



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Work Session Minutes
Wednesday, September 6, 2023, 8:30 am
Belmont Mill, 14 Mill Street
Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude (Sonny) Patten, Jr., Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Town Planner Karen Santoro, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Stephen Akerstrom, Fire Chief Deb Black, Town Clerk Cynthia DeRoy, Deputy Town Clerk Jenn Thomas, General Assistance Director Donna Cilley, Parks & Rec Director Danielle St. Onge, CEO Mark Ekberg and Budget Chairman Ron Mitchell.

Absent: Selectman Travis O'Hara.

Donna Cilley, General Assistance Director, stated things are alarming as she is starting to build her budget. Board members should be communicating with the community. Housing is astronomical, electric rates and heating costs are up, but we need to offer services. The vacancy rate in Belknap County is 0.4%. Other funds have been available to us in recent years, but budgets are going to look different this year.

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski reported that they are unable to level-fund their budget again after 4 years of doing so. Repairs, fuel, and tires have increased significantly, and they have to retain help with 2 positions open currently. There are 6 in the department who could retire anytime. Police Captain Steve Akerstrom has done a wage study, not just for law enforcement, but for the Town as a whole. Retention is a significant problem. Our prosecutor will be retiring in March, and we will either need to hire an attorney or find an Officer-Prosecutor with experience. There are currently 350 cases. Captain Akerstrom proposes removing the two bottom steps for union and non-union wages to try to retain current employees, and to attract and be competitive for new employees that are needed. TA Alicia Jipson agreed that the proposal was reasonable. The PD Equipment line has doubled, and repairs have increased. There is currently no Dog Control Officer, but it needs to be included in the budget. Selectman Jon Pike predicts a 12% increase in auto expenses this year.

DPW Director Craig Clairmont has filled two vacancies and given some promotions, but it has been a tough summer. Equipment prices are crazy, and wages need to be increased. We need to keep our hard workers but jobs in the private sector are paying significantly higher wages and it is hard to compete. He plans to increase his part-time line, which does not include any benefits. This helps the department and reduces overtime costs for other employees. We need to be creative to man our departments. They are working on grants for two new vehicles with a

60/40 match. Newer equipment saves on repair costs and downtime. Block Grant money can be used for the matching portion.

Code Enforcement Officer Mark Ekberg said his budget does not have a lot of line items but does include a salary analysis. There are not many increases outside of the salary adjustment. Things are working well with his clerk who works 3 days per week. They are keeping up with the workload. The CEO vehicle does not have a lot of miles but will need brakes and an AC compressor in the future. There has been no decision on body cameras, but the cost is estimated to be about \$4,500. He does not think Belmont should pioneer that type of program. TA Jipson has some direction on body cameras from Legal that will be reviewed with the Board at a future time. She also noted the request for a salary increase of 49.6% could be an issue.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Cynthia DeRoy noted that her department has a “working office budget”. Many of the costs are not controllable, such as postage and paper costs. Contracts increased 5-7% and there will be five elections next year. There is a budget for a new voting machine but Town Clerks across the State are requesting the State pay for new voting machines. Motor vehicle registrations are down and some of the big companies are registering elsewhere. There are possibly some grants available for voting machines (estimated cost \$6-\$10,000) but they are not mandated for next year. The machines are worth it to save on costs for evening ballot hand counts.

Fire Chief Deb Black has some increased budget lines such as Equipment Repairs. Some of the trucks are older and need tires. The training budget needed to be increased as well. Fuel costs are up. There is a wage study for Chief and Assistant Chief positions in the area. It will be a struggle to find an Assistant Chief at the current wage scale. There are three open positions in the department and a wage scale adjustment would be helpful for recruitment.

Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden said they have a small budget and they tried to balance things from last year, but they can't control fuel and electrical costs. The Board previously awarded ARPA grant funds for two new mowers and all of their other equipment is good. Their truck should last another year without major maintenance expenses. Patrick said he will be leaving at the end of 2024 and is teaching Kyle all of the ins and outs of what he needs to know to keep the Town looking good. Patrick said he is concerned about wages also.

Parks & Recreation Director Danielle St. Onge reported some line items are going down and numbers are being moved to other lines. She asked the Board where they want to go with the Director position because it was originally setup to transition from PT to FT. But Danielle is concerned they don't have the facilities for full-time activities. There was discussion about taking the senior group under the Parks & Rec umbrella. The Board requested the Parks & Rec budget reflect a full-time director and taking over the senior group. She will also include money for lifeguard certifications in an effort to retain employees for two years.


Town Planner Karen Santoro increased a few supply lines but the contract changes were minimal. They are currently fully staffed and utilize NHMA and as many free services as they can

to keep expenses down. They are emailing more documents to save on postage. There are some minor increases in some lines, but reductions in others. Selectman Pike commented that their meetings are concise and well run.

Budget Chairman Ron Mitchell noted the committee will be prepared and they understand the problems. This is not the first time we've been in this situation, and we will get through it. We are lucky to have our Department Heads. This could be tough on some of our seniors.

TA Jipson stated there is a lot of work to rebuild the wage scales and requested the Board give some direction. Chairman Mooney said we have no choice. There will be a meeting with legal regarding the union contracts next week. Craig reminded everyone it is less expensive to pay a higher hourly wage and have a full staff than to pay overtime.

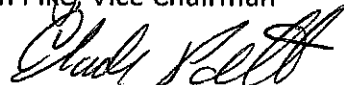
The meeting ended at 10:05am.




Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



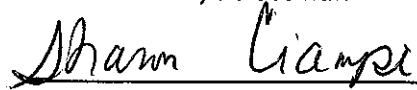
Jon Pike, Vice Chairman



Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman



Travis O'Hara, Selectman



Sharon Ciampi, Selectman