

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

To the Residents of Boston,

In the spirit of Passover, which ends this evening, I would like to focus on a question. A colleague recently asked me: What do I think the City Council's role in reviewing the budget should be?

I can tell you what the City Charter says. Section 48 states "The mayor and city council shall hold budgetary powers together." It goes on to say that, after the Mayor submits the budget, "Not later than the second Wednesday in June, the city council shall take definite action on the annual budget, by adopting, amending or rejecting it, provided that the amended version shall not be for a higher total budget than originally proposed."

"Take definite action" is a strong statement. But does it answer the question? Not really.

As the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, I see my role as running a process that ensures each of my colleagues, and the public, can make an informed decision about whether this budget is right for the people of Boston. To do that, over the next 6 weeks, we will hold around 40 hearings and working sessions, going over every line of the proposed budget, and comparing it to the budgets of prior years. We'll also be analyzing historical data about each department's number of employees, job vacancies, underspending, overspending, equity in hiring and pay, and whether they are effectively providing services to our residents.

And in a world filled with rage-baiting, we can't take definite action without working together. As we saw the last couple of years under the leadership of prior Ways and Means Chair Brian Worrell and former Council President Ruthzee Louijeune, we can find that common ground. We have come together to support fiscally responsible budgets that help people where they need it – to find housing, food, senior programming, youth jobs, safe communities, and a school system that meets the needs of all of its students.

This isn't shampoo, but we still can't just lather, rinse, and repeat. Unlike in prior years, we have learned in three pre-budget hearings that costs are rising due to increased spending on health care, a harsher than expected winter with lots of snow and persistent freezing temperatures, and rising costs of police overtime which have all worked to stretch our current budget thin. These rising costs are butting up against restrictions in our ability to raise revenue, resulting in budget deficits in both BPS and the operating budget for FY26. And this is happening under a backdrop of rising residential property taxes, putting further strain on our residents.

We don't have much control over trends in rising costs of health care or high interest rates. What we should have control over, however, is how we raise revenue. But instead we have a



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home rule situation here that is much more restrictive than in other similar cities like Philadelphia or Seattle. The result is a double whammy of facing sharply rising costs while having our revenues capped by Prop 2 ½ and a state legislature which rejects our attempts to find alternative sources of revenue by for example passing a transfer tax on high-value property sales or even a temporary shift of the tax burden from residents to commercial landlords.

The impacts of all of this are clear in this budget, where despite an increase of around \$100 million, we are having to trim departmental budgets and in BPS are looking at layoffs.

As a result, in FY27, we need to plan differently so we can avoid deficits and preserve our AAA bond rating. Whereas in the past we talked about nearly 9-digit surpluses and ample federal funds, now, in many cases, we will have to work hard to simply maintain the services and programming we have fought for in prior years.

Today, the budget has been handed to us by the mayor. I want to acknowledge the immense amount of work that has been done by the Mayor and her team. Thank you to the Office of Budget Management Director Jim Williamson, our CFO Ashley Groffenberger, and the various Chiefs and Commissioners across every city department. To their teams and to the public servants who tabulated and drafted this year's budget: thank you.

We have until June to review the Mayor's budget and take (as the City Charter says) definite action. To our central staff and our budget team Karishma Chouhan and Ryan Pratt, I want to thank you in advance for all of your hard work on a budget that will say a lot about how we move forward as a City in the following years. And to my colleagues, I am here to make sure you have the answers you need to make decisions on the budget that will deliver for your constituents and every resident of Boston.

We all know that most of the taxes we collect go to pay for the wages of our city workers – teachers, fire fighters, police officers, librarians, workers who maintain our parks and our streets. It is never easy to choose one of these groups over another. Making tough choices on the budget will require us to collaborate. That's not listed in the City Charter, but as we have shown over the last two years, that is our role and I know that if we work hard, we can rise to this challenge together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Weber".

Benjamin J. Weber  
Boston City Councilor, District 6