manager
Casey Townsend – Executive Director – Natick Community Organic Farm
Lauren Mercer – Director of Parks and Recreation
Angela Snell – Director of Community Services
Gloria Huang – Finance Administration
Tien Nguyen – Finance Administration
Todd Gillenwater – Chair Natick Finance Committee
John Townsend – Deputy Town Administrator/Finance Director

Absent:

Kat Monahan – Member of Sub Committee
Patricia Demeo – Member of Sub Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00. Motion to open meeting made by Todd Gillenwater and seconded by Hossan Behery. Our discussion began at 7:50. This was the fifth department discussed at the meeting. Community Services – consisting of six department budgets were discussed at this meeting. Separate Meeting Minutes have been issued for each discussion.

The discussions in these minutes are a summary of our meeting. The discussions were influenced by the written responses to questions previously submitted prior to the meeting by subcommittee members. We have attached the written responses from department leadership at the end of meeting minutes.

Casey informed us in 2025 that the farm is celebrating its 50th Anniversary.

In 2024 the farm has one course per month on Saturday on various subjects for people who cannot attend during the week.

Casey stated that Avian Flu is not currently an issue for the farm. They have standard operating procedures for their poultry to provide protection.

There are more children from Memorial School attending after school programs. This is due to the proximity of school to the farm.

The farm still has the Senior Shares Program. The program delivers fresh farm foods to seniors in Natick in conjunction with Grace from the Community Services Department.

The farm currently has a pilot program to repurpose selected food waste from school lunch for use at the farm. They will evaluate results (cost savings to farm and schools) later in the year.

The committee's discussion with Casey concluded at 8:03.

The General Government Subcommittee voted 3-0 to recommend favorable action on the 2026 Budget with no override. The guidance from the Finance Committee Chair was to discuss and vote on the 2026 Budget information with no Override.

Natick Community Organic Farm Responses for 2025 Budget Significant Items and 2026 Budget Specific Questions of Finance Committee General Government Sub Committee

2026 Budgets General Questions

The 2026 Budgets (with and without override) as presented by the Town Administration; did you actively participate in the preparation? Do you agree with the data?

The Farm's portion of the budget is comprised only of the salaries for the 3 positions so it is very objective and simple relative to other Town departments. Angela and I did consult on this matter prior to the budget being created.

Can you represent to the public that your ability to safely perform the department duties and service all departments with adequate risk protection can be done without an override? If not, please give detailed reasons.

Yes, we can perform our duties and responsibilities without an override.

Are there any open or pending department legal issues? There are no

open or pending department legal issues.

Natick Organic Community Farm 2025B Significant Items

The new barn officially opened in 2024. Have there been any issues with respect to the barn's operations?

We are very fortunate to have the new barn to accommodate the food for our animals, the space to grow more seedlings and the shop space to work on a multitude of infrastructure projects. The new barn officially opened in May of 2024 and has been integral to having the space to teach the next generation of kids about small-scale farming.

Is there still no before school program?

We discontinued the before school program a few years ago because it was logistically very difficult to have program participants gear up (especially in winter), get integrated into the morning animal chores and then get them off to school in a timely manner.

How is staffing and attendance at the after-school program?

Our after-school programs are staffed at a 6:1 student to teacher ratio and for the 2024 season we enrolled 36 unique students, of which 35 were from Natick Public Schools. Participants in these programs engaged in caring for animals, helping with our maple syrup operation and engaged in “free play” in the woods.

Were any new adult or children programs added in 2024 or 2025?

During the 2024/2025 season, we started a monthly program series called Farm Discovery Days that packed multiple programs into a single Saturday for both adults and kids and featured the following:

- Family Nature Crafts
- Teen Volunteering Opportunities
- Wee Farmers
- Suburban Farmer Series
- Full Moon Hikes

Is Goat scaping still being performed?

Yes. During the 2024 season we continued to help “mow” the area around the water tower located off Union street for a total of 24 days. Over this period, the goats and sheep ate invasives, poison ivy, normal grass and fertilized it with their droppings at the same time.

The limiting factor in moving this type of operation to other Town properties is the use of persistent chemicals that have been sprayed and their potential harmful impacts on our flock.

YTD FY2024 have you experienced staffing reductions due to retirement or resignations? What were the causes of resignations? Were you able to fill these vacancies?

Catherine Sullivan resigned from the position of Assistant Director in January of 2024 and the Town’s HR department, with the support of Susan Ramsey, moved quickly to fill the position and we onboarded Kirstie Beaton in March of 2024.

Last year we were informed the Farm’s weekend visitor numbers were a 25% increase post Covid. Have the number of visitors kept increasing in 2024? What do you expect for 2025?

In a post COVID world, we have seen our visitation numbers reduced to a more traditional level and believe that this trend will continue for the near term. We estimate that between 20,000 and 25,000 people visit the farm on an annual basis. We have, however, seen attendance increase by 35% for our on-farm special events (ex. Maple Magic & Farm Fest) that occur in March and in May.

Other Noteworthy Programs

- We have started a pilot program between the Sustainability Department, Kitchen Services and the Farm to divert usable food waste (ex. lettuce, peels) to our animals. We are piloting this program with the High School and the Memorial School and believe that it will:
 - Reduce the costs for the schools to pay 3rd party groups to remove the waste
 - Reduce the Farm's overall food costs
 - Act as a great learning opportunity for students in the public schools to learn about the impacts of food waste
- We provided employment for 12 Natick-based teens through our Apprenticeship and Teen Work Crew programs.