



## Office of Board of Selectmen

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**Budget Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, November 29, 2022, 6:30 p.m.**  
**Belmont Mill**  
**Tioga Meeting Room**

Present were TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Administrator Colleen Akerman, Selectmen's Representative Ruth Mooney, Chairman Ron Mitchell, Norma Patten, Sharon Ciampi, Justin Borden, Mark Roberts, Gary Grant, Lisa Crocker, Albert Akerstrom, Roland Coffin, and Marsha Campbell. Also present were Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Steven Akerstrom, Granite VNA Representative Brian Winslow, and CAP Representatives Leah Richards and Beth Hayward. Via Zoom was Finance Director Katherine Davis and CASA Representative Tarah Bergeron.

Vice Chair Tracey LeClair and Member Bob Chapman were absent.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

#### **July 19, 2022:**

Chair Ron Mitchell moved the minutes of the meeting held on July 19, 2022 as written; seconded by Ruth Mooney. The motion passed. Sharon Ciampi abstained because she did not attend the meeting.

#### **November 15, 2022:**

R. Mooney moved the minutes of the meeting held on November 15, 2022; seconded by Roland Coffin. The minutes were amended by Chair R. Mitchell to clarify that the member vacancies were filled until the next election, per RSA 32-15; and by S. Ciampi to correct the meeting time to 6:30pm. The motion passed unanimously.

### **New Member Appointment:**

Lisa Crocker was present to meet with the Committee about her interest in becoming a member. She has spent time all over New England and previously served on a Budget Committee in Maine. She has worked for the DMV in Maine and has lived here in New Hampshire for over a year.

R. Mooney moved to appoint Lisa Crocker to serve out the remaining vacancy until March 2023. Ms. Crocker will be required to run on the ballot for the next election. The motion was seconded by Norma Patten and passed unanimously. Ms. Crocker will be unable to vote until she is sworn in by the Town Clerk.

### **Health Agencies:**

Mr. Brian Winslow was present on behalf of the Granite VNA. He thanked the Town for their support. Their organization merged into Granite VNA but used to be Central VNA and Hospice. They have served the Lakes Region for about 100 years and requested flat funding for 2023 of \$22,000. They provide three primary service lines including home health care, hospice care and pediatric care. Some of the services they offer include nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nutrition, education, and clinics for blood pressure, vaccinations and more. They try to work on prevention because it saves money in the long run. Their organization is larger now after the merge, and without the merge they would not be able to provide all of the services that they have. This year 191 Belmont residents were served with 5,645 home visits.

*R. Mooney moved line 01-4415-333 for the Granite VNA for \$22,000.00, seconded by Mark Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.*

Ms. Leah Richards and Ms. Beth Hayward were present on behalf of the Belknap-Merrimack Community Action Program (CAP). They help provide fuel assistance and heat and electric assistance. They requested \$15,000.00 this year and the Selectmen approved \$13,000.00. 238 households in Belmont with 445 people were provided \$350,000 in heating assistance. 300 households received \$116,000 in discounted electric. Many clients have fixed incomes or disabilities. There is a program where residents on fuel and electric assistance can apply for a weatherization program. 12 homes received \$94,000 in weatherization. The First Baptist Food Pantry was provided with \$22,500 in food and \$584,693 was provided in housing assistance. From July 2021 to June 2022, 85 Belmont households were assisted with \$677,000 in rent arrearages, utilities, moving expenses, and future rents. CAP helps empower people. They could not afford to do this without funding from local towns. Federal grants and state programs make up 2/3 of the CAP budget. They have added staff in anticipation of the additional requests for assistance, but they don't know yet how much funding they will be receiving. R. Mooney asked if these funds go directly toward providing assistance or to staffing. It was explained that grants work differently, where only a very small portion such as 10% can be used to cover administrative costs such as staffing to provide the assistance. This funding would assist with administration. The weatherization program also needs funding. R. Mooney commented that providing this type of assistance will put less back on the General Assistance program and the Town.

*N. Patten moved line 01-4415-335 for the Community Action Program for \$13,000.00, seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.*

Ms. Tarah Bergeron representing CASA was present on Zoom. She thanked the Town for their previous funding. CASA represents abused and neglected children and gives them a free voice in court. They speak on behalf of the child's best interest to ensure children are placed where they should be. They are requesting \$500.00 which is the same as last year. There have been big increases since school started back up. Chair R. Mitchell asked if there are staffing problems. Ms. Bergeron explained they are having big issues getting volunteer

advocates. Staff turnover is normal, and sometimes advocates become staff, but it is hard to recruit where the need is greatest. \$500.00 does not go far. When their request was submitted, they did not yet have the first quarter 2022 numbers. If they did, they would have requested additional funds. It costs about \$2,000.00 to recruit, train and supervise an advocate for one year. They had to refuse 93 children in 2021 and 110 so far in 2022.

*N. Patten moved line 01-4415-336 for CASA for \$500.00, seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.*

*N. Patten moved lines 01-4415-337 to 01-4415-344 [Waypoint, New Beginnings, American Red Cross, Lakes Region Mental Health, Franklin VNA & Hospice, Partnership for Public Health]; seconded by M. Roberts.*

S. Ciampi asked about the scope of the request for Granite VNA compared to Franklin VNA & Hospice. M. Roberts noted Granite VNA had 5,645 visits and Franklin VNA only had 240 visits. L. Crocker asked why there are two VNAs on the list. Mr. Wilson of Granite VNA said there is some overlap, but patients have a choice and they can use either organization.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

R. Mooney presented for the South Road Cemetery, which is the required Town cemetery. They have requested \$9,000.00 due to fuel increases, and the Selectmen approved \$8,500.00. There is plenty of room still available in the cemetery.

*M. Roberts moved line 01-4415-330 for the South Road Cemetery for \$8,500.00, seconded by Albert Akerstrom. The motion passed unanimously.*

*Marsha Campbell moved to approve the Health Agency Budget of \$68,891.00 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by A. Akerstrom and passed unanimously.*

#### **Police Department:**

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski and Captain Steven Akerstrom were present to review the Police Department budget. TA Jipson noted that "second in commands" were asked to get involved in the budgeting process from start to finish.

The new building is working well as they go into their second winter. The work environment, atmosphere and morale have grown. The building came in under budget. If you haven't seen it please come for a tour. R. Mooney commented it was the first bond that ever passed on the first vote. Residents visited the old building and were horrified because it was beyond repair. They put their support into the vote.

This year there have been 9,931 calls and it is about even with last year. There have been 528 arrests and 774 recovering offenses. They have been 193 accidents, which is ahead of

last year. They anticipate having 11,000 calls by the end of December even though they have been short two people for most of the year. They are still one position down, but the pay scale is union-controlled and it has been a problem for hiring. There is a new contract with the Board of Selectman that will go to voters in March. If it passes, Belmont will be close to the starting salaries of other Belknap county towns.

There is a new grant position being filled by Officer Richie Bryant to work with substance abuse, overdoses, and traumas at home. There are currently two officers who primarily work with drug enforcement. The homeless population has increased. There are two open School Resource Officer (SRO) positions at the high school and middle school that are to be funded through the school district. They have been hard to fill but there are two very qualified retirees who are interested. They are currently in negotiations with the school. The cost would be less than the original school resource officer because they are part time with no benefits. The retired officers are mandated to 1,325 hours per year to keep their retirement without penalty, so they will have an hourly salary for 180 school days.

There have been 208 felonies in Belmont with 86 cases referred to the prosecuting attorney. 95 cases have been closed and 27 are still open. There has been an uptick in internet crimes including extortion, blackmail, non-consensual distribution of images, child pornography, and identity theft. A third detective is needed because two is not enough for the workload. They have been aggressive with obtaining grants but there is not enough staff to apply for some of them. They have received \$582,947.00 in grants for items including body cams, radios, shields, printers and the AFIS machine. Having the new facility has made a huge difference in being able to obtain grant funding. There was discussion about finding a way to set aside some funds for grants that require matching funds. Finance Director Katherine Davis commented that we are fortunate that most grants are fully funded. The Highway Safety grant is 80/20 and we were fortunate to have the 20% in the budget to be able to fund it. The Police Department does not have a special revenue fund like the Fire Department does for the ambulance because they don't charge for services and have no billing.

Employee retention is important due to the costs for a new officer, which include uniforms, firearms, gun belt, boots and more. The Town needs to pay a fair salary and be competitive to avoid wasting money. New employees are being asked to sign a three-year contract. Officers have been lost because there is a \$7,000.00 to \$8,000.00 salary difference. The State Police are offering sign-on and retention bonuses right now. Chair R. Mitchell said with training and uniforms there is a lot invested. Training hour requirements are being increased over the next few years and it is costly. Captain Akerstrom said Belmont will host some trainings here at the Mill, which will allow some officers to attend at no cost.

Chair R. Mitchell asked about school security. Chief Lewandoski said with an SRO on site security is very high because they monitor the site. When Officer Marcello was here he was very dedicated and proactive and initiated marking windows and promoted a Knox box for the PD to be able to enter the building in the event of a complete lockdown. An SRO will walk the exterior and the interior of the building regularly. But right now it is left up to the school.

Chair R. Mitchell wanted to know where we are at with cruisers. Captain Akerstrom stated they do a lease-purchase for three years then they own the cruiser. Two officers are assigned to each cruiser and they rotate them to limit the mileage when they can. Older cruisers are used to travel to court, or trainings, or the lab. They are not part of the road rotation. There are currently 12 cruisers with 4 unmarked vehicles. One cruiser is used for Details and one is used for parts. They have lots of hours on them. Chair R. Mitchell stated there are four major highways that run through Belmont to get to Laconia. The Department is busy with high traffic areas.

*M. Roberts moved lines 01-4210-101 to 01-4210-121, seconded by N. Patten.*

There have been retirements but Nikki Wheeler has stayed on part-time. The Sheriff's Department requires coverage for 16 hours per week. Officer Hicks steps up to dispatch when needed as well as Captain Akerstrom. Chair R. Mitchell noted police officers are risking their lives for less money than local drivers earn, and they have to work a rotating schedule plus holidays and weekends. A resident in the audience added that flaggers are currently making \$21.50 per hour. R. Mooney reported that union negotiations went smoothly and that is reflected in the budget numbers.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

*N. Patten moved lines 01-4210-125 to 01-4210-220, seconded by Gary Grant.*

Chief Lewandoski directed attention to the Detective Incentive line 01-4210-190. He requested an increase from \$1,500.00 to \$3,000.00 for a second detective. The bonus is about \$28.85 per week but a new detective cannot be hired without it. The line currently covers one detective and the other detective is salaried and does not receive the incentive.

*M. Roberts moved to increase line 01-4210-190 Detective Incentive from \$1,500.00 to \$3,000.00, seconded by A. Akerstrom. The motion passed unanimously.*

Chief Lewandoski requested an increase of \$1,500.00 to the Telephone line 01-4210-210 because of an increase in the MDT cards for the cruisers and for cell phones. They are already over budget for this year but an additional \$1,500.00 should cover the 2023 increase. This service allows officers to receive critical information while on the road and allows officers to work on reports while still being out in the community.

*R. Mooney moved to increase line 01-4210-210 from \$7,000.00 to \$8,500.00, seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.*

*M. Roberts moved lines 01-4210-230 through 01-4210-295, seconded by G. Grant.*

Chief Lewandoski requested a decrease to line 01-4210-230 Postage from \$1,500.00 to \$1,000.00.

*A. Akerstrom moved to decrease line 01-4210-230 Postage from \$1,500.00 to \$1,000.00, seconded by N. Patten. The motion passed unanimously.*

Chief Lewandoski requested a decrease to line 01-4210-250 Computer from \$6,000.00 to \$5,000.00 per his discussion with the Selectmen.

*N. Patten moved to decrease line 01-4210-250 Computer from \$6,000.00 to \$5,000.00, seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unanimously..*

Chief Lewandoski originally asked for a \$500.00 decrease to line 01-4210-293 Books and Subscriptions, however the subscription for employee tracking increased and an additional \$200.00 is needed to cover the service.

*R. Mooney moved to increase line 01-4210-293 Books and Subscriptions from \$1,500.00 to \$1,700.00, seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.*

*The motion to move lines 01-4210-230 through 01-4210-295 passed unanimously.*

*R. Mooney moved lines 01-4210-302 through 01-4210-440, seconded by R. Coffin.*

Chair R. Mitchell questioned the small budget for uniform cleaning. Chief Lewandoski explained many wash their uniforms at home and do not use the service. However, with new hires there may be more who use the service. He agreed to the \$1,000.00 decrease from \$3,000.00 to \$2,000.00.

Captain Akerstrom said there is some savings if cruisers are purchased before January, however it is not certain what will be approved by voters in March. The cars could increase in cost. They are trying to build up leases from antiquated equipment. They purchase used when they can, such as lighting, and save \$2,500.00 each car. If there are two new cruisers in 2023, and one older car built out, that should take care of the whole fleet.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

The state used to contribute more to retirement but now it has become a Town burden. Finance Director Davis explained there is a one-time reimbursement for retirement available for fiscal year 2023 and depending on the timing it could help offset lines 320 in the Police and Fire budgets by that amount. The governor has signed it, but we do not know when it will be reimbursed.

*N. Patten moved lines 01-4210-441 through 01-4210-719, seconded my M. Roberts.*

Chief Lewandoski noted increases for supplies and vehicle repairs but they have a great maintenance routine to help save as much as possible on oil changes, tires and more.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

*R. Mooney moved to approve the Police Department Budget of \$2,546,502.10 as amended. The motion was seconded by R. Coffin and passed unanimously.*

**Building Inspection:**

Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer Mark Ekberg gave an overview of the year. The former inspector Russ Wheeler has moved to another Town. CEO Ekberg took over full-time duties in September. He will be working on obtaining required certifications within one year. There have been some positive movements on properties with Code Enforcement issues, such as Durrell Mountain and Rogers Road. 15 Johnson Street is court-involved. There are currently 30 open cases. With regards to inspections, he is not comfortable accepting photographs because he is still building relationships with contractors. It is not unique, a number of municipalities accept photos. It is expected they will exceed 250 new building permits this year, and over 2,000 inspections. The fees collected this year include a couple large commercial projects, so fees are not anticipated to be as large next year. Chair R. Mitchell asked if all of this work is completed independently. CEO Ekberg replied there is a part-time clerk to assist with processing building permits and filing but he still has to review every permit with regards to the construction. In Franklin they have 1,600 inspections per year with two people. Being busy is helping to gain experience which will help with certifications. He admitted some things are not going well but they can't be changed at this point. Gas fireplaces have no codes, they are installed per manufacturer's specifications. Chair R. Mitchell suggested the Fire Department should be completing inspections for fireplaces. CEO Ekberg is still learning but the liability of inspection will fall on the installer's license. It is his job to double-check the work. He is averaging 6-8 inspections per day plus paperwork. The budget is mostly flat with an increase for Legal at the Board of Selectmen's recommendation. Some violations will be argued in court and could take years to be resolved. TA Jipson noted the Legal line did not previously exist in this budget but instead came from the Executive budget. The new line will allow better budget tracking.

*M. Roberts moved lines 01-4240-101 through 01-4240-99, seconded by A. Akerstrom.*

There was discussion about the condition of the vehicle and the protective clothing budget.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

*R. Mooney moved to approve the Building Inspection Budget of \$118,205.77 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by N. Patten and passed unanimously.*


It was the consensus of the members to adjourn the meeting at 9 pm and pick up the pace at the next meeting.


**Next Meeting:** The next meeting date will be December 6, 2022 at 6:30 pm.

**Adjournment:**

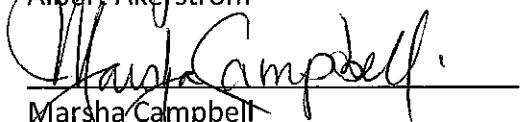
A. Akerstrom moved to adjourn at 9:04 pm; seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.

  
Chairman Ron Mitchell

  
Norma Patten

  
Justin Borden

  
Albert Akerstrom

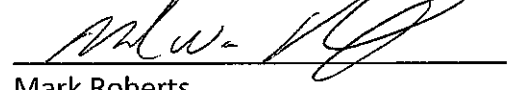
  
Marsha Campbell

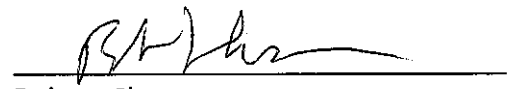
  
Selectman Ruth Mooney

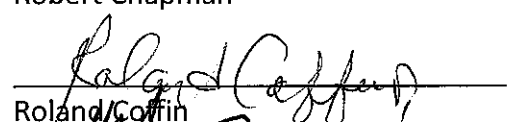
  
Lisa Crocker

  
Vice Chair Tracey LeClair

  
Sharon Ciampi

  
Mark Roberts

  
Robert Chapman

  
Roland Coffin

  
Gary Grant