



Office of Board of Selectmen

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**Selectmen's Work Session Minutes
Monday, March 25, 2024, 4:00 pm
Belmont Mill, Penstock Meeting Room**

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude "Sonny" Patten, Jr., Selectman Travis O'Hara (4:30pm), Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Stephen Akerstrom, Town Planner Karen Santoro, TC/TC Jennifer Cashman, Fire Chief Deb Black, Assistant Fire Chief Donald Pickowicz, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, DPW Assistant Director Brian Jackes, General Assistance Director Donna Cilley, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Parks & Rec Director Danielle St. Onge, Library Director Eileen Gilbert, Planning Board Member Kevin Sturgeon, and Cemetery Trustee Hillary Horn.

Chairman Ruth Mooney stated today's Board of Selectmen work session is to discuss the default budget and meet with department heads and the Town Administrator to discuss where we are at, where we need to go and what changes need to be made to the budget. This meeting is open to the public, however per RSA 91:A:2 the public has no guaranteed right to speak. This meeting is for the Board to conduct important Town business. No comments or discussion from the public will be entertained.

TA Alicia Jipson has met with some of the department heads to work on getting line items at or below the default budget. Things will be monitored closely throughout the year and at the end of the year some things may be added back in.

The amount we are potentially "short" in the operating budget and other union wages is \$716,470 and also \$1,700,000 in warrant article appropriations.

Building & Grounds:

B&G Supervisor Patrick Golden shared his proposed cuts and stated this is painful for everyone. Their department was asked to find at least \$7,700 but they came up with more. They don't have a big budget but they want to help so that everyone gets what they deserve. He stated he was not in agreement with a suggestion to only work on wage increases for lower tier employees. Increases should be for everyone or no one because if supervisors are dissatisfied things flow downhill and more people will be leaving. B&G removed some of the overtime and the cleaning position at the Town Hall. They also cut some of the maintenance and equipment because they were fortunate enough to upgrade mowers and trimmers last year so they should be in good shape. He hopes the budget will still allow them to continue with part-time summer help to keep the beach and Sargent Park open. The Board recounted the year that they had no workers and the Board volunteered to work and clean the beach. The

total proposed decrease to the B&G budget is \$51,500, which is \$45,000 below the default. There are some encumbered funds from last year for some of the heating expenses. Patrick reviewed the costs to operate the Mill building and made a suggestion to bring everything back down to the first floor for savings on heating and cooling. It could save \$5,000-\$7,000. The Board will take some time to consider this option.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector/Finance:

TC/TC Jenn Cashman reported the one big cut that was made was for a shared full-time employee with the Executive office. That is a savings of \$24,015. She also cut overtime, but the elections are typically the only time OT would be necessary. She will work extra herself to help avoid overtime. Cuts were also made to office supplies, advertising, mileage and training. Even with these cuts, the department is still \$19,000 over the default budget partially due to the number of elections this year compared to last year.

Selectman Travis O'Hara entered the meeting at 4:30pm.

There was discussion about election supplies, the need for new voting booths and the coding chip costs. Although the Town Clerk's office collects revenues, we won't know what those are until later in the year. Suggestions were to make small increases to dog registrations, and there are a few properties that may qualify for tax deeding. The department has also looked for grants and received some for staff training.

The Finance budget includes the Finance Director, Finance Clerk and Town Treasurer. There are some encumbered funds that are unspent from last year's audit and the audit line was overbudgeted to account for a federal audit if necessary. Supplies, mileage, training and equipment were cut. With all of the decreases the Finance budget is still over the default by \$7,000.

Land Use, Building & Code Enforcement, Conservation Commission:

Town Planner Karen Santoro reported cuts that included vacation buyback, postage, computers, printing, training and mileage, supplies, and overtime. They are using email as much as possible and having Board members pick up meeting packets to save on the postage expense.

TA Jipson suggested the Conservation Commission use \$6,200 of their Conservation Fund for professional services and invasives but that will need a vote from the Conservation Commission members. There are some limitations on what the fund can be used for, but the suggested items are directly related to maintenance of conservation properties. Karen also suggested cuts to general expenses such as conference and speaker fees.

Karen noted the Building budget has cuts to clothing, postage, vehicle repairs, and supplies but a big ticket item is the legal expenses for Code Enforcement cases. There are currently 3 in court. She also asked if the Board would like to limit the training line to one residential certification this year or if they prefer to spend the additional \$1,100 for the

commercial certification as well. It was the consensus of the Board that both certifications are important, especially with active court cases.

Public Works – Highway/Water/Sewer:

DPW Director Craig Clairmont started with the good news that the vote on the VW mitigation grant for a new vehicle at minimal expense will be voted on this week. He is concerned about the safety of the public. He can't let snow and ice build up, and potentially endanger or prevent our emergency services personnel from getting to an incident. The Highway Department will do the best they can to keep the roads safe. It was suggested that Block Grant funds, which are normally reserved for shim and overlays, be used for other road maintenance this year. Craig stated although the Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) has a balance of \$1,000,000, that barely covers the cost for one road to be reconstructed. Belmont has some of the best roads in the county because they have been well maintained for many years. Well maintained roads help keep our Town vehicles, and our residents' vehicles in better condition, and less salt is needed during storms. They decreased the budget by \$66,000 but could save an additional \$126,000. It is important to understand that a lot of the Highway budget is related to weather and we can't sacrifice public safety. \$750,000 into the CRF doesn't go as far as it did 20 years ago. They will consider sweeping by hand this year but it is a lot of work. Horne Road will need some treatment and they hoped to shim and overlay Bean Hill Road and reconstruct Middle Route. Selectman Pike asked for a priority list of road projects to review.

Parks & Recreation:

TA Jipson said the Board will need to decide if the Director position should still move to full-time this year and incorporate programs for the seniors. Parks & Rec Director Danielle St. Onge reviewed some of the programs the department offers, such as summer camp, which mostly fund themselves. She has plans to reduce some of the camp transportation costs with different types of field trips and has reduced other lines wherever possible. There is the possibility of combining the park attendant and coordinator positions. They are looking at pairing with other organizations to offer low-cost activities. The Board will need to decide if Parks & Rec should still move forward with offering programs for seniors, but that would not be possible if the Director remains a part-time employee.

Selectman Pike moved to proceed with transitioning the Parks & Rec Director to a full-time position to include programming for seniors; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Roll call: J. Pike – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed unopposed (5-0).

Patriotic Purposes/Beach/Beautification:

Lifeguard and camp training costs have increased because of the required certifications. Certifications will help the programs seek out grant funding, which will be a benefit.

Selectman Pike suggested cutting the Patriotic Purposes budget and asking the Old Home Day Committee to provide additional funding. He also recommended cutting the fireworks. Parks & Rec Director St. Onge stated the Town pays for the fireworks, the

inflatables, the dumpsters, the bands, the tents and the porta potties. There was discussion about the additional expenses that are not accounted for directly in the Old Home Day (OHD) budget, such as Building & Grounds, DPW, Police and Fire who put in a lot of extra time for this event. TA Jipson suggested cutting the evening Old Home Day activities, including the fireworks. Selectman Pike suggested cutting Old Home Day in its entirety. Selectman O'Hara said he would support cutting the evening OHD activities. Selectman Patten was in agreement with cutting the evening OHD activities. Selectman Ciampi questioned if the event could proceed with donations but the OHD Committee is setup differently than other non-profit groups and may need to be reorganized to accept donations.

Selectman O'Hara moved to cut the fireworks and evening activities for Old Home Day; seconded by Selectman Pike.

There was additional discussion about the costs for the event and Selectman O'Hara withdrew his motion.

Selectman Pike moved to eliminate Old Home Day for 2024; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Roll call: J. Pike – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – nay, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-1).

The default budget for Patriotic Purposes decreased from \$17,500 to \$2,500. It was suggested that next year Old Home Day be budgeted to show all of the costs including staff from other departments. It was noted that some of the budgeting is difficult because we can't show revenues and some things look like a big loss.

The Library Trustees and the Cemetery Trustees have left the meeting to discuss the budget at their own meetings this evening. They will report back at the meeting on Wednesday.

It was recommended that Household Hazardous Waste Day be canceled. TA Jipson will look into the commitment and any payments that may have already been made.

Police Department:

If the Board chooses to proceed with bonuses for this department, they have the biggest shortfall to make up due to the failed union contract warrant article. The difference is \$360,000. The department will need to make difficult decisions and make more cuts. They made cuts to special duty pay, but that has offsetting revenues which go into the General Fund. They also cut the part-time line. There was discussion about the new cruisers and the rotation schedule. If the cruiser lease-purchases are cut, the vehicle maintenance line will need to be increased for additional repairs and it will take years to get back onto a good rotation schedule. The cruisers are leased direct so if funds were to become available later in the year, one could be leased at that time. The department does get grants to help outfit new cruisers. Some funds were encumbered from 2023 for the cruisers. There was also discussion about cutting one open position and only hiring one new officer. Supplies were reduced and they email

whatever they can to save on postage. There was also a reduction in health insurance due to staff changes. If both cruisers and both open positions are cut, it is still not enough to make up for the shortfall. Selectman O'Hara asked about using the county to cover dispatch services. Captain Steve Akerstrom explained that even 2 years ago they did not have the resources to cover Belmont. If they take Belmont on, they will need additional people because Belmont is so busy. Some calls and stops can't be radioed in on their system right now because the airwaves are too busy. It is not safe. In addition, the lobby is open for permits, reports and complaints. Someone needs to be there to take care of those people, otherwise officers have to be taken off the streets to do those things. Safety wise, he would never recommend using the county for coverage on a regular basis. When there is a need, it is scheduled well in advance so they can adjust their staffing schedules. Belmont is safer and more efficient with their own dispatch.

The department already has someone in process for one of the open positions.

Selectman O'Hara moved to fill one open officer position; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Roll call: J. Pike – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed unopposed (5-0).

The department has offsetting revenue for the School Resource Officer, Special Duty and a Prosecutor stipend. There may also be additional health insurance savings.

Fire Department:

The department's default budget is higher than the requested budget. They have made cuts to the call department, special duty pay, phones, uniforms, electric, training, supplies, equipment and repairs and more. There was discussion about the cut to the ambulance billing line and how the ambulance fund works. The department is only short one grant position at this time. If fully staffed, there may be additional cuts to the overtime line.

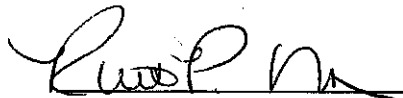
General Assistance:

GA Director Donna Cilley reminded the Board the housing line was overspent last year and the Town is required by law to help with housing and there is no cap on welfare. There are some residents at the Belknap House and some who are housed in affordable motel rooms where the Town has a long-term agreement. Some of the lines like mileage and training can be reduced but the housing line should have a buffer. The budget is still \$6,715 more than the default.

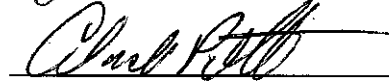
Next Regular Meeting Date: April 3, 2024


Adjournment:

Selectman Pike moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 pm; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Roll call: T. O'Hara – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed unopposed (5-0).


Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman


Jon Pike, Vice Chairman


Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman


Travis O'Hara, Selectman


Sharon Ciampi, Selectman