Minutes approved June 11, 2026

DISTRICT COMMITTEE- GREATER NEW BEDFORD REGIONAL REFUSE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 18, 2026

The Greater New Bedford Regional Refuse Management District Committee held a publicly posted meeting on Monday, May 18, 2026, at 8:00 a.m. at the Dartmouth Town Hall, Room 309, 400 Slocum Road, Dartmouth, MA.

District Committee Members in attendance: Chairperson John Beauregard, Caroline Conzatti, Kelley Cabral-Mosher, Michael Gagne, Ed Iacaponi, Daniel Patten.

Also in attendance: Anthony Novelli, Executive Director; Raphael Weschler, Project Manager; Matthew J. Thomas, District Counsel.

1. **Call to order / Salute the flag**

   Chairperson Beauregard called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. and led a salute to the flag.

2. **Legal Notices**

   Mr. Beauregard noted that legal notices of the meeting were posted in Dartmouth and New Bedford more than 48 hours prior to the meeting.

   Chairperson Beauregard read the following statement:

   "Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, any person may make an audio or video recording of this public meeting or may transmit the meeting through any medium. Attendees are therefore advised that such recordings and transmissions are being made, whether perceived or unperceived, by those present, and are deemed acknowledged and permissible."

3. **Roll call of members**

   Chairperson John Beauregard, yes
   Caroline Conzatti, yes
   Michael Gagne, yes
   Ed Iacaponi, yes
   Kelley Cabral-Mosher, yes
   Daniel Patten, yes

4. **Approval of Minutes**

   a. Draft Minutes of February 18, 2026, Meeting, Regular Session

      Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes of the February 18, 2026, meeting, regular session. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne seconded by Ms. Conzatti . MOTION passed 6 – 0.

   b. Draft Minutes of February 18, 2026, Executive Session

Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes of the February 18, 2026, meeting, executive session. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne seconded by Ms. Conzatti . MOTION passed 6 – 0.

5. Warrant Report and Ratification

a. Warrant 16-26, 17-26, 18-26, 19-26, 20-26, & 21-26 ratification

Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to ratify warrant 16-26 dated February 20, 2026, warrant 17-26 dated March 5, warrant 18-26 March 24, 2026, warrant 19-26, dated April 7, 2026, warrant 20-26 dated April 23, 2026, warrant 21-26 dated May 7, 2026. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne, seconded by Ms. Conzatti. MOTION passed 6 – 0.

Mr. Patten asked a question regarding why there was an expense for a car rental in Maine for a SWANA training session. Mr. Novelli clarified that the car was rented in Dartmouth and driven to Maine and back for the training.

6. New Business

a. Discuss the District's Compensation System

Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to discuss the District's compensation plan. MOTION made by Mr. Patten, seconded by Ms. Cabral-Mosher.

Mr. Novelli highlighted how he and Mr. Wechsler met with the Personnel Subcommittee in April 2026 to discuss a potential transition away from the step system and to review comparable pay scale information gathered thus far. He provided a copy of the presentation that was presented to the subcommittee.

Mr. Iacaponi asked what recommendations emerged from the subcommittee discussions. Mr. Gagne stated that certain positions should be placed under employment contracts, outside of a compensation schedule. There should be certain goals and objectives set for these positions, with more of a performance-based contract.

Chairperson Beauregard added historical context of how there was little structure to the District's compensation system before the step system was implemented, and the Committee was unsure where the District's pay at that time compared to similar entities. This is why they hired the Collins Center to do a study, and this served as the impetus for the current setup. He compared the District to a small company instead of a municipality with hundreds of employees, and the existing system has proven problematic when attempting to attract and retain talented employees. He believes the District should give its leadership more flexibility in this area and should move away from the step system towards one which is more competitive in the face of rising salaries in both the public and private sector. He added that the District's competition for quality employees isn't necessarily the City of New Bedford or the Town of Dartmouth, but more so other private entities in the waste & recycling industry.

Mr. Patten indicated willingness to review alternatives to the current system but believes what is being proposed will ultimately cause more problems. The Committee had approached the Collins Center believing that District pay was behind other municipalities and other landfills. The Collins Center then reviewed other towns such Attleboro, New Bedford, Bourne, Fall River, and Dartmouth. They had suggested that the District adopt 10-15 steps, and the District ultimately decided on 8 steps. The step system was designed so that when a District employee reached the top step, it would be comparable to the top step in other areas. Employees were placed within the schedule to receive an increase over their previous pay. He

then mentioned that longevity pay was added in subsequent years, largely in response to complaints by employees regarding the step system.

Mr. Patten believes that the step system has worked in paying what each person would be paid in comparison to other cities and towns. The Collins report did not include a cost of living adjustment (COLA), which was later added. The theory at that time was that in 5 years the District pay would be comparable with salaries. The COLAs have been based on Dartmouth and New Bedford. He reiterated his belief that the current system is working, and acknowledged that it needs to be reviewed every 4-5 years. In the past, steps have been added to the schedule to allow for increases if there were issues with promotions or if the position was difficult to hire for.

Mr. Patten was not in favor of the proposed system where employees would receive an annual COLA and merit-based increase. He believes personalities and gossip can influence this system and these decisions. He then cited that in the federal government, managers are given a certain dollar amount for bonuses, which is then distributed to the employees based on their recommendation. He cited a scenario where this caused a lot of issues because some people received higher bonuses than others. Mr. Iacaponi acknowledged that this structure of increases could create other issues and that he has observed similar problems. Mr. Patten reiterated his belief that the current system is a good system and is working, but needs to be reviewed every so often to ensure that other changes haven't happened.

Ms. Conzatti stated that if the current system is designed to make the pay structure for District employees competitive in the broader market, but the latest evidence is showing that this is not the case, the current system does not seem to be accomplishing that goal. Mr. Patten replied that the Committee has always compared pay to other municipalities, as opposed to the broader market. He believes that one employee who is complaining and doesn't like the current structure doesn't mean the system needs to be changed.

Mr. Iacaponi asked about the FY2027 budget and the removal of the step system. Mr. Thomas stated that during previous meetings it had been agreed that the Step system should be removed because it had caused persistent problems every year, leading the Personnel Subcommittee to evaluate alternatives. Mr. Gagne acknowledged that the Personnel Subcommittee had reviewed the presentation and documents being considered. He highlighted that typical COLAs of 2-3% are problematic in current times. The subcommittee had also discussed the potential for transitioning towards more of a performance-based system, but did not take an official vote and wanted to discuss with the full Committee first given the significance.

Mr. Patten stated that he was ok with offering bonus money, not bonus percentages.

Mr. Iacaponi asked if there was an opinion on the system, noting that step systems are often problematic and that creating more steps doesn't always fix the problems.

Ms. Cabral-Mosher commented that it was important to look outside of strictly municipalities when comparing the District's pay, highlighting the importance of sustaining the quality workforce that the District has established, especially given recent trends in the economy. She commended the research conducted by Mr. Novelli and Mr. Wechsler, and although the personnel subcommittee did not formalize a recommendation, it was agreed that it was time to look towards the broader market in discussing what is necessary to hire and retain quality people and to take into consideration what was happening to the economy.

Mr. Gagne added that data gathered from the Town of Bourne's landfill staff is the best available data, because the landfill is publicly owned and the staff are public employees with similar benefits to District employees. He urged that comparing District salaries to Dartmouth

DPW employees or New Bedford DFFM employees are not a good comparison. He was on the Committee when the Collins report was conducted, and never thought it was comprehensive. He added that the Executive Director, Operations Manager, and Project Manager should have contracts. Mr. Patten agreed. Mr. Gagne believes that a step system could be used for the other employees, but the comparables should be aligned with pay scales in the Town of Bourne. He added that in his experience with compensation studies, they are relatively useless after two years. He cited a recent local example where the compensation study was out of date before it was even adopted, due to ongoing discussions and negotiations. Worse, the study did not fix the hiring issues it sought to cure. He reiterated that the best available comparison for District salaries is the Town of Bourne's landfill.

Mr. Wechsler commented that based upon his private-sector experience, including Morgan Stanley and Apple, merit-based systems can succeed when administered properly. Mr. Wechsler acknowledged the risks associated with such systems, but expressed confidence in the capability and integrity of the District leadership and believes the criteria implemented would be evidence based.

Chairperson Beauregard highlighted the importance of flexibility. There are 16 full-time employees and 3 are expected to be under contract, so the compensation system really applies to the remaining 13 people. He believes the step system is limiting, and questioned Mr. Patten's comment that the step system is working, because issues have come back to this Committee at least 3-4 times in recent memory, when the initial objective was to establish a system that didn't need to be changed. He trusts the District leadership and does not believe bonuses or increases would be improperly awarded to friends, but instead would be awarded fairly and appropriately.

Chairperson Beauregard also cited Joe Soares, the Lead Mechanic/Landfill Gas Technician as an invaluable employee to the District's landfill operations. He believes that the step system has overly complicated the District's compensation system, and believes that the best solution is to pay key employees more to demonstrate their value and that the District wants to retain them. He understands that step systems are appropriate for cities and towns due to their nature and number of employees, but thinks it is overly complicated for the District as a small business with 16 employees. The Committee keeps changing the criteria for the step system to try and fit what it ultimately wants.

Mr. Patten replied that the Committee has changed the criteria to keep the current employees happy, largely due to complaints received. He added that lower steps could continue to be eliminated, and additional steps added at the end to address gaps in the system.

Ms. Conzatti commented that a key purpose of this discussion is to be proactive and to not lose key employees. Whether or not they are complaining, the evidence is showing that they are not making what they should and the Committee is trying to get ahead of this.

Mr. Novelli pointed out that about half of the District staff are currently at the top step of the step system. With the current system, they would continue to only receive the annual COLA adjustments and will continue to fall farther and farther behind the market, especially as the real increase in the cost of living is far greater than the COLA increases that have been awarded. The research conducted demonstrated that the Town of Bourne's pay for comparable positions in landfill operations was meaningfully above the current pay of the District, and that in many cases the Bourne starting pay is only marginally below that of District employees with 20+ years.

Mr. Gagne commented that Mr. Patten raised a good point, and that perhaps removing the bottom 3 steps and adding 3 more on the end could have a benefit. If they are nearing retirement age, there is an incentive to stay for 3 years of higher pay to maximize retirement

benefits. Chairperson Beauregard commented that this was simply repeating the process, and that the Committee would then be having the same conversation in a few years. He expressed concerned that employees who are currently at the top step and are solely getting the COLAs are losing money due to the true costs of living increases. This dynamic forces employees to look elsewhere, which he is trying to avoid.

Chairperson Beauregard reiterated the importance of allowing flexibility and how in the private sector there are not steps nor boxes. To hire someone today it is often necessary to pay ~25% more than pre-COVID, citing some recent examples.

Mr. Patten suggested changing the benchmarks for COLA adjustments from using Dartmouth and New Bedford to the New England CPI. Mr. Wechsler asked if that would include food, energy, and health insurance premiums.

Ms. Cabral-Mosher cited the presentation and previous discussions during subcommittee meeting, noting the importance of looking to the private sector outside of just New Bedford and Dartmouth. She acknowledged that District employees do hard work that many are not willing to do, and that has great value to the sustainability of local communities.

Ms. Cabral-Mosher also expressed the view that it is not 'complaining' when people express concern about their pay, as they are concerned about the financial well-being of themselves and their families. That is an important note to understand, and she believes people should be asking these types of questions and the leadership should have answers with clear paths to get pay increases and bonuses. Ms. Cabral-Mosher agreed with Chairperson Beauregard in how the step system has been repeatedly revisited during her time on the Committee without a long-term solution.

Attorney Thomas asked about the compensation system before the step system and how raises were applied. Mr. Iacaponi replied that when he was with the District previously, it changed every couple of years. Mr. Novelli stated that from what he has gathered, there was no defined system and raises were somewhat arbitrary. Adding some sort of structure seems to be one reason why the District wanted to implement the step system, and he added that some sort of structure is good. Ms. Cabral-Mosher agreed with the importance of having structure and leadership that can be trusted to implement the system in a fair and equitable way.

Mr. Patten acknowledged that District employees were underpaid before implementing the Collins Center study, and that the step system provided a plan for bringing them up to a comparable pay.

Mr. Thomas offered a summary of the discussion thus far. First, there should be some type of structure. Second, it appears that the majority do not feel the step system is that structure. Third, he is unsure of what is being proposed as the new structure and asked the group for an agreed upon proposal with more structure. Regarding the concern about not paying people enough, he has seen issues happen in New Bedford in the past, and more recently in Fall River. People are frequently trained and then leave for higher paying positions in other departments.

Mr. Novelli commented that it was his attempt in the presentation to lay a proposal with some structure, but that still granted flexibility. He suggested an agreed upon starting salary for each position, with annual COLA adjustments and performance reviews instead of step increases. Currently, most employees receive COLA increases and step increases. The COLA increases would remain, with a merit-based increase instead of a step increase. This could provide some structure, with a defined starting salary and potentially defined range, while allowing flexibility to advance.

Mr. Patten asked about a hypothetical situation in which a District employee with 20 years of experience is earning $70,000 a year and there is a vacancy in his position. Should an applicant or new hire with 3 years of experience be offered a starting salary of $70,000? Mr. Novelli pointed out that if the starting pay is $70,000 then the senior person should be paid more.

Mr. Iacaponi cited extensive experience in both the private sector and public sector, with the best solution being regular review of any system every couple of years. Especially in the recent environment, 4-5 years can be too long. He was not a supporter of a bonus system in which a sum of money is granted to be distributed among employees.

Mr. Thomas suggested that a compromise could include competitive, defined pay ranges for each position, with an annual COLA increase, as well as an annual range of merit-based increase. He agreed that New England CPI is a good benchmark for COLA adjustments. He clarified that the District does not give bonuses.

Mr. Thomas revisited Mr. Patten's point citing a salary of $70,000 for an employee of 20 years to which Chairperson Beauregard argued that that is the reality we live in, it is a free market system and pointed to professional sports teams who have no choice but to offer very high salaries to attract and retain talent to remain competitive. Chairperson Beauregard offered the insight that every employee a company tries to hire is and should be considered a 'free agent'.

Mr. Gagne referenced page 61 of the packet illustrating the cost of living in MA and how his biggest concern for FY2027 and how the health insurance increase alone will wipe out the COLA. COLAs are intended to stop the negative effects of rising costs on the ultimate take-home pay. A 10% increase in health insurance alone will completely strip a 3% COLA. He urged that the wages effective July 1 should be revisited so that employees don't end up with less take-home pay that they currently receive.

The current FY2027 budget used a weighted 5.5% COLA/step increase across the board. Chairperson Beauregard commented that the increase may need to be at least 10% to keep up with recent gas price increases.

Now the marching orders to Mr. Novelli and Mr. Wechsler are to formulate specific recommendations and present those conclusions to the Personnel Subcommittee which is flexible, is structured, and is competitive. Ms. Conzatti added that this is likely to include salary bands based on level of responsibility. The bands may not necessarily be for each position. Mr. Iacaponi and Chairperson Beauregard both offered insights into the competitive marketplace for talent today and how flexibility can help to address this. Chairperson Beauregard compared the payroll at his company to 5 years ago, noting that it has almost doubled in that time span. When you bring in a new person at a higher pay, you have to raise the pay of senior staff as well. He acknowledged that it can cost twice as much to hire a replacement and get them up to speed compared to losing an employee.

Mr. Patten suggested that the team think about what the starting pay for a job opening would be posted at in the new system.

Mr. Iacaponi revisited the idea of dropping the lowest 3 steps in one grade to accomplish the desired raises, but said that ultimately seems like there is no right answer. He suggested that a system be implemented where the Committee can deal with frequent change.

Mr. Novelli summarized the fact that discussions can continue regarding the compensation system moving forward, however a majority of employees will still be paid below the market

rate in FY 2027 based on the existing budget. He highlighted Bourne's hourly pay for landfill positions being higher that the District's, and additionally Bourne employees have the opportunity for significant overtime, so their gross pay is greatly above the District's. Mr. Novelli highlighted equipment operators' salary comparison between the District and Bourne. There were comments that overtime should not be factored into the conversation. Mr. Wechsler argued that the gross pay figures for Bourne should be considered.

Ms. Conzatti summarized that there are certain employees deserving of July 1 raises. Mr. Novelli confirmed. Mr. Novelli stated that he would work provide specific recommendations with total cost increases for the next Committee meeting.

Mr. Gagne and Mr. Patten discussed the FY2027 COLA applied of 3% being low compared to more recent CPI data and suggested that this be revisited ahead of July 1 as well. Given that the District needs to adopt its budget in January, it was suggested that an additional line item be included in the budget to account for COLA increases beyond what is approved in January.

b. <u>Staff Report</u>

Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to receive the staff report. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne , seconded by Ms. Cabral-Mosher. MOTION passed 6 – 0.

Mr. Novelli discussed the exploration of GPS and drone technologies to improve landfill compaction and efficiency. This can help maximize available airspace in the landfill.

Mr. Novelli raised the Recycling Reimbursement Fund, which is made available to the District's members for waste reduction initiatives. He highlighted the high and increasing turnout at recycling events and cited a few ideas for expanding waste diversion initiatives with some additional funds. The last grant of $25,000 was awarded in 2023 and he requested that an additional $25,000 be made available in grant funds to New Bedford and Dartmouth from this Reserve. The amount is divided by the most recent percentage of solid waste delivered to the landfill by each community.

Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to appropriate $25,000 from the Recycling Reimbursement Reserve to be made available in grant funds to Dartmouth and New Bedford for the purpose of increasing food waste diversion and/or improvements to their recycling facilities. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne, seconded by Ms. Cabral Mosher. MOTION passed 6 – 0.

Chairperson Beauregard asked for a motion to accept the staff report and place it on file. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne, seconded by Mr. Patten. MOTION passed 6 – 0.

7. <u>Executive Session</u>

Chairperson Beauregard requested a MOTION that the District Committee go into Executive Session pursuant to General Law chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(7) and G.L. c. 4, Section 7, Clause Twenty-Sixth(d) to discuss inter-agency or intra-agency memoranda or letters relating to policy positions being developed by the District, and also pursuant to G.L.c 30A, Section 21(a)(3) because discussion in Open Session may have a detrimental effect on the District's litigating position in pending litigation, and then reconvene in Open Session. The minutes of this Executive Session will become public once the policy positions being developed by the District have been fully developed. MOTION made by Mr. Gagne, seconded by Mr. Patten.

The Committee entered into Executive Session at 9:07 a.m.

The Committee returned to Open Session at 9:33 a.m.

8. Items That Could Not Be Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance

None

9. Set Meeting Schedule

The next meeting is set for **June 11, 2026**. July 9th was scheduled for the subsequent meeting.

10. Adjourn

Chairperson Beauregard requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. MOTION to adjourn made by Mr. Patten, seconded by Mr. Gagne. All voted in favor. MOTION passed 6 – 0.

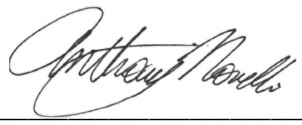
The meeting was adjourned at 09:35 am.

MEMOS

6A. Vote to adopt Draft FY 2027 Budget dated 01/15/2026
Attachment – Draft Fiscal Year 2027 Budget
Attachment – Income Statement as of June 20, 2026

6D. Staff Report dated 01/15/2026
Attachment – Income Statement as of 5/14/2026
Attachment - March 2026 New Bedford Water Bill Insert
Attachment - May 2, 2026, HHW Drop-Off Day Flyer
Attachment - Mending, Dartmouth, and Patching - Oh My! Flyer

Approved by vote of the District Committee on June 11, 2026.



Anthony Novelli, Executive Director