ADOPTED Minutes
August 26, 2026
12:32 PM – 2:21 PM
District Office & Zoom

Commissioners Present: K. Stevens, *Chair;* S. Malinowski, *Secretary;* M. Doyen *Vice-Chair, Treasurer*
Staff Present: J. Theodore, *Operations Supervisor;* C. Panza, *Business Office Administrator*
Public Present: R. Claflin
The meeting began at 12:32

1. Public Budget Preparations

Professionalization framework

- The public budget presentation came with an overview of the District's multi-year transition from a hands-on working board to a governance/support role, with staff running day-to-day operations with a broad support network (accounting, legal, communications, IT, mechanical etc.) Board members do not direct staff individually — direction comes through board votes and flows through the manager. Additional professionalization progress noted: an updated handbook, work on the strategic plan and governing documents, and a stable chain of command are now in place.
- In keeping with this transition, the budget presentation was led by the manager and business office administrator, with the goal of keeping institutional knowledge in-house through board turnover. The Operations Manager brings operations experience across aviation, pharmaceuticals, and the military. The Business Office Administrator brings 25 years of school-district administrative experience (state reporting, documentation, grant line items).

Revenue

- Proposed tax revenue increase is just under 1%, coming in below the ~2% municipal tax cap.
- The budget balances without drawing on the investment account. Background: a landfill-capping bond repayment historically left the district with surplus funds that were used to artificially reduce costs; the district now maintains a fund balance of roughly $300,000 as a reasonable contingency and no longer uses reserves to subsidize operations.
- Minor revenue lines: user fees (appliances, mattresses, compost-station fees) held steady, and the landfill lease brings in $2,000/year during the lessee's feasibility phase, rising to roughly $13,000/year in the operation phase.

Payroll & Benefits (About Half the Budget)

- Salaries and wages: a proposed decrease, reflecting a shift towards adjusted seasonal hours and staffing
- Health insurance: a ~10% carrier increase this year. The district pays 100% of employee coverage, a deliberate benefit so no employee is healthcare insecure.
- Despite the insurance increase, overall payroll shows a net reduction.

Operations & Hauling

- Waste leaves the island in three cost stages: ferry transport, the hauling contract, and tipping/processing fees. The ferry has added a fuel surcharge, and per-haul fees continue to rise.
- The core cost-reduction strategy is fewer hauls: maximizing compaction, reducing recycling volume, and diverting food scraps (which could reduce household trash by up to ~30% per state data) into on-site compost given back to the community.

- This summer shows a large uptick in visitors, waste, and compost volume; staff are tracking whether MSW hauls decline as the food scrap program grows.
- Several 2026 lines show large apparent jumps due to re-categorization of previously commingled costs; the overall picture changed little, but the new line items now show accurately where money goes (e.g., tipping fees, ferry shipping).
- Hauling contracts lock in pricing for two- to three-year periods; RFPs are issued every couple of years, though typically only one hauler responds. A special agreement with the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Resource Recovery Authority (SCRRRA) allows the District's municipal solid waste to be accepted in Connecticut.

Other Operating Lines

- Business insurance lines are freshly quoted and accurate, with auto coverage now broken out; only a slight increase carried.
- Professional fees ran over budget in recent years due to legal, HR, consulting, and IT work required to get the District to its current state; these should decrease going forward.
- Marketing/advertising remains minimal (flyers, food scrap cards, the annual box-holder mailer); website work is carried under professional fees.
- Employee expenses include the boot program, mainland parking, and training (including the annual New York State conference)
- Building and equipment lines (fuel, utilities, propane) are on pace; a possible renaming/merge of small miscellaneous building categories was discussed.

Compost, Firewood & Equipment

- Compost operations are the larger program area: brush grinding and firewood processing make up the bulk (~$80K). The District has shifted from owning expensive processing equipment (with costly repairs) to outsourcing this work.
- Firewood processing now has its own budget category
- Heavy equipment (loader, backhoe, skid steer) is 20+ years old; a maintenance line is budgeted and an outside mechanic services the machines. Machine hours are tracked. Future options discussed: used equipment and auctions, pre-identified rental sources as a contingency plan

Administrative, Landfill & Capital

- Administrative costs bumped last year for the IT installation (fiber optic, new computers, Google Workspace, official fiwmd.net email addresses); ongoing support costs remain, but the category shows an overall reduction.
- New line items were created for the Transfer Station so the actual costs of that site are tracked in one place (the causes an apparent jump due to the re-categorization, with the overall number up only about 1%).
- Landfill maintenance continues (annual mowing to protect the cap from root penetration).
- Capital expenses: the reserve line was reduced and some items (e.g., the roof) pushed out. A rolling five-year CapEx plan tied to the strategic plan was previewed; items are flexible placeholders and can shift year to year.
- The full rubble bunker was flagged as a future Compost Station site issue, emptying it or capping it depending on long-term site needs.

The regular meeting began at 1:20

3. Additions to the Agenda

Sanger Fund / invasive species update.

4. Public Comment

Two public comments were relayed by staff:

- A resident praised transfer station service (staff come out and help, take large items) and suggested the recycling containers be labeled more clearly — the existing magnets are old and hard to read. New signage/labeling will be explored.

- A new resident calling for directions could not find the station: the box-holder mailer lists phone numbers but no street addresses. Addresses will be added to next year's box-holder mailer.

5. Meeting Minutes

Approval of prior minutes was postponed to the next meeting.

6. Warrant & Transfer

A motion by M. Doyen to approve the payables of $73,104.43 and to transfer $75,000 from the investment to the operating account was duly seconded by S. Malinowski. On a vote of 3-0, the motion carried.

7. Business Office Report

Audits

The 2024 audit is near completion with the auditing firm; the 2025 engagement contract will be signed and work begun as soon as the 2024 audit is complete. The goal is to complete the 2025 audit within this year so the 2026 audit can start on time.

Security Upgrades

QuickBooks Online migration is complete; two laptops were purchased (one per station) and all staff now have official fiwmd.net email addresses. The old, slow tower computer at the transfer station will be retired once staff are comfortable on the new laptop. Security cameras are now installed.

8. Manager's Report

The three seasonal summer helpers finished last week; operations continue with the year-round crew as island activity begins its seasonal taper.

RFPs for material processing will be prepared and posted.

A discussion about staffing, and station hours were deferred to the next meeting. The District currently provides ~80 hours of weekly coverage across seven days with two full-time and two part-time station staff.

9. Additional Reports

Communications & Diversion Programs

Boat shrink wrap and battery collection articles were published on Fishnet this spring. More updates planned.

Suggestion to republicize the Compost program: free 7-gallon kitchen buckets, what can go in them, and the free finished compost are not universally known even among engaged residents. Other ideas included a community talk, possibly at the Compost Station.

A textile recycling program remains under discussion: supply exists on-island with community members and thrift shops. A pilot program was started a few years ago and can be revisited. The missing link is volunteers to transport material to off-island destinations (animal shelters, insulation/shredding plants). Several community members have expressed interest in helping.

Standing subcommittees that include community volunteers was raised.

Native Plant Berm Project & Grants

The berm bordering the neighborhood is blanketed with invasives (porcelain berry, honeysuckle, among others, with some valuable trees worth saving). The project would remove invasives and replant with native species to reduce noise, dust, and odor impacts on neighbors. The project includes working with the Conservancy to develop methods to break down knotweed and other invasives both originating at and brought to our Compost Station to render these materials inert locally. A landscape architect is drafting a management plan to be implemented over time. The Sanger Fund has granted 2k for the effort and additional funding will be pursued with the DEC.

A DEC recycling coordinator salary grant was also noted as an opportunity to explore.

Water Loop Update

The water company provided the requested beneficiary map indicating properties with no existing service benefit most (their projects cannot proceed without the loop), dead-end-line properties benefit next, and everyone within the surrounding circle gains stronger pressure and improved fire-fighting capability.

The District sits inside the benefit circle but not in the highest-benefit tier and it was generally agreed that any contribution would need to be proportional to taxpayer benefit.

10. Executive Session

R.Claflin left the meeting

A motion by M. Doyen to adjourn to executive session at 2:21 for HR was duly seconded by S. Malinowski. On a vote of 3-0, the motion carried.

A motion by M. Doyen to adjourn executive session and the meeting at 3:07 was duly seconded by S. Malinowski. On a vote of 3-0, the motion carried

Respectfully Submitted by,

S. Malinowski

August 31, 2026