

**TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MEETING MINUTES**

New Hampton Public Safety Building, Fire Dept. Training Room
Monday, January 8, 2024

MEMBERS

Mr. Drake, Mr. Shaw, and Mr. Harvey were present.

PRESENT:

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Drake called the meeting of the Board to order and opened the Public Hearing for the 2022 proposed budget at 7:00 p.m. and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2023 BUDGET
HEARING**

Present: Town Administrator Mr. Davenport and Finance Officer Ms. Duggan
Town department heads present: Police Chief Tyrrell, Fire Chief Lang, Public Works Director Mr. Boucher, and Town Clerk/Tax Collector Ms. Schofield.
Others present: Residents: Residents Tom Smith, Dana Torsey, Patrick & Samantha Cremin, Richard Spead, Bill Gilson, Karyn Gattermann, Scott Provencal, Bob Pollock, and others.

Mr. Drake said initial budget requests represented a 7.52% increase from the 2023 budget, but after much discussion trimmed it down to a 4.23% increase. The Selectmen are proposing a 5% wage increase, and with increased health insurance costs, this represents about a \$.14 increase on the estimated 2024 tax rate. He said the Town was without a Town Administrator since August 2023 and thanked Land Use Administrator Mrs. Vose and Finance Officer Ms. Duggan for their extra work during the last several months. Mr. Shaw thanked Mr. Drake for his added work as there was no Town Admin.

Mr. Drake reviewed the operating budget spreadsheet, at \$3,517,645, which was available to everyone present. Highlights:

**TOWN
OPERATING
BUDGET**

- Mr. Smith asked why the Treasurer did not get an increase in wages and Ms. Duggan said they appointed a new treasurer so that can be considered after more experience is gained. The overall wage increase elsewhere was to retain current employees.
- Mr. Torsey questioned the accuracy of assessments and the Board noted that to assume no mistakes will ever be made wasn't realistic due to the nature and number of properties, and that in some cases property owners don't let assessors onto their property. Mr. Drake advised that property owners should always review their assessment cards for accuracy.
- There was discussion to post the proposed budget to the website, sooner than it was done for this hearing.
- The Board expressed disappointment that no one attended any Selectmen's meeting when they were working on the budget, inviting interested individuals to attend in the future.
- Mr. Provencal asked the result of the revaluation, whether it was an increase or decrease in overall taxes compared to 2022. Mr. Shaw advised that amount of money raised did not change, only the amount of assessed value increased, which is why the tax rate was reduced.

Police Chief Tyrrell reviewed his departmental budget. Highlights:

- Mr. Spead expressed concern with employee retention. Chief Tyrrell said historically the department has not retained officers very long, but currently has all the staff that are needed. Mr. Spead expressed concern with the wages being paid to the PD and Fire Departments and how the wages compare to neighboring towns. Chief Tyrrell reviewed data from a 2023 wage survey (data averages

being Lakes Region, Belknap County, & state), which showed some positions in the PD were similar to the average and other positions were below the average (data averages being Lakes Region, Belknap County, & state). Chief Tyrrell said his budget request for wages was reduced but understands the Selectmen wanted to keep increases to a minimum for taxpayers. He said he is concerned about losing some officers to other communities who will pay more. Mr. Harvey advised that New Hampton does pay the full amount of medical insurance for the employees as an incentive.

- Ms. Gattermann asked for information on the cost to train new uncertified employees to become officers. Chief Tyrrell advised there were costs to attend the academy, to equip and provide uniforms for the attendee, field training once they've graduated and that it takes approximately a year to become familiar with the town. Ms. Gattermann recommended the town pay in line with other departments as the Town has invested a lot in a new officer.
- The Board agrees that the town doesn't want to lose employees to other towns but cannot always compare officer's wages to what some larger towns are paying. They said the Board has been able to make some significant increases to PD wages over the last few years and though they would like to increase wages more the Board also has a responsibility to the taxpayers.
- Mr. Spead asked if when a new officer is lured away to another town is New Hampton reimbursed in some way and Chief Tyrrell said there is some compensation based on the officer's contract with New Hampton.
- Mr. Shaw said he agrees the critical departments should be earning more but if they increase the budget by too much there is a risk it will be voted down with no pay increases for employees.
- Mr. Torsey pointed out that there is a balance between paying appropriate wages while keeping taxes lower for struggling property owners.
- Mr. Gilson asked how much of an increase would affect the town tax rate and Mr. Shaw advised \$58,000 equates to an additional \$.10 on the rate.

Fire Chief Cathy reviewed his departmental budget for Fire. Highlights:

- Mr. Spead asked Chief Cathy if he was satisfied with his budget who responded by saying he would always like more. There was discussion on whether the status of the fire engines. It was noted that 17E1 is having its frame refabricated, which means the 1987 17E3, which was previously used very seldom, is getting used while repairs are being made. Mr. Spead asked if a new fire truck is needed and Chief Cathy said yes. Ms. Gattermann confirmed with the chief that there is a proposed warrant article for a new engine to replace 17E3. Chief Cathy said he'd like his training line increased as he is trying to get more personnel hired. Mr. Spead stated his commitment to paying for the training of two new hires.
- Mr. Harvey said he supports higher wages for employees but that this budget requires the approval all of New Hampton's voters. He urged those present to become part of the budget process instead of criticizing the hard work of the Selectmen to develop this budget.
- Chief Cathy advised that relative to his salary he is middle of the average.

Fire Chief Cathy reviewed his departmental budget for EMS and Emergency Management. Highlights:

- Mr. Spead asked if the Town is reimbursed from the patients being transported and Chief Cathy said the services are billed and the reimbursement rate is a

problem - a problem everywhere.

- Mr. Torsey asked how much revenue was collected from ambulance services and Ms. Duggan advised it was \$98,000. Mr. Drake said these monies collected helped pay for departmental vehicles and equipment, the new public safety building, all helpful to taxpayers to offset taxes.

Mr. Boucher reviewed his departmental budget for Highway Dept., Solid Waste, and Landfill. Highlights:

- Mr. Spead asked Mr. Boucher if he was happy with his proposed budget. Mr. Boucher said his department would always do the best they can with the amount of money in their budget. Relative to wages Mr. Boucher said more recently wages have been adjusted as the Selectmen have said.
- Mr. Boucher said the amount of money received from recyclables is greatly reduced to their decrease in value.

Mr. Drake reviewed the proposed 2023 warrant articles (not including Election of Officers, or Zoning amendments), which if approved, would be an increase to the town tax rate of \$.85.

**PROPOSED
WARRANT
ARTICLES**

1. \$80,000 PD cruiser covered by a federal grant with no match; Chief Tyrrell said award of this looks favorable.
2. \$750,000 to replace the fire engine though an AFG (at 95%), with a 5% town match, to come from the special revenue fund.
3. \$23,000 for fire hose though an AFG (at 95%), with a 5% town match, to come from the operating budget to update the current hose with more effective hose, when responding to fires.
4. \$37,344 Ambulance lease payment.
5. \$25,000 Public Safety Building partial payment.
6. \$3,517,465 – Operating budget.
7. \$25,000 Master Plan/Zoning Consultant to assist the Planning Board.
8. \$94,291 for two full-time Fire Dept firefighter/EMT positions and gear. Chief Cathy said this will help address the difficulty getting per diems hired, with these employees working weekdays 8hrs/day, & 12 hours on the weekend. He said he is currently staffed at about 50% and this would provide full coverage during the day. He said the net increase is mostly with the benefits as the payroll money (for per diems) is currently accounted for in the budget. Chief Cathy said that in 2007 the Town approved 2 full time firefighter/EMT's which the department no longer has.
9. \$200,000 to be added to Town Capital Equipment expendable trust fund. Mr. Drake said this will be a new fund for use by all departments. This would allow the Town to move quickly on the purchase of capital equipment if there is an opportunity to save the Town money. The Board said the intent is to add to this each year. Relative to appropriating money for the bridge that needs replacement, Mr. Drake said that with bridge money and highway block grant monies, a requisition has now been signed to purchase the fabricated structure and the plan is to replace the bridge over Blake Brook this year.
10. \$250,000 for road maintenance. Mr. Boucher reviewed 2023 road repairs for Gordon Hill, Sand Hill, Birch Way, Pine Meadow, and a portion of Dana Hill Road and he would be reviewing the Road Management System Survey to determine what roads to work on next, which could change due to mobilization costs.
11. \$10,000 to be added to Dry Hydrant expendable trust fund. Mr. Drake said with

- this addition a dry hydrant can be installed in the Winona Heights subdivision.
12. \$15,000 to be added to the Reimbursable Grants expendable trust fund. Chief Tyrrell said this assisted their department with several purchases.
 13. \$8,000 to be added to the Equipment Repair or Replacement expendable trust fund, which helps departments avoid costly repair costs coming from departmental budgets.
 14. \$22,000 to be added to the Vehicle Repair expendable trust fund. Mr. Drake said the Board decided not to purchase a new dump truck in 2024 but to add to the repair fund to keep the older Hwy Dept International going.
 15. \$27,000 to be added to the Town Building Maintenance expendable trust fund.

Mr. Drake reviewed the estimated revenues, which are typically conservative. Mr. Gilson asked about the sale of municipal property and Mr. Drake said they have been considering the sale of some tax-deeded parcels and unless there is a need to keep a parcel for conservation purposes it makes sense to sell some properties to pay the unpaid taxes and to make those lots taxable.

Mr. Drake reviewed the default budget if the proposed budget fails.

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further discussion or questions, the meeting adjourned at 9:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Pamela Vose