



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Budget Review Workshop Minutes

Wednesday, October 12, 2022, 10:00 a.m.

Belmont Mill

Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Finance Director Katherine Davis, Town Planner Sarah Whearty, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes, General Assistance Director Donna Cilley, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, and Building & Grounds Employee Kyle Dodge. Via Zoom was Cemetery Trustee Sharon Ciampi and Library Director Eileen Gilbert.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 9:08 am.

Highways, Water & Sewer, Street Lighting, Highway Block Grant

DPW Director Craig Clairmont and Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes presented an overview for 2022. They reported it was a challenging year to schedule projects and for ordering parts, and there were staffing issues as well. They have just hired a new person who will start October 24th. It has been hard to find full-time staff. They have some employees who have retired but still want to work part-time so they have increased the part time budget line to take advantage of that. Eventually they hope to have a seasonal person for the winter months who will help with plowing and snow removal. DPW Director Clairmont said that we will need to look at increasing the budget to keep up with the roads. Budgeting the same amount each year will not be sustainable. Selectman Pike said 15 years ago we were behind. Director Clairmont said the Board put a good plan in place years ago, and DPW is now following the road assessment and they know how to prioritize. The Highway Block grants help a lot. The Seavey Road paving was finished on Monday, and the Johnson Street cut will be fixed soon. Their new truck is expected in a few weeks.

Highways - Selectman Pike had concerns about the electric line. Director Clairmont explained they are locked into a contract until November 2023 so the rate should not increase. Finance Director Katherine Davis said they are trending for \$5,600 in electric costs this year. TA Alicia Jipson asked if changes could be made to the conference and training line. The money has not been used in recent years. Director Clairmont would like to keep the funding because they should be getting more training. Chairman Ruth Mooney supports \$500 for the training line.

Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes' salary is proposed to be split 50% Highway, 25% Water, and 25% Sewer. This more accurately reflects his time split. The assistant DPW director does a lot of the day-to-day staff like meter reads and changing meters. We would have to pay extra to Pennichuck for them to do those duties. DPW is doing cross-training so they can be in a better place than last year.

There was discussion about a winter seasonal person at full time hours. If they work 32 hours average the Town has to offer health insurance at their cost. If they are over 32 hours, we are eligible to pay for their health insurance. Chairman Mooney asked why there was a decrease in the 314-health insurance line. Finance Director Davis explained these are the people we have enrolled now, at the 2023 rate, and some people are currently on a single or two-person plan instead of a family plan. There was an increase in the overtime line for sidewalk clearing. The Police Department is challenging in the winter because the parking lot is not designed for snow. A seasonal employee could help with the downtown area. Line 301 has not been expended yet, but they will be getting cutting edges and other items to prepare for the winter season. TA Jipson asked why there was an increase in the uniform line. The company is going up on their prices by 10%. Chairman Mooney asked about the lease purchases. TA Jipson said the new truck was included as well as a dump truck and the Bobcat. The backhoe has been paid off. The vehicle repair line is only for the Highway Department vehicles and not for other departments. The vehicle fuel line is an educated guess based on the actual numbers. Director Clairmont said all the expenses are weather related. Salt increased last year from \$56 to \$76 per ton. If they over expended the salt line, they could use the Highway Block Grant money. This year salt increased from \$76 to \$85 per ton and it was appropriate to increase the budget line. There are usually five to six weather events in November and December and their current stockpile will need to be restocked before the end of the year. Last year they used 300 tons of salt in November. There was discussion about the catch basin cleaning. Prices have increased but they are working with Laconia to trade and share equipment when they can to save money. TA Jipson said she reviewed Selectman Claude Patten's concerns yesterday because he was unable to attend the meeting today. He would like to decrease all of the lines from 890 down. Selectman Pike was happy with the overall budget. Chairman Mooney did not see any changes she would recommend. A lot of items are unknown.

Selectman Pike asked for clarification about what happens to the funds when a budget does not get fully spent for the year. Finance Director Davis asserted it is not an unspent budget. It is revenue less expenditures. Surplus/deficit is added to or subtracted from the unassigned fund balance. A healthy unassigned fund balance is 5 to 15%, in accordance with our fund balance policy.

The new proposed Highway budget is \$1,178,707.28.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Highway** budget of \$1,178,707.28 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Highway Administration** budget of \$80,895.47 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Water - The full-time Water Department position was eliminated. Salaries are 12% for the Director and 25% for the Assistant Director. The service contract line is up because we are now using Pennichuck. Chairman Mooney stated this means the liability falls on Pennichuck instead of the Town. The Director reports that their department does all of the administration and handles phone calls, and they keep themselves updated and involved in everything. Finance Director Davis explained line 540 is \$4,000 in administration fees for the Town Administrator, Finance and Town Clerk offices. TA Jipson reported Underwood is currently studying the water rates and line 501 may need to be revisited.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Water** budget of \$405,141.92 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Sewer – The DPW Director explained the new hire will do lots of work for the Sewer Department and will be paid out of the Sewer budget. Different employees check on things over the weekend and it is working out well. Selectman Pike confirmed the electric contract is the same as the rest of the Town. The Director reports that maintenance was left the same and the CCTV costs increased some. The generators are being serviced. Chairman Mooney asked if the Silver Lake project will be paid off this year. TA Jipson commented the Winni River Basin is proposing big changes and increases for Belmont. The Director reported the State is proposing a complete pipe replacement on Route 140 that could cost \$6 million. Finance Director Davis mentioned there are grant programs available, but a grant comes with debt and debt forgiveness.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Sewer** budget of \$633,561.10 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Lighting – There has not yet been a full year with the new LED lighting. There should be savings so next year the budget could decrease. The last upgrade payment is in 2024.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Street Lighting** budget of \$19,649.05 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Highway Block Grant – There was no discussion on this item.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Highway Block Grant** budget of \$196,965.00 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Land Use/Conservation:

Land Use - Town Planner Sarah Whearty observed the biggest challenge this year was staffing. Land Use Technician Rick Ball retired in February and the new LU Tech was not hired until April. A decision was made with the last budget to separate the Building and Land Use clerk duties into two positions with more hours of coverage for the department. It was a struggle to try to fill the position most of the year. One hire was not a good fit and the position with most recently refilled in mid-September with an experienced person. The Land Use Coordinator, formerly the Administrative Assistant, has given her retirement notice with her last day tomorrow. The new Land Use Clerk has municipal and Land Use experience and was offered the position. She will start in the new position in December when she finishes a course she is taking. Selectman Pike had concerns about keeping the office staffed, particularly on Fridays. Someone knowledgeable needs to be there. Town Planner Whearty outlined the new Administrative Assistant position as being 40 hours, five days a week. She said a new Land Use Clerk is still needed but she has not been able to hire a part-time person. The department has been short-staffed since she has been the Planner. She proposed making the position full-time and has some potential candidates to interview from the Town Clerk's recent employee search. Chairman Mooney supports the move to a full-time clerk position. There was discussion about the budget and the funds available for making the position full-time. She expects the new Land Use Clerk may sit out front at the reception desk while the Administrative Assistant works in another office. There have been other big changes that impact the Land Use suite including a new Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer with a new part-time Building Clerk. The new Land Use Clerk will be cross-trained to assist with building permits as necessary to keep things flowing smoothly. Chairman Mooney is a big believer in cross-training because in the long run it saves taxpayers money. Everyone should have a little knowledge of other people's jobs.

There was not a big increase in the budget. The Administrative Assistant position was increased from 35 to 40 hours and a new Land Use Clerk position will also be 40 hours. The phone line will decrease because it is only the monthly service cost. Postage costs are increasing again in January. The Planning Board recently increased the notification fee for applicants, but that goes into the General Fund, not the Land Use budget. The department is planning to change some procedures to reduce costs by emailing documents instead of mailing. Driveway permits will be emailed or picked up in the office. Courtesy mailings will be discontinued but email notices can still be done. They are going to work towards being more efficient, which should result in cost savings. Selectman Pike would like to see figures for the fees that were collected even though they do not go back into the Land Use budget. It would also be helpful for the Budget Committee to see those numbers.

Finance Director Davis reported \$19,203 was collected in planning and zoning fees. Selectman Pike recommended an increase in fees. Town Planner Whearty has discussed increasing the building fees with the Building Inspector, but the Planning Board has balked at the suggestion of impact fees. It is seen as a bad word, but it costs time and money to provide a service. Selectman Pike would like to discuss fee changes at a Planning Board meeting. Finance Director Davis recommended new construction fees.

Other budget lines were kept the same, with a slight increase in the Legal and Professional line. If the Planner needs time off and can't work, a temporary planner will be needed. The department should not be completing legal reviews of deeds. Dues have increased and publications has decreased. Training has been cut back. Equipment had a printer in it that was moved to the printer line, but items like hard hats and safety vests were purchased for site inspections. The plotter line was reduced because the plotter was paid for as of January and is no longer a lease. There is a stockpile of paper and ink on hand. The Master Plan line was reduced to \$1 to hold the line but \$600 is not going to go far towards making changes to the Master Plan. It is going to take some research and getting some quotes. There is a reason it has not been updated in over 17 years. Lakes Region Planning Commission could help push a schedule and meet milestones, gather information, and review data. We will need assistance. The Tax Map line was initially reduced, then brought back up to \$4,500 after some research on some of the fees.

The final number is \$395,552.91, a 6% increase that includes the new full-time LU Clerk position. If the employee health insurance costs change significantly, they can bring it back to the Board.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Land Use** budget of \$395,552.91 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Later in the meeting, the Board accepted a final adjustment to the proposed Land Use budget for a total of \$393,835.71, after additional calculations by Finance Director Davis.

Conservation – There have been no significant changes to the budget or staffing. The Commission proposed adding \$1,500 to the professional services line to contract with Ron Klemarczyk to blaze and paint the boundaries of the Daniel Ladd Farm property. Selectman Pike maintained there is a large balance in the Conservation Fund. Town Planner Whearty explained the fund is intended for property acquisitions and that a \$10,000 projects budget line was removed from the budget in 2021.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Conservation Commission** budget of \$16,873.79 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

General Government Buildings:

Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden and Building & Grounds Employee Kyle Dodge were present to give an overview of the year. Things went well. They were able to get some summer help this year. Old Home Day went well. The biggest increase has been fuel costs. Time management has been good. Seven lawns outside of downtown and 25 trash stations need to be maintained each day. They are vigilant in checking for vandalism. With Parks & Recreation back in swing the beach gets attention every morning with raking and trash pickup. All of the furnaces have been serviced. The Town Hall furnace is at 86% efficiency. Thermostats are monitored. The heat is built up and then monitored for the best efficiency.

One of their big concerns with the 3-man summer crew is when the truck needs to travel outside of downtown. A CIP request has been submitted for a Big Horn "side-by-side" that can be registered to travel on the roads under 35 mph. There are four quotes from \$9,000 to \$15,000. The unit has a windshield, back dump and a winch. It can be stored and used in Town and will help the crew be much more efficient and save on fuel with so many trips in the truck.

TA Jipson mentioned with line 360 for custodial that the part-time cleaner for Town Hall and Mill has resigned. We may need to look into an outside service. This line item may need to be revisited after getting some quotes. She is going to contact the person who cleans the Police Department. The part-time line has also been increased. The summer help has agreed to work on his winter vacations as well. Service contracts have increased. The electric and heat rates have been locked in. Selectman Pike asked about the fire hydrant rent line. The Town pays water and sewer bills for its properties. TA Jipson will research for more details about the line and get back to the Board. Computer expenses have increased based on the renewal. Chairman Mooney asked if it is put out to bid. Finance Director Davis explained the Town has its own server and computer stations are updated on a rotating basis, and the line includes support services such as for the firewall. Chairman Mooney requested the computer services go out to bid. The boot allowance is part of the union contract and was increased with the uniform expense due in part to the new seasonal Building & Grounds employee.

There was discussion about the CIP item and whether it would fall under Capital Outlay or as part of the Highway Department budget. Chairman Mooney suggested a separate warrant article should be discouraged.

B&G Supervisor Golden is comfortable with the fuel line budget. The phone budget has increased a little for the Mill.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **General Government Buildings** budget of \$464,491.74 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Cemeteries:

Cemetery Trustees Sharon Ciampi and Kyle Dodge presented the budget proposal. Trustee Sharon Ciampi requested \$26,000 for 2023. The maintenance is estimated to be less than \$18,000. There is \$5,000 for legal expenses and \$3,000 for operations and supplies. A Capital Reserve request of \$10,000 has also been made. Chairman Mooney asked for clarification on the legal expenses. Trustee Kyle Dodge explained there is a lot of money set aside for graves that can't be accessed. To gain access and do the paperwork required, a lawyer is needed. Trustee Ciampi said there are about 15-20 accounts, and they must petition Superior Court for the perpetual care funds. State statute allows Cemetery Trustees to take over abandoned cemeteries if they have not been maintained in over 50 years. There was conversation about how perpetual funds work and restrictions on use of the principal and

interest. Some account funds may need to be returned to relatives because burials did not happen in Belmont.

Selectman Pike asked about bids for maintenance. Trustee Ciampi explained they do not expect to look for bids until spring due to companies not yet looking for jobs for next year and issues with gas prices, etc. Selectman Pike maintained the Town does not operate that way. All other departments provide a budget based on the information they have and what is necessary to move forward. He is not in favor of the \$26,000 request or the Capital Reserve request of \$10,000. He is not happy with what has happened previously with a lack of bids for maintenance and repairs and difficulties with prepaid work that was not completed. He is not prepared to vote on a budget until there are some factual numbers. TA Jipson shared that Selectman Patten, who could not attend today, recommended adjusting the request to \$22,000 and denying the Capital Reserve request. Chairman Mooney stated this budget item will be put on hold until the next meeting.

General Assistance/Welfare:

General Assistance Director Donna Cilley acknowledged it has been a challenging year with the homeless population growing. Laconia has reported about 300-400 cases. The number is fluid. Belmont currently has six active cases that involve children. The New Hampshire Emergency Rental Assistance Program funds are in question. There are currently no answers about what the future of the program holds. It is a slow process, but we need to take advantage of it when people qualify. Director Cilley is working with some new hotel owners on how the voucher process works and negotiating the bills. The CAP homeless outreach program only has three employees. It is difficult to find someone who wants to go out in the field because it is not a safe or inviting job. Currently single homeless people with animals are the biggest hurdles. More than 50% have animals. Most families have a minimum of two to three kids and there is no housing available. Landlords have increased rates and are making tenants leave without going through the proper eviction process. There are long waiting lists for subsidized housing.

Heating costs have increased significantly, and the qualification percentages have changed. There is also a one-time grant available this year. The program will open November 1st but there is still a gap. The Director is seeing more people who have never applied for assistance asking for help. There is a big issue with those who are just over the threshold. They have their own home and don't use any other services. Many of those wish to remain anonymous and decline to apply when they see there is a lien application for their property. Chairman Mooney doesn't want to gamble with big changes to the budget because next year there could be a huge increase if other assistance programs are discontinued. There is an overall budget decrease of 15%.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **General Assistance** budget of \$175,197.34 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Executive:

The Executive budget includes the addition of two new Selectmen for three quarters of the year. In 2024 the number will be up to \$26,000. Wages were adjusted because of the recent changes with Jeanne Beaudin's retirement and TA Alicia Jipson's promotion. The administrative assistant line was left with \$1 in case this is a position that needs to be filled. The overtime and vacation buyback were separated. The Executive budget covers fringe benefits for all Town Hall employees and Building & Grounds. The service contracts line includes some consultation fees for Jeanne Beaudin's continued assistance with things like union contracts. The computer line includes the BMSI interface and Advantage database. There is increased training and mileage with the recent staff changes. The copier lease will now include faxing to a PDF electronic format, which will be a cost savings on land lines, ink, paper, and equipment costs. There was a question about why the health insurance line was so expensive. This number is determined by the number of employees taking advantage of the insurance, and whether they have single, 2-person or family plans. This line includes all Town Hall employees except Land Use. The total proposed budget is a 6% decrease from 2022.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Executive** budget of \$316,139.91 as presented. Selectman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Legal:

There were no changes to the Legal budget. Selectman Pike asked if Code Enforcement legal costs are included in this budget. TA Jipson stated they are not.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Legal** budget of \$35,000.00 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Police Department:

After adjustments there was a 4% increase in the Police Department budget.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Police Department** budget of \$2,541,690.47 as presented. Selectman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Town Clerk:

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Town Clerk's** budget of \$120,387.31 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Overall, there was a 3% decrease because some items were moved to the Elections budget. Health and Dental insurance are reflected in the Executive budget.

Financial Administration:

There was discussion about the need for a part-time Finance Clerk. Finance Director Davis is obtaining some quotes for the cost to sub out some functions such as payroll and AP, in lieu of a clerk. It is concerning the Land Use department struggled to find a part-time clerk for most of the year. Selectman Pike suggested a full-time clerk could work for the Finance

Department and the Administrative/Assessing Departments. He would like to get a job description that would include other functions and show additional duties.

Property Taxation:

The wages have been updated. There is an increase because there is now one full-time employee instead of one employee split with multiple departments. There is a 50% increase. There is also an increase in the Vision line items due to increased appraisal fees for increased building permits.

Selectman Pike moved to approve the proposed **Property Taxation** budget of \$305,899.19 as presented. Chairman Mooney seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

The next Budget Workshop will be Wednesday, October 19th, 2022, at 9:00 am at this location.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30pm.



Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



Jon Pike, Vice Chairman

Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman