Town of Rowe

Board of Selectmen

Minutes

Thursday, October 8, 2026 – 3:30 PM

Rowe Elementary School

BOARD OF SELECTMEN: Joanne Semanie, Bill Baker, Ed Silva
FINANCE COMMITTEE: Dan Pallotta, Loretta Dionne, Jeff Bailey
SCHOOL OFFICIALS: Susie Zavotka, Patrick Gonder, Matt Stine, Tara Barnes, Jon Friedman, Jorden Rennell, Kara Kitchen, Kerri McLatchy
TOWN OFFICIALS: Town Administrator Brooke Shulda
AUDIENCE: Cindy Laffond, Lori Ledger, Kathy Atwood, Aaron Poulin, Justine Krumm, Kevin Balawick, Roberta Baker

Call to Order: Chair Semanie called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM

Announcement of recording devices: Two (2) recording devices in use. One utilized by the School Committee and one by the Town Administrator.

3:30 PM

Joint discussion between the Select Board, the School Committee and the Finance Committee re: School Budget & Viability

The meeting was convened as a joint discussion among the School Committee, Select Board, and Finance Committee to review the long-term sustainability of Rowe Elementary School, current budget challenges, enrollment trends, and potential future planning options. Discussion was prompted by concerns previously raised regarding declining enrollment, reduced school choice revenue, staffing levels, fiscal responsibility, and community concerns about school spending.

Fiscal Sustainability and Budget Concerns:
Members of the Select Board and Finance Committee emphasized their continued support for maintaining a school in Rowe but expressed growing concerns regarding the long-term financial sustainability. Discussion focused on the declining number of resident students, the anticipated reduction in school choice enrollment, and the potential loss of school choice revenue that has historically supplemented the school budget. Several members noted that while the Town currently has the financial capacity to support the school, continued increases in per-pupil costs may become increasingly difficult to justify to taxpayers in future years.

Participants expressed concern that if the Town does not develop a sustainable path forward, future Town Meetings could become less supportive of school budgets. Multiple participants stressed that planning should occur proactively rather than waiting until a fiscal crisis develops.

Enrollment Trends and School Choice:
Participants reviewed the ongoing decline in both resident student enrollment and school choice enrollment. Discussion acknowledged that declining birth rates and demographic trends throughout the region are affecting most rural schools, not only Rowe. There was broad agreement that attracting and retaining students remains critical to maintaining a viable school program.

While school choice has been an important factor in sustaining enrollment, concerns were raised regarding future risks associated with school choice students and the potential obligation to fund secondary education costs for those students. The School Committee provided an update regarding pending state legislation intended to clarify and potentially exempt elementary school choice students from certain tuition obligations associated with regional districts.

Educational Programming and Staffing:
School leadership discussed the educational model currently employed at Rowe Elementary School and emphasized the school's commitment to educating the whole child through personalized instruction, intervention services, outdoor learning opportunities, enrichment programs, and other educational experiences that distinguish Rowe from neighboring schools. School administrators noted that many families choose Rowe specifically because of its small-school environment and ability to provide individualized attention and support.

Discussion also focused on staffing levels and student-to-teacher ratios. Questions were raised regarding whether current staffing levels remain sustainable given declining enrollment. School administration acknowledged that enrollment trends will require examination of operational efficiencies but cautioned against reductions that would significantly diminish the educational opportunities and support services that attract students to the school. Participants generally agreed that any future staffing adjustments must balance fiscal responsibility with educational quality.

Regional and Long-Term Planning:
A significant portion of the discussion focused on long-term planning and potential partnerships with neighboring communities. Participants discussed the ongoing Two-District, Eight-Town Sustainability Study and the proposed PK-12 regional school model. Several attendees expressed skepticism regarding the likelihood of the PK-12 concept moving forward, citing financial, governance, and community approval challenges.

Discussion included exploring alternative partnerships with neighboring communities. Participants acknowledged, however, that regional conversations are complex and influenced by historical relationships, community perceptions, local financial constraints, and ongoing regional planning efforts. There was general agreement that Rowe should remain informed about regional developments while also pursuing its own sustainability planning rather than relying solely on external studies.

The School Committee noted that finding long-term solutions will require participation beyond the School Committee alone and will benefit from ongoing collaboration among Town leadership, school officials, and community stakeholders.

Tuition Agreement Discussions:
Participants discussed upcoming tuition agreement negotiations with Mohawk Regional School District and emphasized the importance of understanding the long-term financial impacts of middle and high school tuition arrangements. Finance Committee members encouraged the School Committee to allow participation by representatives of the Select Board and Finance Committee during discussions to ensure all parties have a clear understanding of potential budget impacts.

Community Collaboration and Communication:
Throughout the discussion, participants repeatedly emphasized that all boards share the same fundamental goal: maintaining educational opportunities for students while ensuring fiscal responsibility to taxpayers. Attendees agreed that improved communication and information-sharing among the School Committee, Select Board, and Finance Committee will be important moving forward. Attendees supported continued joint discussions and periodic updates on enrollment trends, budget planning, regional opportunities, and sustainability initiatives.

*The Select Board departed the meeting with the School Committee and Finance Committee and reconvened in the School Cafeteria at 4:46 PM.

New Business:

1. Hazelton Road Bridge - Tree Hearing Determination

The Town Administrator informed the Select Board that the Tree Warden issued a tree removal permit following a hearing held by the Planning Board on 10/06 for the Hazelton Road bridge project.

2. Gracy House Inspection – Insurance Recommendation

The Town Administrator informed the board of the insurance recommendation and other possible options for insurance on the Gracy House Barn following a poor inspection outcome of the barn roof. The TA will provide further information as questions are answered by the next board meeting.

3. Goal Post – AI-Generated Images

Board members discussed whether to include AI-generated content submissions in the Goal Post. Two members expressed that they favored AI content and felt these submissions should not be excluded. One member expressed that the Goal Post should remain original and authentic to preserve its value.

Chair Semanie departed the meeting at 5:06 PM.

The two remaining board members briefly continued the discussion, expressing that they would like to find common ground and a solution to this issue. It was requested to include this topic on the 10/22 meeting agenda to continue the discussion.

Because of Samanie's unexpected departure, the two remaining board members were unsure whether she would return to future meetings and continue as a member of the Selectboard. Silva volunteered to temporarily serve as Chair, and Baker volunteered to review and sign the vendor, payroll, deduction, and NBSU warrants.

Silva and Baker agreed that, to ensure the timely conduct of Town business, the Town Administrator should be authorized to execute contracts for the remainder of the fiscal year. Any new projects, grants, or contracts outside the ordinary course of business is to be submitted to the Select Board for review and approval prior to execution of any contract. The Town Administrator must also notify the Select Board before executing any minor revisions to current contracts and is expected to bring major revisions to a meeting.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE: Selectman Silva moved to authorize the Town Administrator as the authorized signatory for all current town business contracts, project and grant contracts for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2027. Selectman Baker seconded the motion, and it passed. (vote: 2-0-0)

Continued Business: No discussion was held on the following topics.

1. Charlemont/Rowe Fire District: no update.
2. Fire District Expansion: next meeting TBD.
3. Shared EMS Services: next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, 10/14, at 1 pm.
4. Personnel Policy Manual: no update.
5. Public Shade Tree Policy: no update.
6. Bylaw: Limitations regarding non-residents serving on Boards/Committees/Commissions
7. Emergency Shelter – Rowe Elementary School – MOU: no update.
8. Tunnel Road Bridge: no update.

STM Items: No discussion was held on the following topics.

1. Yankee Road Easements
2. Hazelton Road Easements
3. FY27 Berkshire County Retirement System Assessment Increase
4. FY26 unpaid invoices: School, Town Clerk, Amazon, etc.
5. FY25 unpaid FICA: Town of Clarksburg
6. Town Clerk Timestamp

7. Planning Board – Bylaws
8. National Flood Insurance Program - Bylaw

Ongoing Projects:

Roads/Bridges/Culverts:

Hazelton Road Culvert: refer to new business #1.
Steel Brook Road Bridge: no update.
Sibley Road Bridge: no update.
Monroe Hill Road Culvert: no update.
Yankee Road: no update.

Other Projects:

Oil Tank Removal: update available.
Town Hall Boiler Replacement: update available.
National Grid – 10W19: update available.
Streetlight Conversion: no update.
Record Organization: update available.
Verizon Decommissioning of Centrex Lines: no update.

Emergency Planning:

Emergency Planning Meeting: meeting date scheduled for 11/05/2026 at 10:00 AM.
Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan: meeting date TBD.
National Flood Insurance Program: FEMA scheduled to join the 11/05 meeting.

Warrants/Contracts:

1. Review and Sign Warrants - FY27 AP Warrants #05A, #06A and AP, Payroll, Deduction & NBSU Warrants #06, and #7.

Vice-Chair Baker agreed to review and sign the warrants after the meeting adjourned.

2. Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grant – Contract and Supporting Documents

The Town Administrator executed the Woodlands Partnership Grant Contract.

Mail:

1. None.

Minutes:

1. None.

Future Meetings:

1. Thursday, October 22, 2026 – 6:00 PM
2. Thursday, November 05, 2026 – 6:00 PM
3. Thursday, November 19, 2026 – 6:00 PM

Adjournment: 5:58 PM

MOTION TO ADJOURN: Chair Semanie moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:58 PM. The motion, seconded by Selectman Baker, was unanimously approved. (vote: 2-0-0)

Respectfully Submitted,
Brooke E. Shulda, Town Administrator

Approval Date: _____

Approved by:

Ed Silva, Chair

Bill Baker, Vice-Chair

Vacant

Documents:

1. Agenda for October 08, 2026
2. Gracy House Inspection - Insurance Recommendation
3. Woodland Partnership Implementation Grant - Contract and Supporting Documents

Outlook

list of Rowe meeting attendants 10/8

From Julia Cellana <jcellana@nbsunion.com>
Date Fri 10/09/2026 11:10 AM
To Town Administrator <townadmin@rowe-ma.gov>

You don't often get email from jcellana@nbsunion.com. Learn why this is important

Hi!

Here is the list of people in the meeting last night:

Susie Zavotka- SC
Patrick Gonder- SC
Matt Stine- SC
Tara Barnes- Assistant Superintendent
Jon Friedman- Principal
Jordan Rennell- Business Administrator
Dan Pallotta- finance committee
Loretta Dionne- finance committee
Jeff Bailey- finance committee
Ed Silva- BOS
Joanne Semanie- BOS
Bill Baker- BOS
Brooke Shulda- Town Admin
Kara Kitchen- teacher
Kerri McLatchy- teacher
Cindy Laffond
Lori Ledger
Kathy Atwood
Aaron Poulin
Justine Krumm
Kevin Balawick
Roberta Baker

Thanks!

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Julia Cellana

Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

North Berkshire School Union

26 Union Street, Suite 1A