

Town of Orange, Vermont
Town Budget Forum
April 20, 2026
Orange Town Hall

In Attendance: Steve Simpson, Carmella Tucker, and Diane Hallenbeck, Lisa Allard, Scott Edwards, Kevin Wilson, John McNeil, Sue Perreault, Michael Tagliavia, Eric Holmgren, Ginny Raboin, Michael Raboin Jr., Philo Raboin, Chuck and Eileen Houle, Emily Ruff, Rod Coronado, Simon Davies, Bob Maddock, Mike Concessi, Joe Blais, Nate Choge

Absent: Kristin Paya

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at **6:00 PM** by **Steve Simpson**.
Steve reviewed the rules and format for the meeting.

2. Budget Overview

- Updated budget booklets were made available.
- Fund balances were discussed; figures are accurate as of December 31st but are unaudited currently.
- Carmella noted audit cost line item increased due to completing four years of audits in the current year.

3. MERP Grant Discussion

- Grant applied for approximately 3 years ago for energy improvements to all three town buildings.
- Planned upgrades include heat pumps for heating and cooling.
- Tank removal needs to be completed before the project can begin. Tank removal discussion including why tanks were not previously removed.
- Grant funds expected to be reimbursed as invoices are submitted.

4. Capital & Safety Improvements

- Fire system discussed:
 - Estimated cost ~\$30,000 (not sprinkler system).
 - Lower-cost alternatives (~\$7,000 systems) mentioned.
 - Fire Marshal recommended obtaining quotes.
 - Board open to seeking additional bids.

5. FEMA Funding

- Ongoing FEMA reimbursements from 2024 flood:
 - Estimated between \$200,000–\$400,000.
 - Some projects remain open.
- Discussion on whether to include anticipated funds in the budget:
 - Board position: funds should not be budgeted until received.
 - Future funds expected to return to Highway Fund.

6. Highway Fund & Use of Funds

- Approximately \$174,000 accumulated in Highway Fund.
- Carmella explained use of ~\$87,500 to offset taxes.
- Discussion included:
 - Whether funds should be used for one-time vs. operating expenses.
 - Sustainability concerns.
 - Clarification that funds represent accumulated surplus (“savings”).

7. Audit Status

- Multi-year audit (2022–2025) underway with Batchelder Associates PC.
- Audits had previously not been completed.
- Carmella acknowledged significant work completed to bring records up to date.
- Future audit costs expected to decrease.

8. Equipment Discussion

- Road grader:
 - Over 12,000 hours.

- Considered beyond useful life.
- Proposal to lease to own 7 years discussed.

9. Budget Concerns & Public Comment

Topics raised by residents included:

- Budget increases year-over-year
- Use of reserve funds
- Staffing and temporary help costs
- IT service necessity
- Rising health insurance costs (+\$12,000)
- Delinquent tax revenue discrepancies (under review with NEMRC)
- Insurance budgeting adjustments
- Fire department billing structure

General sentiment:

- Some residents felt the budget was too high and could be reduced.
- Others noted rising costs across all sectors.

10. Fund Balance Goal

- Carmella stated a goal of maintaining approximately **2 months operating reserve**.

11. Legislative Discussion – Michael Tagliavia, Vermont Representative

- **Act 181 (Road Rule / Tier 3 mapping):**
 - Concerns raised about impact on rural towns.
 - Multiple towns submitting opposition letters.
 - Request for Orange Selectboard to consider sending a letter.
- Legislative Breakfast announced: Scheduled for Saturday at 9:00 AM.

12. Closing Comments

- Carmella thanked residents for participation and support.
- Board committed to maintaining budget discipline moving forward.

13. Adjournment - Meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM