



# BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Ways and Means  
Benjamin J. Weber, Chair

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One City Hall Square 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Boston, MA 02201 ♦ Phone: (617) 635-3040 ♦ [city.council@boston.gov](mailto:city.council@boston.gov)

## REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

May 27, 2026

Dear Councilors,

The Committee on Ways and Means was referred the following docket for consideration:

***Docket #1030, Message and order authorizing the City of Boston to appropriate the amount of Forty-Seven Million One Hundred Twenty Thousand Two Hundred Ninety-Two Dollars (\$47,120,292.00) for purposes of funding the Snow & Winter Management appropriation to meet operating expenses of the fiscal period commencing July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026***

This matter was sponsored by Mayor Michelle Wu and was referred to the Committee on May 20, 2026.

### ***Summary of Legislation***

***Docket #1030*** is a message and order authorizing the City of Boston to appropriate the amount of Forty-Seven Million One Hundred Twenty Thousand Two Hundred Ninety-Two Dollars (\$47,120,292) for purposes of funding the snow and winter management appropriation needed to meet operating costs for fiscal year 2026 (FY26).

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44 § 31D allows any town or city to incur liability and make expenditures in any fiscal year in excess of available appropriations for snow and ice removal provided the following: such expenditures are approved by the chief administrative officer and the appropriation for such purposes in said fiscal year equaled or exceeded the appropriation for said purposes in the prior fiscal year.

In FY25 the City budgeted \$22,468,938 in snow and winter management; in FY26, the City budgeted \$22,676,037, thereby allowing it to exceed appropriations for FY26.

This appropriation requests appropriating funds from the budgetary fund balance, which has been certified by the Director of Accounts (within the State's Department of Revenue) pursuant to Chapter 59 § 23 of Massachusetts General Laws. The budgetary fund balance (commonly referred to as "free cash") is the portion of available reserves, generated to a considerable degree by annual operating surpluses, which the City can responsibly appropriate for spending. The appropriation of free cash certified by the Department of Revenue is only considered to offset certain fixed costs (such as pensions and other post-employment benefits, or OPEB) or to fund extraordinary and non-recurring events as determined by the City auditor. This appropriation is categorized as the latter.

In recent fiscal years, prior appropriations from the budgetary fund balance were for the OPEB trust fund and the Housing Accelerator fund. Please see below for a history of the budgetary fund balance as certified by the Director of Accounts within the Department of Revenue.



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<i>Date Certified</i>	<i>Amount</i>
April, 2021	\$428.1M
May, 2022	\$366
May, 2023	\$440.7M
May, 2024	\$514.5M
June, 2025	\$552.2M

The most recently certified balance is **\$601M**.

### ***Information Received at Hearing***

The Committee held a hearing on Wednesday, May 27, 2026 to discuss Docket #1030. Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, City of Boston, and Jim Williamson, Budget Director, City of Boston testified on behalf of the administration.

Director Williamson provided a brief overview of the docket being discussed. He reiterated the Administration continues to value the shared responsibility with the City Council to safeguard the City's limited public resources and serve the City's residents. He provided an overview of the impacts of this appropriation alongside the appropriation being discussed in the afternoon (Docket #1031).

Director Williamson stated the funding source that will support these appropriations will be free cash, which has been most recently certified at \$601M. The City started FY26 by budgeting \$40M for the Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) trust fund, a practice it has employed for several fiscal years. Combining the OPEB appropriations with the two appropriations aforementioned (Docket #1030, the subject of this hearing, and Docket #1031, the BPS appropriation) the total drawdown on the balance will be \$110M. Additionally, the FY27 budget includes another \$40M appropriation to the OPEB trust fund, meaning the City will draw down \$150M from the free cash balance over two fiscal years, or approximately 24% of the balance.

The snow and winter management supplemental will cover snow and ice contractors for the Public Works Department (PWD), Boston Public Schools (BPS), Parks and Recreation, and the Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH). The City provides for snow and ice removal for all roads open to public travel, municipal parking lots, public stairways, and is the landlord for City owned lots, requiring the clearing of sidewalks in front of said lots. Expense items include contractors for emergency response and post-storm removals, staff overtime (which includes managing contractors and driving trucks for roadway treatment), roadway treatment/salt, the renting and operating of snow melters, City equipment repair and debt payment (for equipment such as snow spreaders and plow blades), and weather monitoring costs. The renting and operating of snow melters was a unique one time expense, as the City moves excess snow from major thoroughfares into snow farms, which are often housed at City owned assets (like the municipal golf course). As the City reduces the number of assets under its control, the number of snow farms has reduced, requiring the need for snow melters to make space in storage areas.



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Director Williamson provided context for the increased snow removal costs. He stated the City is not alone amongst Massachusetts municipalities in requesting a free cash appropriation to cover snow and winter management costs. Nearly 80% of Massachusetts communities had to secure additional funding to cover snow-related costs exceeding their budgets. He stated the reporting deadline for the utilization of said free cash is not until September 15th. He reiterated the sensitivity of municipal budgets to snow costs, evidenced by the procedures and State laws enforced by the Department of Revenue to manage snow costs.

Director Williamson provided context for the 2025-2026 winter season. In this season, Boston accumulated a total of 61.6 inches of snow, marking it the coldest and snowiest winter in 11 years. Temperatures averaged -2.1 degree Fahrenheit below normal, reversing a 10-year warming trend (+3 degrees Fahrenheit over normal). The City managed 20 distinct winter weather events this winter, requiring continuous ice response. The following are major 2025-2026 winter storms: January 25-26 (23.2 inches of snow in a 36-hour window), February 22-24–Winter Storm Hernando (17.1 inches of snow). Winter Storm Hernando was concentrated mostly in Rhode Island and South Eastern Massachusetts, leading to a lower accumulation of snow in Suffolk County; therefore, the county did not meet the eligibility for FEMA reimbursement.

Director Williamson stated even prior to the winter, the City had implemented spending controls due to revenue not meeting expected totals, amongst other financial constraints. The City implemented a controlled hiring process which has led to more modest personnel savings and has tried to incorporate said savings into its February projection for the FY26 deficit (which was communicated to the Council in February). Other spending controls include additional spending restrictions implemented in March that have driven modest savings across contracted services, supplies, and equipment. The City did maintain continued hiring for essential roles such as 911 call takers, lifeguards, and parking enforcement officers. He stated spending control gains have been offset by both World Cup security costs and increased energy costs since the start of the Iran War. He reiterated the supplemental appropriation being requested should allow the City to end the fiscal year on balance.

### ***Committee Chair Recommended Action***

As Chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, I recommend moving the listed docket from the Committee to the full Council for discussion and formal action. At this time, my recommendation to the full Council will be that this matter **OUGHT TO PASS**.

Benjamin J. Weber, Chair  
Committee on Ways and Means