



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Budget Review Workshop Minutes
Wednesday, October 23, 2023, 10:00 am
Belmont Mill
Corner Meeting House Room

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude Patten, Jr., Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Town Planner Karen Santoro, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, DPW Assistant Director Brian Jackes, Fire Chief Deb Black, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman and Cemetery Trustee Hilary Horn.

Absent: Selectman Travis O'Hara.

Via Zoom was Library Director Eileen Gilbert.

Highway:

DPW Director Craig Clairmont introduced two new department employees: Jesse Rolland and Wayne Pierce. He said they also have a full-time temporary person for the winter, and it is a good group.

DPW Director Clairmont reviewed their summer projects, which were off schedule because of the weather. It rained 17 out of 20 weekends this summer but they are getting caught up. They finished Leavitt Road, Plummer Hill, Durrell Mountain Road, South Road, Old Marsh Hill and Stone Road. With the staffing shortage this year he was happy with what they got done. They lost a few employees in recent years, and had one retirement so it was a big blow and they are still recovering.

There is a small increase to the budget for wages and benefits. A lot of the costs are uncontrollable. There was an increase in overtime this year because of the staff shortages which should see improvement next year. There are some part-timers without benefits. They are being creative to get their work done. TA Alicia Jipson noted a typo error to be corrected on the electrical budget line. DPW Director Clairmont noted some lines have decreased as equipment was paid off and they have applied for two grants from the VW Mitigation Fund to replace vehicles. There is an opportunity to get a \$200,000 truck for \$50,000 and that amount could be paid out of Highway Block Grant Funds for no cost to taxpayers. They will hear back about the grants in November. The trucks being replaced will need to be destroyed by having the frame and engine decommissioned, but all other parts of the trucks could be sold/scrapped. The Equipment for Hire budget was increased because they need to rent a forestry head for trimming and the costs have increased. There was discussion about the costs for guardrail and culvert replacements. Some of the lines have not been expended yet for 2023. The insurance rates have been adjusted and the buyout reduced to zero because that employee will be going onto Town insurance in 2024.

This year the town spent \$521,520 working on multiple roads, which was almost equivalent to what was done last year just between Church Street and Wildlife Boulevard. Next year they will be working on Middle Route. The department thinks there is more work they can do to save a lot of money if it is within their capabilities. This would be a good experiment to see how it would work.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the Highway & Streets budget of \$1,313,710.46 as presented without the final wages; seconded by Selectman Sharon Ciampi. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Street Lighting & Highway Block Grant (HBG):

The Street Lighting upgrade is in year two and when the program hit year one, we had already saved \$10,000. There is one more payment in 2024 and then this budget will decrease.

The Highway Block Grant budget may still change based on the state, but this is grant money coming in to the Town.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the Street Lighting budget of \$14,000 as presented; seconded by Selectman Patten. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Selectman Pike moved to approve the Highway Block Grant budget of \$194,234.85 as presented; seconded by Selectman Patten. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Water & Sewer:

DPW Director Clairmont explained that Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes has been highly involved with the Water & Sewer departments. There has been a big increase in final reads because of home sales. There are some minimal budget increases that are out of our control. Overtime is already over budget for this year because of the problems that happened. The user rate increases will help so that we can be more accurate with our budget. Postage and service contracts such as Pennichuck have increased. There is an increase in training to maintain the Assistant DPW Director's water license. There are no other large increases this year. There is no health insurance line because we subcontract work out to Pennichuck. There are costs that go the Finance Director, the Town Administrator and the Town Clerks to help offset the work done for billing. The department now charges for "final reads" so that should help because we were not charging for those previously. We will need to review fees and keep close tabs on them each year. TA Jipson mentioned the sewer rates include Winni River Basin fees that have increased.

The emergency generators for the pump stations are serviced yearly. The voters did not approve an upgrade for the Shaker Road and Coons Point pump stations even though there was a matching grant. That grant funding is now gone and we will have to pay the full cost of upgrading those stations.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the Water budget of \$275,652.59 as presented; seconded by Selectman Patten. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Overtime has been increased, and a new phone system has been upgraded for the stations in the field. The service contracts have increase and the Asset Management program to map all of the systems and manholes has an annual cost. NHDES mandates 5,000 feet of line is cameraed each year and they try to get the best cost. They noted the problems the system has with disposable wipes and kitchen fats, which inhibit the system from working properly. TA Jipson noted four of the budget line amounts are directly from the Winni River Basin. There was discussion about the anticipated line replacement on Route 140, which could run in the \$4-\$5 million range.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the Sewer budget of \$655,777.57 as presented; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Town Clerk/Tax Collector:

New Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman has reviewed the budget originally crafted by Cynthia DeRoy and has just a few items of note. She is a big proponent of education and with so many new people in the office also needing to be certified, it would be important to increase the training line. TC/TC Cashman is relying on Cynthia DeRoy's many years of experience as far as the rest of the budget goes; knowing she was very accurate in previous years.

Chairman Mooney moved to accept a change to the Town Clerk's budget to include an additional \$600 for training and to accept the updates to the insurance line for a total of \$164,250.44; seconded by Selectman Patten. The motion passed (3-0-1). Selectman Ciampi abstained because she was absent from the meeting where the Town Clerk/Tax Collector's budget was originally discussed.

Land Use:

Town Planner Karen Santoro is presenting a budget for the first time. It has been a busy year with some personnel changes. The new Land Use Technician Rod Cameron is doing well and helps with mapping and planning review. There are a lot of big projects in process and they are trying to close out some projects like the Tioga Ridge Subdivision, which is almost at a full buildout. Aiden Circle only has one lot left. The department has tried to be conservative with the budget and new salaries are the biggest change. They have been able to reduce postage by using email more, and Board members are picking up their large meeting packets instead of having them mailed. There have been some increases for noticing for legal ads and larger numbers of applications increases the cost of those ads; which they try to truncate as much as possible. There was a big drop to the professional line as last year's budget included funds for a maternity leave for the previous Town Planner. They are trying to do as much online as possible and digitize things as much as they can. The large plotter can scan and print large plans but is no longer under a maintenance contract. Some funds were added for the Master Plan line, which has not been updated since 2002 and has been a point of conversation at Planning Board meetings. The cost to update the plan all at once would be very expensive so it is recommended to start working on it one section at a time. The Tax Map line was increased due to the increased number of structures to be added to the maps, and the increase price per structure for the placement. Overall the budget has a small decrease.

Selectman Patten moved to approve the Land Use budget of \$391,617.08 as presented; seconded by Selectman Pike. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Conservation:

Town Planner Santoro explained the bulk of the budget is salaries and insurance, and items that are beyond their control such as workshop and member fees. The invasive species line has a request of \$4,000 which is a small portion of the true costs. The bill for milfoil removal at Silver Lake was \$21,000. Selectman Patten does not approve of the increase from \$3,000 to \$4,000 for the invasive species line. Conservation Commission Chairman Denise Naiva said that this is a sensitive subject. But it is important to maintain the property values around the lake. If milfoil chokes up the water, it will devalue the properties on the lakes and it is hard to get rid of it. It is important to maintain things to keep the milfoil levels stable without overwhelming the waterways. Water quality affects everyone. We need to be global about what we can do and this work incorporates mostly volunteers. The Commission members work hard to donate their services to Town properties and they are not paid. They need funding to help fulfill their mission. Milfoil removal requires experienced, certified divers and certified people to spray herbicide. The state provides matching grants for milfoil removal. The Winnisquam Watershed Network did not request any funding this year so the Commission was able to give more to the Silver Lake Association. Herbicide is a very cost effective method for removal because it is only needed every three years instead of divers manually pulling it each year.

Some of the other projects the Commission has worked on are battling terrestrial (land-based) invasives. They can't be completely eliminated but they can be beat back. This includes bittersweet and autumn olive, which choke back all of the native plants. The Commission worked on the trail system at the Tioga Headwaters on Route 140 and put in a new loop trail. Trails at the Town Forest were evaluated and the running trails for students were cleaned. They are trying to get more volunteers. The Bean Dam is getting chopped up by ATVs and needs a new sign, and the boundaries need to be firmly determined. The Tioga Ridge subdivision and Town open space boundary line also needs to be surveyed. There was discussion about lakefront properties and the concern about plants taking over. The Belmont Town Beach is on Lake Winnisquam and provides public access to the lake.

Selectman Pike moved to decrease line 506 to \$3,000; seconded by Selectman Patten. Roll call vote: Sharon Ciampi – nay, Sonny Patten – yes, Ruth Mooney – nay, and Jon Pike – yes. Motion fails as a tie (2-2).

Selectman Ciampi moved to approve the Conservation budget of \$22,085.05 as presented; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Sharon Ciampi – yes, Sonny Patten – nay, Ruth Mooney – yes, and Jon Pike – nay. Motion fails as a tie (2-2).

It was the consensus of the Board to hold another vote on the Conservation budget when all five members can be in attendance.

Capital & Revenues:

TA Jipson reported only three requests have come forward for Capital. She noted Library Director Eileen Gilbert is connected via Zoom and their request is for \$25,000. There was a general feeling that this request is not large enough to work towards building improvements. Their account will have about \$375,000 at the end of the year.

Chairman Mooney moved to accept the \$25,000 request from the Library for their Capital Reserve Fund; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Selectman Ciampi stepped down from the Board to represent the Cemetery Trustees with Trustee Hilary Horn. She explained that she has learned more about the Capital process and they are looking for \$35,000 this year. They would like to update many of the older signs, which are wood and not in good shape; with signs that look more like the sign for the trail and other Town landmarks with a granite post. The material would not sun fade or rot and there wouldn't be any maintenance required. The Conservation Commission may also need some signs and they may be able to get a discount. It was recommended that something less elaborate than the sample image be used for the cemeteries. The Trustees estimate there are 25 cemetery signs needed. There is work needed at the Ladd Hill Cemetery, which is owned by the Town but has not been maintained. A tree company had to come and pull some dangerous trees last week. The cemetery on Brown Hill Road is worse than this one. They expect to spend \$10,000 to work on these two cemeteries. There was discussion about previous Capital requests and approvals.

Selectman Patten moved to approve \$5,000 for the Cemetery Capital Reserve Fund; seconded by Selectman Pike. The motion passed (2-1). Ruth Mooney opposed.

Selectman Ciampi returned to the Board.

Fire Chief Deb Black spoke about trying to determine how the CIP works and the ambulance fund. The department is in need of an air compressor system for \$58,079 for regulated air that is used during fires. Their current system came from the old Winnisquam Fire Station, who got it from the tech college before that. They tried getting a grant for it. They have a letter from the service technician about the money spent fixing the unit and the amount of downtime. They need to go to Gilford or Laconia when their system is down. Thankfully they have had low fire numbers recently, but the system is very aged and needs updating. Firefighters can't get into a building without an SCBA.

There is currently not good data on the amount in the ambulance fund because there are funds that still need to be distributed for last year's warrant articles for hoses, the truck refurbish and the ambulance, plus the offset to the General Fund which are firm commitments. TA Jipson will update the Board at the next regular meeting. There was discussion about the ambulance revenue fund and how it does not come from taxes and was intended to be used as a "savings account" for replacing equipment for the Fire Department. There was discussion about how to have some accessible funds from the ambulance revenues for equipment replacements that might be necessary during the year without needing to go to the taxpayers for every small purchase. TA Jipson will check with Legal and NHDRA about this type of setup.

There was a \$50,000 request for a side-by-side UTV for the Fire Department, including a trailer to transport the unit. The trailer they have now is not rated for the ATV they currently have, which is being used by Building & Grounds for maintenance in downtown. Selectman Pike recommended finding funds in the budget to upgrade their trailer in anticipation of a future UTV.

It was the consensus of the Board to remove the side-by-side UTV from the CIP requests.

Chairman Mooney said the air compressor is a top priority safety issue. The Board agreed that it should be left on the CIP.

TA Jipson brought forward a potential request depending on how the Board wants to proceed with the Mill and if the Capital Reserve request should be increased for Municipal Facilities or if the Board wants to try for a bond. The fund is to cover all buildings and issues so it should be increased to keep some money in there for other buildings as well as converting the Mill. There was discussion about the steps for the Mill including the elevator and the generator and the infrastructure that needs to be done first. Chairman Mooney recommended a \$500,000 request so we don't go backwards if something goes wrong in a building. It is too late to consider a bond for this year.

Capital Reserve Items:

These are the standard items that are put forward each year. Accrued Liability covers retirements and we have many eligible employees. This is funded through the unexpended fund balance and there is no change to the \$100,000 request. Heavy Equipment remains unchanged at \$60,000. Property Revaluation is unchanged at \$75,000. The 5-year revaluation is about \$300,000 so some funds are put away each year. Municipal Facilities was increased from \$300,000 to \$500,000. The Bridge Repair was reduced to \$20,000. There are bridge aid funds coming from the State this year as there were last year. The Dry Hydrant and Cistern Repair was left at \$2,500. Election Equipment was increased to \$10,000 to help cover the costs of the new voting machines the State will require in the future, and some of the booths that are required to be replaced. They are trying to get a grant for the voting machine as well. Highway Reconstruction was brought back to \$750,000, which is what has been put away for 15 years. Today only about half the amount of work can be completed for the same money. The Environmental Contingency was kept steady at \$20,000. It could be used if there are any leaks, or if there is asbestos abatement needed, etc. Informational Technology was unchanged for \$10,000. The Durrell Mountain Road CR is \$5,000 which is paid every year by a pit owner in Gilford to help with any road repairs needed. The Water System Repair & Maintenance is \$100,000 and comes from user fees. The Sewer System Repair & Maintenance is \$30,000 and is also funded through user fees. The Board agreed with the Capital Reserve Items as presented.

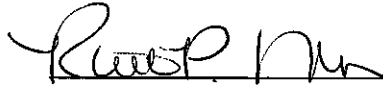
Selectman Pike moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (a) at 12:43pm; seconded by Selectman Patten. Roll Call: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

The Board discussed matters of concern with regards to union and non-union wages and instructed TA Jipson to move forward with the plan presented.

Selectman Patten moved to exit non-public Session at 12:52 pm; seconded by Selectman Pike. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).

Adjournment:


Selectman Pike moved to adjourn at 12:53 pm; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. The motion passed unopposed (4-0).



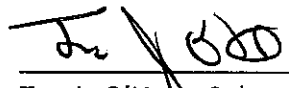
Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



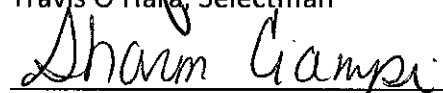
Jon Pike, Vice Chairman



Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman



Travis O'Hara, Selectman



Sharon Ciampi, Selectman