

Town of Westford



PAYT Program Lunch & Learn @ The Cameron

Noëlle Donovan, Select Board Member

Mike Edwards, Assistant Town Manager – Strategic Operations

February 10, 2026



Agenda



- Introductions & History
- Why PAYT?
 - State of the State
 - Westford's Fiscal Reality
- Hybrid PAYT Program Description
- Why a Hybrid PAYT?
- Impact on Westford Households
- Where Does the Bag Fee Go?
- Operations Analyst
- How is PAYT Policy Decision Made?
- How to Learn More
- Questions?



Background & History



- 2021–2023: PAYT discussed by the Select Board multiple times as trash costs rise and disposal options shrink
- Oct 2023: Budget Task Force formally recommends the Town consider PAYT to control costs and reduce waste
- Oct–Nov 2024: First resident PAYT survey (~1,300 responses) establishes typical household trash levels and shows strong preference for variable, pay-for-excess models
- Nov 2024–Sept 2025: Multiple public presentations and discussions with the Select Board and Recycling Commission refine program goals and options
- Sept 23, 2025: Select Board directs staff to move forward with a Hybrid PAYT model (35-gallon cart as basic service) and evaluate overflow options
- Oct–Nov 2025: Second resident survey confirms prior data and shows a 2:1 preference for bags over additional carts
- Nov 25, 2025: Staff presents final Hybrid PAYT recommendation based on research, public input, and financial analysis; Select Board votes 5-0 to implement in July 2026



Why PAYT?

Massachusetts Reality...



- MassDEP requires a 30% reduction in trash by 2030
 - Cities and towns are expected to cut waste and increase recycling
- More materials are banned from the trash every year
 - Food waste, textiles, mattresses, electronics, and other items can no longer be disposed of normally
- Massachusetts is running out of places to put trash
 - Landfills are closing, incinerator capacity is limited, and costs are rising fast
- PAYT is the state-recommended solution
 - MassDEP identifies Pay-As-You-Throw as the most effective way to meet state goals
- Status quo = higher costs and fewer options
 - Without change, disposal costs and regulatory pressure will continue to increase



Why PAYT?

Westford's Fiscal Reality...



- Largest contracts (by far) the Town has in its portfolio
- This is a 100% contracted service; only opportunity for cost reduction is through reduced trash tonnage **or** reduce the level of service
- FY2025 Budget (without override):
 - Police, Fire, DPW, teachers and other positions eliminated; Town and school service reductions were also made
 - 84% of the Town's budget increase was dedicated to trash and recycling contract increases with **ZERO change to curbside service level or any new fees**
- Trash collection is a utility service but not currently tied to how much it is used



Fiscal Reality and PAYT



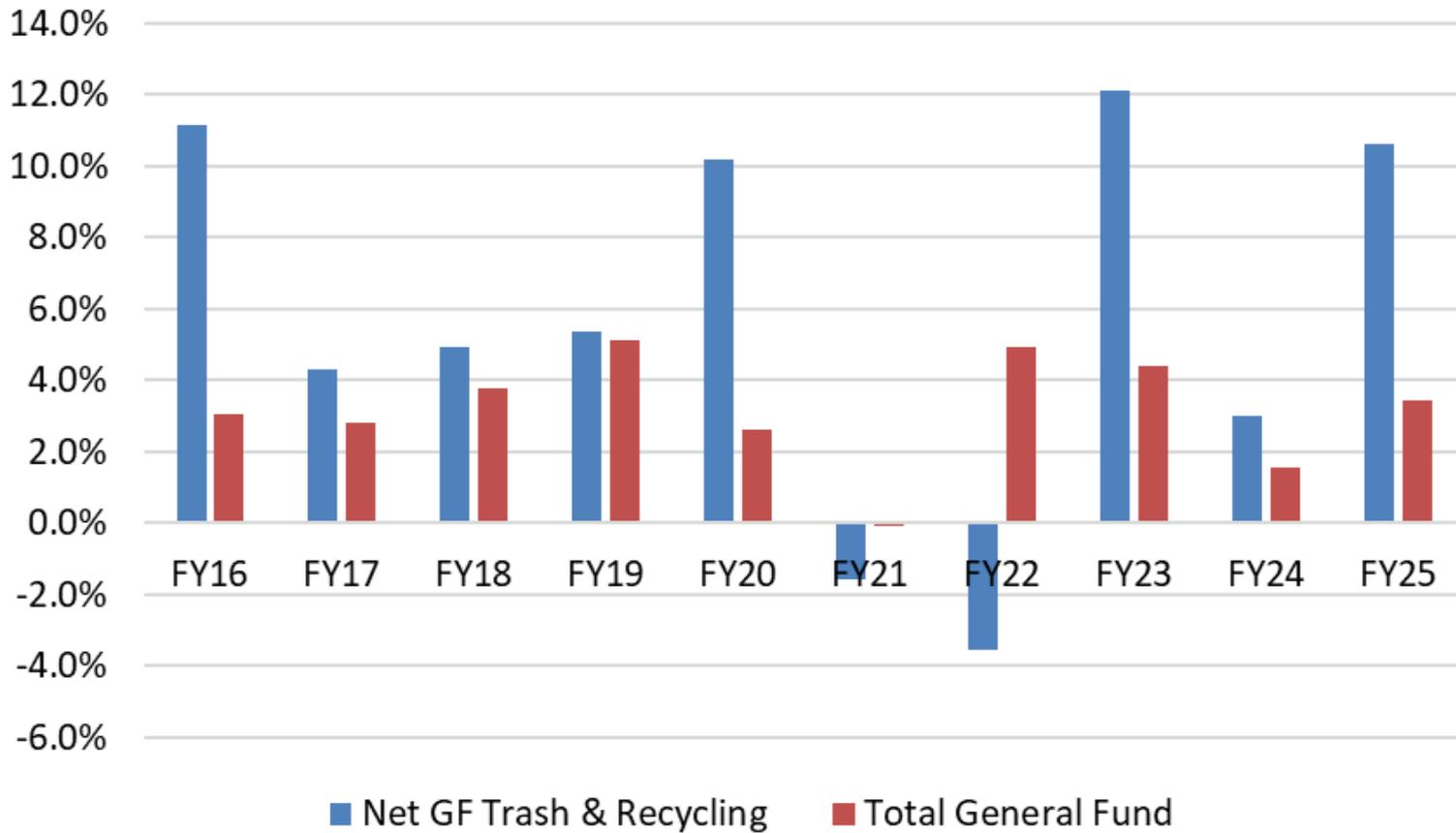
- 10-year (FY16-FY25 actuals) expenditure trends:
 - Trash and Recycling – 5.7% average annual increase
 - General Fund – 3.1% average annual increase
- Trash and Recycling Expenditure as % of Total General Fund:
 - FY16 (actual) = 1.59%
 - FY25 (actual) = 1.85%



Fiscal Reality and PAYT

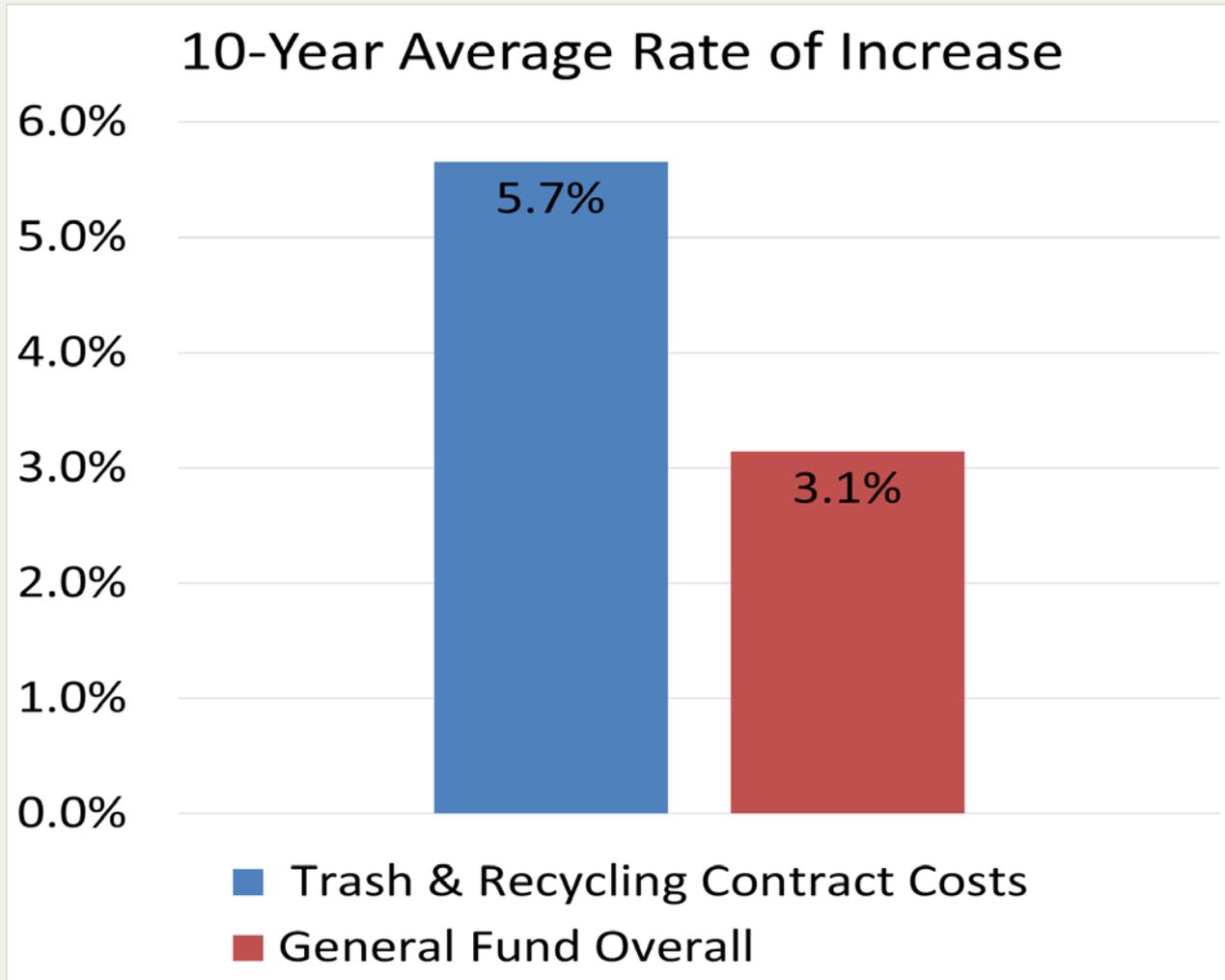


Trash & Recycling Increase vs. Total General Fund





Fiscal Reality and PAYT





Hybrid PAYT Program Description



- Program launches July 2026
- Each household will receive, at no charge, a 35-gallon automated Town-branded cart for free, weekly Basic Service
 - Cart will be delivered to their home mid-June
 - Trash that fits within this cart will be collected at no charge
- 33-gallon Town-branded bags will be available for excess/overflow trash for a fee of \$2.75 each
 - Bags sold in rolls of five (5) at area retailers (grocery, convenience and hardware stores)
 - No weekly limit (removal of current barrel limits)
 - Bags can be placed on ground or in a container curbside
- No changes to curbside recycling or current bulky waste collection program
- Program revenues will also fund additional recycling



Why this PAYT Model?

Select Board Goals and Directive to Staff



- As a waste reduction tool...
 - Household standard based on target tons per household
- As a tool to improve service delivery...
 - Move majority of collection to automated pickup with standardized cart
 - Provide cost-effective way to allow residents to dispose of excess waste
- As a tool to support housing and economic development goals...
 - Shift a portion of tax burden from businesses and multi-family taxpayers that are not eligible for curbside program
- As a revenue tool...
 - Recommendation to use only for trash in excess of waste targets; current tax levy should cover basic household service



Why this PAYT Model?



- **Protects basic service for most households:** A free 35-gallon cart covers the typical weekly needs of the majority of residents, so most households won't pay anything extra most of the time
- **Fair and flexible for different household needs:** Households that generate more trash only pay when they exceed the basic level, rather than everyone paying a flat fee regardless of use
- **Strongly supported by resident input:** Multiple surveys showed clear preference for a hybrid approach, with residents favoring a free base level of service and pay-only-if-needed overflow
- **Encourages waste reduction without being punitive:** The model provides a clear incentive to reduce trash while allowing flexibility for occasional higher-volume weeks (holidays, clean-outs, special events)
- **Operationally practical and future-ready:** The hybrid system supports automated collection, controls long-term costs, and allows the Town to adjust or expand options over time as needs change



Hybrid PAYT Program Impact

Westford Households



- According to survey responses, most households would pay nothing extra most of the time
 - 73% of respondents across all household sizes dispose of 1-3 bags per week; this amount would fit within a 35-gallon cart (compared to 64% in October 2024 results) and result in no additional costs in a typical week
 - Staff is working on distribution plan using Town social services departments to distribute no-cost or discounted bags to households in need
 - Housing Authority properties would not be impacted by PAYT (dumpster collection, not curbside service)
- At \$2.75/bag, one bag per week would cost \$11.92 on average per month
- Based on public input survey results:
 - Households with 1-2 people: 85% = no cost; 11% = 1 bag; 3% more than 1 bag
 - Households with 3-4 people: 67% = no cost; 27% = 1 bag; 5% more than 1 bag
 - Households with 5-6 people: 37% = no cost; 46% 1 bag; 13% more than 1 bag



Where Does the Bag Fee Go?

Per Bag Cost Breakdown



	Low (WasteZero)	High (MassDEP)
Disposal Costs for excess trash		
FY2027 Cost Per Ton	105.33	
Cost per lb.	0.05	0.05
Disposal Costs per bag (ReWorld)	1.00	1.32
Bag Cost (WasteZero)	0.46	0.46
Collection Cost (E.L. Harvey)	0.25	0.25
Total Cost Per Bag	1.71	2.02
	Average	1.90
Program Costs		
Add'l Recycling Programs & Cart Mgmt.	0.31	
Program Management	0.50	
Total Program Costs	2.71	
Recommended price per 33-gallon PAYT Bag	\$ 2.75	



Unintended (*not unanticipated*) Impacts



- Illegal dumping
- Unauthorized use of Town, school & private dumpsters
- Increase in private haulers & need for hauler regs
- Increase in recycling contamination
- Wildlife



Operations Analyst Proposal



Purpose & Strategic Value

- Targeted, low-cost position to generate net financial returns, reduce future budget pressure, and protect taxpayers

Proven Return on Investment

- Since March 2024 reorganization, ATM-SO team produced \$4+ million in taxpayer benefit despite staffing reductions (Sustainability Coord. & Finance Analyst)
- Savings and revenue driven by:
 - Contract enforcement (solid waste & recycling) - \$130K since July 2024
 - Energy project rebates, grants, and 0% financing - \$3.3M since July 2024
 - Energy cost savings – \$198K in short-term avoided costs + \$400K long-term
 - Process improvements (surplus sales, leases, risk management) – \$95K since July 2024

Role Overview

- Reports to ATM-SO; also supports Finance Director & Departments as needed
- Position budgeted at \$80K salary + benefits averaging \$22K



Operations Analyst Proposal

Key Financial & Resident Benefits



Solid Waste & Recycling Operations

- Stronger contract enforcement; improved customer service & complaint tracking
- Capacity to expand recycling programs and potential transition to variable sized carts or other cart-based program enhancements

Energy & Utilities

- ATM-SO has completed or underway \$3.8M projects with only \$179k upfront taxpayer cost; we need to continue to build on these efforts

Cost Containment & Revenue

- Private sector comparison – like Financial Analysis and Planning (FP&A) team
- Fee review to align charges with actual service costs
- Expanded surplus sales (\$50K+ since FY24 vs. \$26k over prior 7 years)
- Insurance & risk management savings (\$21k in FY25)



How is PAYT Policy Decision Made?



PAYT is a fee structure for trash service — not a tax or bylaw change

- Pay-As-You-Throw is a method of assessing user fees for solid waste collection and disposal
- Under Massachusetts General Law, the authority to set these fees rests with the Select Board, not Town Meeting

Policy role of Select Board is well-established

- G.L. c. 44, §28C(f) authorizes a town's chief executive authority to charge and fix fees for solid waste services
- G.L. c. 40, §22F, which Westford has adopted, further authorizes municipal boards to set fees for services they provide
- Town Counsel reviewed the Charter and Bylaws and found no additional restrictions

What Town Meeting still controls

- Overall Town budget and tax levy
- Any required appropriations or transfers related to program start-up or operations



How You Can Learn More...



- Visit the Town's PAYT website:
<https://www.westfordma.gov/1831/Pay-As-You-Throw-PAYT-Program>
- Watch the November 25th Select Board meeting (starts at 1:58 mark)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgB7z5kPQzk>
- FAQ's will likely answer any questions that you have; if they don't, tell us!



Questions?

PAYT PROGRAM LUNCH & LEARN @ THE CAMERON

NOËLLE DONOVAN, SELECT BOARD MEMBER

MIKE EDWARDS, ASSISTANT TOWN MANAGER – STRATEGIC OPERATIONS

FEBRUARY 10, 2026