



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Budget Review Workshop Minutes
Wednesday, October 5, 2022, 10:00 a.m.
Belmont Mill
Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude Patten, Jr., TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Finance Director Katherine Davis, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, TC/TC Cynthia DeRoy, Fire Chief Mike Newhall, and Assistant Fire Chief Deb Black.

The Chairman opened the workshop meeting at 9:56 am.

Police Department

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski presented an overview of the department's year. Case numbers are about the same level as last year. They are down two positions but hope to fill them shortly. Everyone is working odd shift hours in order to provide coverage. Brendan Sica has graduated from the Academy and will be on his own very soon. That will open up hours for better shifts and allow the department to have at least two cruisers on the road. There was lots of overtime but they are managing the best they can. Officer Bryant's new grant position does not include patrol time. He will meet with the Board soon to explain the new program. His position is not an enforcement position, which makes it easier to communicate and get through barriers.

Chief Lewandoski reported the department has obtained many grants and they are going to continue to try for more grants in 2023. They have saved about \$500,000 in equipment costs by using grants. Chairman Mooney asked about the live scanning machine for fingerprints. Chief Lewandoski said it is great because you know immediately if the prints are good, and the prints go directly to the state and FBI. In the past, fingerprint cards could be rejected after the fact and there is no way to track down the person to get fresh prints. They are replacing equipment as they go along.

The proposed budget has two cruiser lease programs in it. They have fallen out of the circuit of replacements and need to get back into it. They are also building in the replacement of antiquated equipment. If they get two new cruisers this year and one next year, it will bring them up-to-date for technology. They are also trying to obtain a grant for six more portable radios. Most of the ones they have are 10-12 years old.

Chief Lewandoski noted Captain Steve Akerstrom is currently on vacation, but he worked on the budget also. They did not agree on everything, but Captain Akerstrom understood why they are doing what they are doing with their budget. Selectman Jon Pike asked about the increase in service contracts. Chief Lewandoski reported on a new taser program as the current contract cannot be renewed because the units are outdated. The program will save over \$2,757 per year and has a number of great benefits including being rechargeable, duty and training cartridges, and the ability to document and record each interaction.

Selectman Pike questioned the uniform cleaning budget. Chief Lewandoski said not everyone takes advantage of the program, but new hires seem to be using it. It is very hard to tell how much will be used. TA Jipson suggested dropping the number down to \$2000.

Chairman Mooney asked what the PD medical expenses line is for because last year the number was \$900 and this year it's only \$70. The Chief replied it is used if employees have to be tested for anything; and Finance Director Katherine Davis said it is also used to complete psych evaluations for new hires. The Chief indicated they are also able to request reimbursement money from the Academy for that right now.

Selectman Patten asked about the vacation buyback. Only \$1,100 has been used this year but the budgeted amount is \$7,000. TA Jipson explained every employee is entitled to buy back one week of vacation each year, and it needs to be budgeted for, because technically everyone could buy back a week. Historically not everyone takes advantage of the buyback, and the number could possibly be brought down. The maximum amount was calculated at about \$14,000 but was brought down to \$10,000. Finance Director Davis said the maximum amount only includes the union members and does not include non-union employees. There tends to be more buybacks with tenured employees, or new employees who take unpaid vacation during probation. Most buybacks tend to happen at the end of the year, in December.

Chairman Mooney asked about the contract for Dog Control. Chief Lewandoski said the same officer covers Laconia, Belmont, and Gilford. She is very good, passionate about her work, knows the area and is a benefit to the Town. Chairman Mooney asked about the low number for actual 2022 training expenses. The Chief informed the Board that there is free training for Academy graduates for three years. Right now, it costs \$395 to \$695 for training sessions. Belmont PD is trying to start hosting training here in Town which will give them some training spots for free. Next year more mandated training will be needed as the Academy is going to be increasing the number of hours required per officer per year. This line item is also used for equipment related to training such as props and ammunition. They are trying to use local and computer-hosted training opportunities as much as possible to save on costs of travel, food, and hotels.

Selectman Patten questioned the salary increase for Officer Pickowicz. Chief Lewandoski stated there was no increase. Officer Pickowicz submitted a letter of intent for the School Resource Officer (SRO) position, so his salary moved to that line. His patrolman position would

then be vacant and need to be filled at the \$50,000 salary range. TA Jipson noted other salaries have not yet been included in the budget because the non-union wages were only approved Monday. More time is needed to plug those numbers in and rework the budget. The estimated increase for operational expenses is 11.71%. That number will increase once wages, taxes and benefits are added. TA Jipson said that is a big increase and the Board should consider making some cuts. The Board discussed the cost of cruisers, vehicle fuel, electric, and propane. TA Jipson said the electric number should come down because they have locked in a new contract. Chief Lewandoski explained the heating system has been reprogrammed and should function more efficiently this season.

Additional discussion about the SRO position outlined that the school is supposed to fund 100% of the salary and benefits for the year. Finance Director Davis explained the line item has to be included in the Town's budget but will be offset by revenue from the school district. The Board had concerns about additional costs to the Town for the SRO position and what the SRO will use for a vehicle. Chief Lewandoski will work with the school district on more details. The contract will not allow the PD to pull the SRO from school duty unless there is a major emergency/incident. The SRO will be unable to take vacation time during school time and will be required to provide coverage for 180 school days.

There was discussion about increased expenses that came with the new building, such as the elevator and alarm monitoring. Chief Lewandoski said he could make most of the numbers work without changes. Other discussion included uniform and tire costs. They are saving money by using all weather tires instead of swapping tires out twice a year. Chairman Mooney asked about the Gilmanton prosecution fees and Chief Lewandoski confirmed that the number has been increased. The postage line was reviewed and the Chief thought he could decrease the number by \$500.

Selectmen Patten asked about decreasing the training budget. The Chief maintained that it should not be changed because the Academy is going to be increasing the number of required hours each year from 8 to 24 or possibly 40. That training is mandated.

Finance Director Davis updated the Board with a new increase at 10.77% after the changes proposed today; but before wages, taxes and benefits. TA Jipson will bring back a final revised budget for approval next week.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector and Elections/Registration

Town Clerk/Tax Collector (TC/TC) Cynthia DeRoy reported some things were refined this year to show election items separately from the TC/TC budgets so election expenses can be more accurately reported. She reminded the Board that many items are split between the Clerk and Tax budgets. The Postage and Supply lines were adjusted to move shipping costs from Postage to Supplies. Service contracts have decreased because the ballot machine was moved to Election Supplies. These changes will keep the TC/TC budgets more stable because the Election budget fluctuates based on how many elections there are in a year.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed Elections/Registration budget of \$11,315.00 as presented. Selectman Patten seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Financial Administration

Finance Director Davis said her department and the Tax Collector are in the same budget. There are not a lot of changes in the Tax Collector area. Postage was increased for tax bills. Finance general expenses were decreased based on the supply trend and postage expenses moved to other lines. The service contracts line includes the copier lease for the TC/TC office. The computer line includes the BMSI software which increases every year and includes the finance and tax collector functions. Conferences and Dues was increased to account for new staff. Training and mileage were also increased for new staff and for \$300 moved from the Finance general expenses line.

Finance Director Davis noted that the Audit line is split with the library, and water and sewer. The audit is increasing for 2023. This amount could increase if we have over \$750,000 in federal grants award expenditures, which would trigger an additional federal compliance audit. Everyone is shopping different vendors to bring expenses down. The prison is being used for printing because it is a much better price.

Finance Director Davis proposed adding a part-time finance clerk to the department to serve multiple needs. The clerk position would be responsible for handling AP, payroll and cash receipts, which typically takes about three days and does not include all of the reconciliation, summarization and review required. This would leave the Director to handle more of the high-level tasks and some of the functions that the former Town Administrator previously handled, such as grant management. This would be a fiscally conservative move because the clerk would be at a different pay rate. It also protects the Town by providing a segregation of duties. The clerk would also be cross trained in other finance duties to provide protection for the Town in the event of an unexpected absence of the Finance Director. The Board received documents outlining current finance functions and duties, and the proposed division of those duties with a new clerk. Currently, the department is busier than ever with retirements, resignations, and new hires. External vendors are having difficulties which means additional time spent correcting billing errors and missing invoices. NH Retirement is mandating a move to a new monthly reporting module. BMSI is outdated and requires a major cloud-based update by July 2023. There is not enough capacity in the department to complete the required 8-week dual entry of payroll. Some recent functions had to be outsourced to meet deadlines. When there is an absence right now, TA Jipson and Admin Assistant Colleen Akerman have to complete the minimum tasks of AP, Payroll and Cash Receipts Log, but it takes the Finance Director up to a month to catch up on any other duties that were not completed during the absence. This position was proposed to provide cross-training, checks and balances, and to protect the Town. There were questions about where a new employee would work but TA Jipson assured the Board there is space in the back offices due to recent changes with the CEO position.

Selectman Pike asked for time to digest the proposal. TA Jipson said it can be discussed at the next meeting.

Property Taxation

TA Jipson presented the Property Taxation budget. All service contracts have increased. This line includes the Vision tax card program and the AxisGIS online program. Appeals, Legal and Appraisal was increased in anticipation of upcoming abatement requests due to the recent assessment changes. KRT does the abatements and handles any appeals to the BTLA. There are ongoing appeals from 2020 that are still being worked on. The Conferences & Dues line could be decreased some. On the Property Appraisals line, KRT handles pickups and current use changes and Sansoucy completes the utility appraisals. Building Permits have not decreased and more of a buffer is needed.

Solid Waste

TA Jipson acknowledged the current Casella contract expires at the end of 2022. It was a great deal and recycling was free. There is a 50% increase for 2023. Disposal and recycling were broken out into two lines with the new Casella automated collection contract. Everyone is encouraged to recycle as much as possible because recycling is less expensive. Flyers will be going out soon about the new carts. Automated collection starts in January and carts will be distributed in December. The Town retains host fees from outside tonnage at the Casella facility. Chairman Mooney asked if the bulky pickups would continue. TA Jipson replied that they would continue and stated that bulky pickups are a wash. We are working on multi-family properties that will get letters about changes to collection. It was suggested all of this be promoted and publicized as much as possible. There is a sample bin at Town Hall that residents have been looking at.

Selectman Patten moved to approve the proposed Solid Waste budget of \$682,907.56 as presented. Selectman Pike seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Fire Department & Emergency Management

Fire Chief Mike Newhall and Assistant Chief Deb Black presented the Fire Department proposed budget. There was an increase of about 3-5% in calls this year. The volume increases with an influx of people. There is a trend that patients are requiring more advanced care because of illnesses, heart attacks, cancer patients, etc. This creates a hardship on EMS services. Accidents have increased and Route 106 has been shut down many times with collisions. Adding two new employees last year has helped and they now have 3 full-time people 24/7.

Chief Newhall reviewed most of the line items in detail and decreased the proposal on line items for call salaries, training pay, postage, electric, computer, conferences and dues, training expenses, operating equipment, and equipment and repair. Paper products were

moved from the Repair & Maintenance line item to the Supplies line item. Some line items have not been expended but will be expended before year end. Four new hires need uniforms, which will cost \$6,000. This is part of the union contract. Service contracts have increased in the Fire Department just like other departments. Medical supplies have increased drastically. Chairman Mooney asked if the Town gets this money back. When a bill is paid, the money goes to the Ambulance Revenue Fund. The department uses flat line billing with three different rates for service, but everyone gets the same level of care whether they have insurance or not.

Selectman Pike was concerned the vehicle repair and maintenance line did not have enough in the budget. Finance Director Davis said the trend is for this year to be at \$38,000. The line was left as proposed at \$40,000. No changes were suggested for the fuel line. No changes were made to the Special Revenue Fund Balance request. This request reduces the taxpayer burden by paying operating expenditures from the ambulance billing account.

Finance Director Davis calculated a 13% increase in the budget without non-union wages and benefits.

Chairman Mooney suggested a discussion with Canterbury about the costs of providing coverage. Chief Newhall is meeting with Fire Chief Gamache later this week and will review the agreement with him. Currently Belmont receives about \$5,000 and the number has not been revisited in a long time.

The Fire Department budget will be reviewed again once the non-union wages and benefits have been updated.

The Emergency Management budget line had no changes.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed Emergency Management budget of \$5,000 as presented. Selectman Patten seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

TA Jipson explained there were opioid settlement funds moved into the emergency management budget, but the amounts are different every year. The funds can be used for any department from that line item.

Chief Newhall reviewed his CIP requests. One ambulance needs replacement. The new price with all equipment is \$575,000. The old ambulance can be sold to help defer the cost. He recommends a lease purchase agreement for 5 years, so the ambulance fund is not depleted. Selectman Pike recommended a down payment of \$50,000.

Engine 1 Typhoon needs to be refurbished. Once refurbished it should last for another 15 years. The cost is \$225,000.

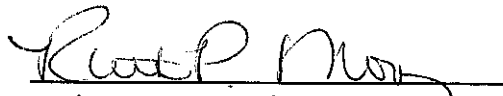
A new utility pickup has been requested at \$78,181. They are trying to stay with diesel. Selectman Pike asked for a price on a gas model due to the issues newer diesels are having.

New hose is also needed. The hose is tested every year and portions need to be replaced. The cost is \$25,000 for 1,000 feet of 4" hose.

Non-Public:

Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (c) at 1:40pm. Roll call was taken and those present, and voting were Jon Pike, Ruth Mooney and Claude Patten, Jr. Also present was TA Alicia Jipson and Fire Chief Mike Newhall. The Board returned to public session at 3:36 pm.

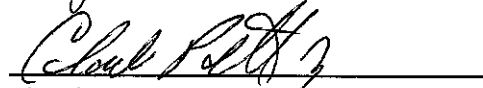
The meeting was adjourned at 3: 38 pm.



Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



Jon Pike, Vice Chairman



Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman