

Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 14, 2023, 6:30 p.m.
Belmont Mill
Corner Meeting House Room

Present were TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Administrator Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Selectmen's Representative Ruth Mooney, Chairman Ron Mitchell, Vice Chair Tracey LeClair, Justin Borden, Mark Roberts, Albert Akerstrom, Marsha Campbell, Bob Chapman, and Fred Wells. Also present was Planning Board Member Kevin Sturgeon. There was one attendee named Sue present on Zoom. Also present were Budget Committee Candidates Jessica Fleck, Marc Zimmerman and Kevin Sturgeon (all three later appointed to full Committee positions).

Chairman Ron Mitchell welcomed everyone at 6:30 pm.

Member Lisa Crocker was absent.

New Member Appointments:

There are currently three vacant positions. Chairman Mitchell explained that department heads create budgets, then present to the Selectmen, who review and make decisions on the budget before it goes to Budget Committee. Each department head will present their budget to the committee. The committee will review, make any necessary corrections, and then the budget becomes a warrant article to be voted on by taxpayers in March.

Chairman Mitchell asked the candidates to introduce themselves. Mr. Marc Zimmerman explained he has worked with finance, economics, and government his entire life and worked in Washington, DC for 15 years. He has a top-down view of policies and considers how they will affect all sectors of citizens, and those who pay. He wants to help the helpless, but that always needs to be balanced with the taxpayers. He will also filter decisions through a prism of needs versus wants.

Ms. Jessica Fleck has been a resident for 19 years and had two children in the school system. She was active in the school PTO and has tried to stay involved in Town. She wants to be part of the solution and likes to see what is happening in Town. She runs the small business department at Melcher & Prescott and has a financial background. She is a board member for the Belknap House and is the Outreach Committee Chair at the Gilford Community Church.

Mr. Kevin Sturgeon previously served on the Budget Committee and was elected by a write-in campaign. He has served on the Planning Board but will not be running again next year. He will offer to be an alternate. It is interesting to see where we are at, and he wanted to be sure there were enough candidates to serve on the committee.

The committee discussed the candidates after they left the room.

Mark Roberts moved to appoint Marc Zimmerman, Jessica Fleck and Kevin Sturgeon to one-year terms to serve out the three vacancies; seconded by Fred Wells. Motion passed unopposed (9-0).

TA Alicia Jipson swore in all three candidates: Marc Zimmerman, Jessica Fleck, Kevin Sturgeon. These candidates will need to run on the 2024 ballot at the Town Election.

Chairman Mitchell asked members to contact Town Hall as soon as possible if they cannot make a meeting because we need to have a quorum to do business and there is a tight schedule.

Election of Officers:

Tracey LeClair nominated Ron Mitchell as Chairman; seconded by Al Akerstrom. Motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Ruth Mooney nominated Tracey LeClair as Vice Chair; seconded by A. Akerstrom. Motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Overview 2024 Budget:

TA Alicia Jipson provided a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the 2024 proposed budget and 2023 year in review. The presentation included staffing changes, tax rate history, grant information, the history of funded and proposed budgets for individual departments, revenues, Capital Reserve summaries and principal and interest for debt service. The new solid waste program has reduced costs and DPW Director Craig Clairmont said the roads are cleaner. There was a \$220,000,000 increase in assessed values from 2022 to 2023. Oil, propane and electric rates were locked in and health insurance rates have increased. The elevator at the Mill building is being refurbished and we are working on grants and funding to finish the building for use as Town Hall. There was a lot of staff turnover.

Chairman Mitchell encouraged members to visit departments and check out the equipment that we have and get a tour.

General Government Buildings #8:

Buildings & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden said he tried to make this budget as level as possible and the main increases were to wages only. There are only three people in their department and one is seasonal. 2023 was a busy year with lots of projects. We have old buildings, but they are in good shape, and we keep a good maintenance schedule to help

prevent costly repairs and replacements. Kyle Dodge is a great asset and he is being trained to take over when Patrick retires. The department received ARPA grant funds from the Board of Selectmen to replace two mowers, which should last up to 10 years. The part-time seasonal position was increased to full-time seasonal in order to address some big projects next summer such as roofing the four pavilions at the beach. Other increases were for utilities and fuel but we don't have any control over those. R. Mooney noted the department shared a UTV with the Fire Department for use in the downtown area. DPW Director Clairmont thanked the department for their assistance with plowing, and mowing the pump stations and more.

T. LeClair moved lines 01-4194-101 to 01-4194-980; seconded by M. Roberts. M. Zimmerman asked about the oil and propane prices compared to last year. It shows a 100% increase from last year when looking at the 2023 actual. T. LeClair explained 2023 is only accounting for 10 months so far because we still have November and December, and may not have spent the money. The 2022 actual is \$8,000 and they are requesting \$10,000. The contract is for 9,000 gallons for propane and 6,000 gallons for oil. The rates are lower than last year but it seems to be a considerable jump. Department heads have to guess what they will need for the year. The police department is still a new building, and there is more use of the Mill building. This line includes Town Hall, DPW, Police and Fire. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the General Government Buildings Budget of \$498,305.42 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unanimously (12-0).

Highway #15:

DPW Director Craig Clairmont and Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes presented the proposed Highway budget.

The department has recently hired 2 new people and now has a total of 9 employees. This is the first time in 4 years they have been fully staffed going into winter. There was lots of flooding this year and despite the rainy summer, they completed many paving projects which included checking ditches and drainage. Costs have increased, which includes salaries, but we are trying to compete with the private sector. DPW applied for grants for two new trucks through the Clean Diesel Act and hope to have an answer by next week.

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4311-101 through 01-4311-505; seconded by M. Roberts. T. LeClair recounted a discussion with a Gilmanton resident about how well Belmont's roads are maintained and it is nice to hear. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the Highway Administration budget of \$91,554.09 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved lines 01-4312-102 through 01-4312-505; seconded by M. Roberts. There is still money being spent before the year ends, so the 2023 Actual numbers are not completely accurate. They have included hiring a mulching excavator for the pit in an effort to avoid the need to log the property in the future. There are more employees with family insurance plans and rates have increased. Line 301 is for the plow cutting edges. There are heavier expenses in November and December and they try to stock up this time of year. Parts are expensive, but it is easier to scrape the roads than to salt. The cost per ton increased from \$56 to \$82 and they try to be conservative. They also try to purchase similar equipment so that they can share parts when repairs are needed. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4312-707 through 01-4312-999; seconded by T. LeClair. There have been some issues with dumping on Mile Hill Road that accounts for some of the transfer station expenses. The salt budget could be encumbered to move it forward but there may not be much left on the line by the end of the year. It takes 60-70 tons of salt for an average storm, but they are talking about lots of ice and big storms this year. The equipment hire line has increased because of the cost to rent a roadside mower for what they can't reach with their own equipment, and street sweeping expenses have increased. The garage uses the waste oil furnace during the day when it can be monitored but uses propane at night. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the Highways and Streets budget of \$1,309,322.66 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unopposed (12-0).

Street Lighting & Highway Block Grant #15:

R. Mooney moved line 01-4316-220; seconded by T. LeClair. New LED street lights were installed in 2022 and the final payment will be in 2024. It has paid off because electric expenses have decreased. The lights will pay for themselves within 3 years. Lighting was also improved in the downtown area as a result. This was important due to an accident downtown. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the Street Lighting budget of \$14,000.00 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved line 01-4319-001; seconded by F. Wells. These funds are obtained from the state for revenues from gasoline taxes, and the amounts are based on the number of miles of roadway in town and the population. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the Highway Block Grant budget of \$194,234.85 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unopposed (12-0).

Sewer #17:

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4321-101 through 01-4321-888; seconded by M. Roberts. Assistant DPW Director Jackes explained they have 8 pumping stations that are regularly maintained, and they are required to clean and camera a portion of the piping every year. NHDES mandates how often pump stations are checked and Belmont is required to do so 365 days a year. In the past there was a dedicated sewer employee but now they are cross-training all employees so they can rotate the schedule. It is also good to have different sets of eyes checking things. The sewer costs are offset by user fees, which had a minimal increase this year. Lines 401-404 are for the Winni River Basin (WRBP) and we have no control over the fees they set. There are problems with the line on Route 140 and we are paying for repairs. WRBP wants to replace a lot of piping in the future at a cost of \$8-\$12 million dollars for 1,500 users. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the Sewer budget of \$657,540.23 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unopposed (12-0).

Water #18:

Belmont has 600 water users in two areas; Belmont and Belmont North. Some of the water is purchased from Laconia, with a meter at the town line. Our water tank was cleaned this year by sanitized divers and there was 2-3" of iron inside the tank. The previously proposed manganese plant would have been helpful. They are working on a new well replacement using a grant. Pennichuck continues to operate the water system and do testing, but the DPW Director and Assistant Director are maintaining their water licenses and continuing education. This budget is also paid for with user fees. There is a lead-lined service grant being used to help inventory every service in town, and to check inside each house to ensure there are no lead pipes. Everything will be documented and used for GIS mapping, which is a big upgrade.

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4331-101 through 01-4331-875; seconded by R. Chapman. We previously had two employees but they left and we had to hire Pennichuck for the work; especially to keep up with the government mandates on testing. There is a line for \$17,500 for corrosion control chemicals. In the future, the state will mandate a manganese treatment plant. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

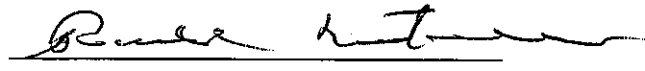
T. LeClair moved to approve the Water budget of \$275,158.34 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by F. Wells and passed unopposed (12-0).

Agendas are included at the front of each member's binder so that everyone can check out the budget sheets and documentation in advance of meetings. DPW Director Clairmont invited members to come check out operations at the Town garage.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be November 21, 2023 at 6:30 pm.

Adjournment:

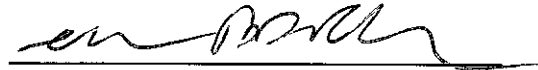
T. LeClair moved to adjourn at 8:46 p.m.; seconded by R. Mooney. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).



Chairman Ron Mitchell



Vice Chair Tracey LeClair



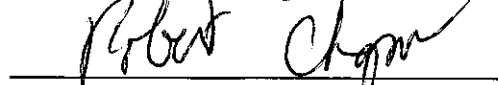
Justin Borden



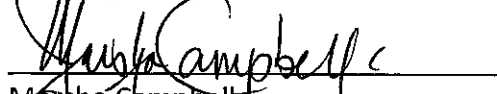
Mark Roberts



Albert Akerstrom



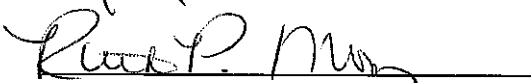
Robert Chapman



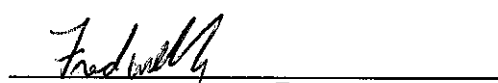
Marsha Campbell



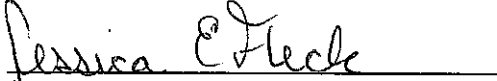
Lisa Crocker



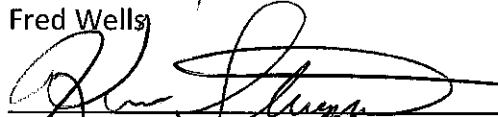
Selectman Ruth Mooney



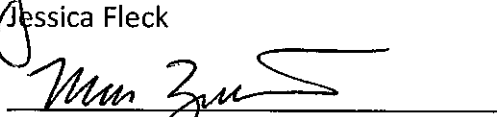
Fred Wells



Jessica Fleck



Kevin Sturgeon



Marc Zimmerman