

Office of Board of Selectmen

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Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 21, 2023, 6:30 p.m.
Belmont Mill
Corner Meeting House Room

Present were TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Administrator Colleen Akerman, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman, CEO Mark Ekberg, Selectmen's Representative Ruth Mooney, Chairman Ron Mitchell, Vice Chair Tracey LeClair, Justin Borden, Mark Roberts, Albert Akerstrom, Marsha Campbell, Bob Chapman, Fred Wells, Jessica Fleck, Marc Zimmerman and Kevin Sturgeon. Via Zoom was Library Director Eileen Gilbert.

Absent: Lisa Crocker.

Approval of Minutes:

November 14, 2023:

T. LeClair moved the minutes of the meeting held on November 14, 2023 as written; seconded by Fred Wells. The motion passed unopposed (11-0).

Administration was approached by member Kevin Sturgeon about concerns that he should have recused himself from some of the votes at the last meeting due to a perceived conflict of interest because of a family relationship. We cannot amend the votes that have already occurred, but the outcome of the votes on the Highway, Sewer and Water Department budgets would not have changed had K. Sturgeon recused himself from the votes. He stated that his actions do not demonstrate any direct personal or financial interest in the outcome of the votes.

Mark Roberts entered the meeting at 6:35 pm.

Building Inspection #13:

Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer Mark Ekberg distributed handouts to the members with statistics and examples of his schedules. Overall there are more inspections and permits than last year. There are four active code violations in process but 40 were closed so far this year. This year's large commercial project was The Vault, and Belknap Marketplace (the mall) has ongoing projects for new tenants. CEO Ekberg stated he performs about 2,200 inspections per year while most inspectors are only completing 1,300. As of October 17th he is no longer donating additional hours to the Town and he has fallen behind. There was discussion about inspection types and timing to complete inspections and associated

paperwork. CEO Ekberg proposed that the Budget Committee approve a budget that includes \$77,376 for his salary. The Board of Selectmen (BOS) approved \$68,297 but the problem is not having enough time to do everything in 40 hours. \$77,376 is the total amount of salary from 2022 for the part-time building inspector and part-time CEO positions combined. R. Mitchell asked if this was discussed with the BOS because the number the BOS approved shows on the budget sheet as \$68,297. R. Mooney explained there was some discussion because CEO Ekberg was hired to become a certified building inspector. Planned courses did not take place so he has enrolled in a third-party class in December for B1 certification. R. Mooney stated the BOS agreed to a certain amount with a bump once the certifications are obtained. TA Jipson noted that the part-time building inspector in 2022 had over 20 years' experience and both of the part-time positions did not include health insurance. Part of CEO Ekberg's employment contract was to obtain certifications within one year.

T. LeClair moved lines 01-4240-101 through 01-4240-999; seconded by A. Akerstrom. T. LeClair would like to hear more from the BOS about the situation and how the amount was meant to be and why. TA Jipson stated the \$68,297 was the total with anticipated certificates. Currently the position is budgeted at \$55,000 until the certificates are obtained. There was some discussion about the process of making a change and if it would go back to the BOS, and if the recommendations on the ballot would be different.

A. Akerstrom moved the discussion on line 01-4240-101 only. Members will need to vote if they want to leave the wages line at \$68,000 or change it to \$77,000. The potential increase the BOS approved from \$55,000 to \$68,000 would be an increase of 21.67%. Most staff is only receiving a 12% increase.

M. Roberts moved the increase of \$77,376 to line 01-4240-101; seconded by A. Akerstrom. There were concerns about the certification issue and the committee's involvement with personnel issues. T. LeClair explained that if this vote passes, it does not change what the CEO will be paid, but it makes the funds available if the BOS chooses to give an increase. Roll call: F. Wells – aye, M. Roberts – aye, K. Sturgeon – aye, J. Borden – nay, M. Zimmerman – aye, M. Campbell – aye, J. Fleck – aye, R. Chapman – aye, A. Akerstrom – aye, R. Mitchell – abstain, T. LeClair – nay, R. Mooney – abstain. The motion passed (8-2-2).

T. LeClair asked if this would go back to the BOS and R. Mooney responded yes, if they want to discuss it.

T. LeClair moved lines 01-4240-102 through 01-4240-99; seconded by R. Mooney. The Vault is complete and the Belknap Marketplace is a revolving project. There are 229 building permits so far this year. There are subdivisions being built out and the possibility of two new subdivisions in the near future. There were some changes to mileage and trainings, vehicle maintenance and protective clothing. There are a few ongoing court cases. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the amended Building Inspection budget of \$145,432.31. The motion was seconded by K. Sturgeon and passed unopposed (12-0).

Town Clerk #2:

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jennifer Cashman was appointed in mid-October and this is her first time presenting a budget to the committee. She will be on the ballot in March 2024 for a one-year term to finish out Cynthia DeRoy's term, and then she will run in 2025 for a traditional three-year term. She has nine years' experience in the office, but she will be rebuilding the department with two new clerks. Jenn Thomas will be moving to the Land Use Department in a few weeks.

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4140-101 through 01-4140-505; seconded by A. Akerstrom. TC/TC Cashman noted that the budget had been developed by the prior TC/TC DeRoy and TA Jipson, but she reviewed the records for the last year or two and does not see any changes that need to be made at this time. It will take a long time to train the new clerks, whose salaries are split between this budget and the tax collector budget. There will be five elections in 2024. There was discussion about the constraints for town clerks and deputies and the residency requirement. The training line was increased because of the number of new people in the office. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved to approve the Town Clerk's budget of \$166,262.59 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by T. LeClair and passed unopposed (12-0).

Elections #3:

T. LeClair moved lines 01-4141-101 through 01-4141-999; seconded by R. Mitchell. There was discussion about the five different elections for 2024 and what will happen if we have a default budget. The elections are required and the funding may need to come from other budgets. There will be the primary, deliberative session, town election combined with school voting, the state primary and the general election. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

T. LeClair moved to approve the Elections budget of \$ 24,811.27 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by R. Mooney and passed unopposed (12-0).

Tax Collector & Financial Administration #4 :

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4150-101 through 01-4150-999; seconded by R. Mitchell. M. Zimmerman asked if this budget was split with another department. This budget is split with the Town Clerk's budget and is shared with the Finance Department. We have a new Finance Director Susan Hickey, and our new part-time clerk Steve Forster is doing great. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved to approve the Tax Collector and Finance Administration budget of \$355,585 as recommended by the Selectmen; seconded by A. Akerstrom. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Executive #1:

TA Jipson explained this budget encompasses a few different departments including the Board of Selectmen, Trustees of the Trust Funds, salaries for the TA and her administrative assistant, vacation buybacks for Town Clerks, Executive, Building & Grounds, General Assistance and more. It also includes health insurance, dental and disability for Town Clerks, Finance, TA, Assessing, CEO, Building & Grounds and Parks & Rec.

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4130-101 through 01-4130-999, seconded by A. Akerstrom. There is a 14.8% increase in health insurance and 4.7% for dental, but other towns are seeing 20-22% increases. M. Zimmerman questioned the difference between the 2023 actual and the proposed 2024. It was noted that the 2023 actual number is not reflective of the November and December payments, and perhaps not October. Health insurance is budgeted according to open enrollment. Staffing and personal life situations can change throughout the year but the budget has to be reflective of the open enrollment. T. LeClair noted the Town is billed each month based on what is being used and billing will change from month to month with life events. There was discussion about the staffing changes in the department and how the wages had previously been split with assessing and finance. There is a proposed half-time administrative position that will be split with the Town Clerk's office/budget. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved to approve the Executive Budget of \$470,102.01 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by A. Akerstrom and passed unopposed (12-0).

Legal #6:

There were no changes in the Legal budget.

R. Mooney moved line 01-4153-275; seconded by F. Wells. This will cover items such as employment issues, unions, town business, questions on warrant articles and policy review. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R Mooney moved to approve the Legal Budget of \$35,000.00 as recommended by the Selectmen. The motion was seconded by A. Akerstrom and passed unopposed (12-0).

Insurance #10:

R. Mooney moved lines 01-47196-326 through 01-4196-626; seconded by A. Akerstrom. The Town's insurance is through Primex for unemployment, worker's comp, property liability and insurance deductibles. The rates are set by our risk and value. Increased salaries increase the worker's comp rates, and we have a new police department building. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved to approve the Insurance budget of \$286,100; seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Property Revaluation #5:

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4150-102 through 01-4150-324; seconded by R. Mitchell. This budget includes salary, our database and property card software, and the AxisGIS and BMSI software. There is still a warrant article in the Capital. R. Mooney suggested that if there is a recession, residents will likely want to have another update to capture the lower value. M. Zimmerman questioned line 102. This salary was previously shared with three different budgets. Appeals, Legal and Appraisal covers the cost of abatements and if our assessors have to defend values before the BTLA. Line 294 covers regular building permit pickups and changes in land use such as subdivisions. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved to approve the Property Revaluation budget of \$134,208.75; seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

#25 Long Term Debt & Insurance #26:

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4711-004 through 01-4711-006; seconded by J. Borden. This covers money borrowed for projects. The Town has very little debt. The Pleasant Valley project will be paid off in 2024 and the Hoadley Road culvert project in 2026. Some payments were paid off last year. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved \$230,439.00 for Principal Debt Service; seconded by K. Sturgeon. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4721-004 through 01-4721-006; seconded by R. Mitchell. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved \$76,825.00 for Interest Debt Service; seconded by M. Roberts. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved line 01-4723-001; seconded by M. Roberts. \$1 for this line keeps it open in case there is a mismatch of tax receipts and ongoing revenues and expenditures. Short term borrowing could be used for deficits and this line can be overextended if necessary to meet cash flow needs. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

R. Mooney moved \$1.00 for TAN Anticipation Debt; seconded by J. Fleck. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Solid Waste #16:

R. Mooney moved lines 01-4323-470 through 01-4325-450; seconded by M. Roberts. There was a new contract that started in January 2023 and we moved to automated collection. There was a \$40,000 grant for education on how to recycle and to help purchase the recycling carts. This budget includes trash and recycling. Line 480 covers any items DPW collects from the sides of the roads.

TA Jipson reported the Lakes Region Planning Commission recently provided the Household Hazardous Waste commitment amount for 2024 at \$8,408.

R. Mooney moved to amend line 01-4325-449 from \$7,500 to \$8,408; seconded by J. Borden. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

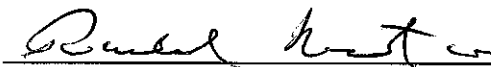
R. Mooney moved \$706,384.00 for the Solid Waste budget; seconded by J. Fleck. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Next Meeting: The next meeting date will be Tuesday, November 28, 2023 at 6:30 pm. Administration will try to fill in next week's meeting with other budgets from the 12/12/2023 meeting.

R. Mitchell requested that all departments provide their handouts in advance so that committee members have an opportunity to review the data prior to the meeting.

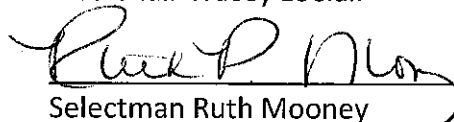
Adjournment:

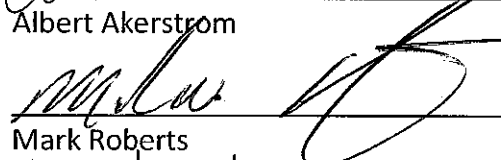
F. Wells moved to adjourn at 8:33 pm; seconded by A. Akerstrom. The motion passed unopposed (12-0).

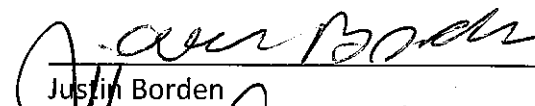

Chairman Ron Mitchell

Vice Chair Tracey LeClair


Albert Akerstrom


Selectman Ruth Mooney


Mark Roberts

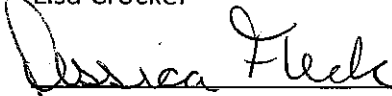

Justin Borden


Robert Chapman

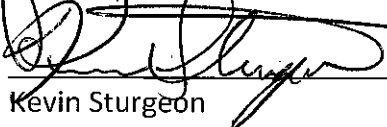

Marsha Campbell


Fred Wells

Lisa Crocker


Jessica Fleck

Marc Zimmerman


Kevin Sturgeon