

**Town Meeting:
Let's Explore the Warrant
Summary**

The Orleans Citizens Forum held a forum on April 29, 2026, to discuss two articles in the town warrant. The session was designed to be a conversation on the need and the merits of the projects to be funded by actions at Town Meeting.

Article 17: Fund the Construction of a New Fire-Rescue Station

Panel: Fire Chief Geof Deering, Select Board Chair Kevin Galligan, Finance Committee Member John Cooper

Fire Chief Geof Deering presented the need for a new fire station, explaining that the current building, built in 1987, no longer meets modern safety standards or space requirements for the department's expanded staffing. He highlighted inadequate space, poor air quality, and outdated infrastructure, emphasizing the need for a new building to improve safety and efficiency for firefighters and the community. Chief Deering addressed concerns about planning for future needs, noting that call volumes have been increasing steadily and another ambulance will likely be needed soon. He also added that the study has looked at service needs now and projected future needs. Continued increase in call volume is expected as more housing comes online. Designers have completed various options on every space—offices, shift accommodations, storm response capacity. He asked attendees to remember that when the 1987 station was built, they cut 5,000 square feet to save \$150,000, which contributed to current problems.

Kevin Galligan, chair of the Select Board, outlined the project's estimated cost of \$60 million and its potential impact on taxpayers emphasizing that the current cost estimate is a "not to exceed" number and will be refined as the design process progresses. He explained that the Fire Rescue Building Committee will meet to narrow down design concepts, which will help provide more accurate cost estimates. He also described the acquisition of additional land through Article 16. He estimated a 4-5% increase in taxes in the first year if the full \$60 million borrowing amount is incurred. Kevin stressed the importance of building a station that can accommodate future growth without being overly large, citing past examples of undersized stations that required immediate expansion. He also addressed concerns about costs, explaining that reducing the project from \$60 million to \$50 million would only save taxpayers around \$100 per year, while potentially compromising the building's 50-year lifespan.

John Cooper from the Finance Committee emphasized the importance of long-range financial planning and expressed concerns about the town's lack of 5-year budget projections, questioning the affordability of the project in the context of overall town finances. John also discussed the town's debt and reserve policies, highlighting the need to review debt service as a percent of the budget to maintain the town's AAA bond rating. He noted that Orleans' debt

service burden is currently just below 15% but could approach 20% with future projects, potentially jeopardizing the rating.

Article 25: FY27 Wastewater Management Plan Implementation

Panel: DPW Director Richard Waldo, Select Board Chair Kevin Galligan, Finance Committee Member David Abel

Rich Waldo from the Department of Public Works detailed the wastewater management plan's progress and the importance of Phase 4 in meeting state requirements and qualifying for funding opportunities. Rich explained the town's need to meet state requirements to reduce nitrogen pollution in water bodies, highlighting the benefits of the State Revolving Fund (SRF) program, which offers 0% interest loans for wastewater construction. The town aims to submit a project evaluation form by July 2027 to qualify for SRF funding and potentially receive a 25% subsidy from the Cape and Islands Water Protection Fund. The current funding request is for \$2.7 million to support preliminary design work for Phase 4, with construction funding planned for 2028.

Kevin Galligan emphasized the importance of maintaining the existing sewer construction schedule. He also commented on the town's debt policy and financial management. "Regarding fiscal prudence, there is not a town on Cape Cod more careful in spending every dollar than Orleans. We've been very careful in expenditures, and when we advance a project, we do it with community support. Future projects will require us to make choices about priorities—wastewater, fire rescue, and possibly not other priorities." Orleans tracks debt service as percent of budget, which has been just below 15% for years. When future budgets add \$60 million debt service plus sewer project commitments, the ratio will approach 20%. Orleans does have a 5-year plan, 5-year revenue forecast, and AAA bond rating.

David Abel suggested exploring alternative technologies like urine diversion and compost toilets that could achieve similar nitrogen reduction goals at a fraction of the cost. He also expressed concerns about the lack of long-term debt projections.

Next steps for the town

- Fire Rescue Building Committee: Meet on Monday May 4 to review and potentially narrow down the number of concept choices for the new fire rescue station.
- Fire Department internal working group and Fire Rescue Building Committee: Continue to review and refine building layout and design with the architectural team and project manager, including providing staff input on functional needs and addressing layout questions in the coming week.
- Town staff and consultants (Bureau Veritas, Waterworth LLC): Complete facilities assessment and cost modeling for both the wastewater enterprise and town facilities to support long-term capital planning and debt structuring.

- Darren Tangeman (Municipal Finance Officer) and town staff: Continue to collect and analyze data to support long-term capital planning, including 5-year expenditure and revenue projections, and provide updated information to policymakers and committees.
- Select Board and relevant town staff: Consider supporting or proposing an article for a demonstration project on urine diversion and/or compost toilet systems for a future town meeting, as discussed during the meeting.
- All attendees: Complete and return surveys (in person or online) to provide feedback on the forum.