

Budget Committee
January 30, 2024
Meeting Minutes

Approved: 2/6/24

Present: Chair Paul Regan, Vice Chair Sue Sodano, Walter Waring, Charlie Therriault, Daniel Kenney, and Select Board Representative Les Dion (arrived late).

Others Present:

Christina Goodwin, Town Administrator; Chief Kristopher Bean, Police Department; Chief Ben LaRoche, Fire Department; and Shaun Lagueux, Select Board Chair.

Call to Order:

Mr. Regan called the meeting to order at 6:08pm.

Pledge of Allegiance:

Mr. Therriault led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

New Business:

Reconsideration – Budget Sections:

#4210 Police Department

Motion to reopen discussion on #4210 Police Department in the amount of \$1,336,091.77 by Mr. Regan, second by Mrs. Sodano. Mr. Waring thanked Chief Bean for the Department's service and noted he has supported all Town projects but voiced his concerns over the increase in budget this year on behalf of taxpayers. Chief Bean shared similar concerns but reiterated that he reviewed the budget and did decrease wherever it could be feasible. Discussion continued regarding wage increases with a consensus that they were necessary for employee retention. Mrs. Sodano asked about #620 Office Supplies and if those lines could be decreased. Chief Bean commented on the necessary purchase of a new letterhead with the new address of the Public Safety Building along with new supplies required in the new building. The current supplies brought over in the move were also shared with the Town Offices. Chief Bean pointed out changes in the Police budget included an increase for the grant reimbursement of new radar equipment, the decrease of a higher paid officer and a part time position, and the increase of #811 Body Worn Cameras and #812 Tasers to reflect new contract prices. With no further discussion, motion to close #4210 Police Department in the amount of \$1,336,091.77 with no amendment made by Mr. Regan, second by Mr. Therriault.

#4220 Fire Department

Motion to reopen discussion on #4220 Fire Department in the amount of \$1,355,453.04 by Mr. Regan, second by Mrs. Sodano. Chief LaRoche stated the Department runs on a level funded, minimal operating budget and he cannot see any cuts to propose within the budget. Discussion ensued on payroll and employee retention. With nothing further to discuss, motion to close #4220 Fire Department in the amount of \$1,355,453.04 with no amendment made by Mr. Regan, second by Mrs. Dion. Mr. Regan

thanked Chief LaRoche for his time.

#4415 Health Agencies and Hospitals

Motion to reopen discussion on #4415 Health Agencies and Hospitals in the amount of \$20,200.00 by Mr. Regan, second by Mr. Waring. Motion to amend line #360 Pemi Baker Hospice and Home Health from the amount of \$3,500 to a new amount of \$2,500 by Mr. Therriault, second by Mr. Regan. Discussion continued regarding amendment. Mr. Waring noted he was strongly opposed to cutting any health agencies. Mr. Kenney stated if the agencies' requests were decreased, it would affect the agencies' operating budget and could affect services available to Town residents. Motion failed, 3-3. Motion to amend line #350 Lakes Region Visiting Nurses Association from the amount of \$16,700 to a new amount of \$17,500 by Mr. Waring, second by Mrs. Dion. Members of the Committee noted the overall budget is too high and opposed to adding other increases to the bottom line. Motion failed, 1-5. Motion to amend line #360 Pemi Baker Hospice and Home Health from an amount of \$3,500 to a new amount of \$4,500 by Mr. Waring, second by Mr. Kenney. Motion failed, 1-5. Motion to amend line #350 Lakes Region Visiting Nurses Association from an amount of \$16,700 to a new amount of \$12,000 by Mr. Therriault, second by Mrs. Sodano. Motion failed, 1-5. Motion to close discussion on #4415 Health Agencies and Hospitals in the amount of \$20,200.00 with no amendment made by Mr. Regan, second by Mr. Therriault.

#4319 Streets/Bridges

Motion to reopen discussion on #4319 Streets/Bridges in the amount of \$35,500 by Mr. Regan, second by Mr. Therriault. Motion to amend line #430 Bridges from \$500 to \$1 by Mr. Regan, second by Mr. Therriault. The budget line is rarely used, and grant funding is available to the Town for bridges only. Motion passed, 6-0. Motion to close discussion on #4319 Streets/Bridges in the amended amount of \$35,001 by Mr. Regan, second by Ms. Dion passed, 6-0.

Mr. Therriault noted that members are still able to make amendments and revisit sections even after the Public Hearing. Ms. Goodwin further noted that another Public Hearing would be held after additional revisits and amendments for public comment and knowledge.

Work Session:

Discussion on Warrant Articles:

Article 9 was noted as the Article that recommendations will be voted on by the Budget Committee first, then voted on by Select Board.

Article 10 is to continue the yearly budgeted contingency fund. Mr. Lagueux stated the importance of the emergency fund for unanticipated maintenance problems. Ms. Goodwin stated approximately \$8,400 was spent this year and the remainder returned to the general fund.

Article 11 was noted with an error in amount. Ms. Goodwin stated the Select Board decreased the amount for Fireworks from \$25,000 to \$20,000. \$18,000 will cover the vendor fees including the barge, boat and show, while \$2,000 is budgeted for entertainment and porta-potties.

Article 12 proposes the potential purchase of the building and parking lot at 20 Summer Street. The budgeted amount covers the purchase, demolition, and landscaping of the lot. Ms. Goodwin and Mr. Lagueux discussed the proposal, stating that the owner of the property approached the Town, giving them the first opportunity to purchase. The proposed project could benefit downtown with additional and much needed parking options.

Article 13 consists of six (6) Capital Reserve Funds. Mr. Lagueux noted these are contributions made for the funds used to purchase vehicles, equipment, and services. Ms. Goodwin added that the Select Board worked to reduce the line as much as possible.

Mr. Regan inquired about Articles 14 and 15 for taxpayer purposes though the Budget Committee is not voting on the Articles. Ms. Goodwin noted that Article 14 is to increase the Veterans Tax Credit from \$500 to \$750, as the credit hasn't been changed in a number of years. She added that any change to the Veterans Tax Credit will also change the All-Veterans Tax Credit. This increases the amount of current approved credits by approximately \$37,000. Article 15 proposes adopting the Bristol Community Power plan. Mr. Kenney, also a member of the Energy Committee, discussed the plan. If approved at the Town Meeting, Bristol will join the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire. All Eversource customers purchasing electricity from Eversource will be automatically opted-in for the program. The effect on NH Co-op customers is still being determined. Customers purchasing electricity from other suppliers will be allowed to voluntarily opt-in. This energy program is expected to provide a lower electricity supply rate than Eversource. Each customer's current electricity distribution company will continue to be responsible for the distribution of energy. Mr. Kenney stated brochures created by himself and the Committee are outside the Town Clerk's office and a voice presentation is available on the Town website. Another public meeting on the plan is scheduled for February 20, 2024.

Discussion on Revenues:

Mr. Regan stated that the Budget Committee will approve the estimate revenues for 2024 during the Public Hearing. The revenues are estimated with conservative figures and the actual revenues for the year are reviewed in the fall by the Select Board and used to estimate the following year's revenues. Ms. Goodwin noted the Police Department grant for radar equipment along with encumbrances will not be added to the revenues until later in the week. Ms. Goodwin also discussed the line for school revenues increased for 2024 to reflect the late invoice payment from 2023 and the cable franchise fees invoice has not been received. Ms. Goodwin reached out to the company for more information.

Discussion, Review, and Approval of Minutes and Minute Format:

Mr. Regan asked the Committee for feedback on the quality and format of meeting minutes. Mrs. Sodano felt that the minutes for the budget sections should require more details to inform others that do not watch the recorded meetings. Mr. Regan said he gave the minute taker a format to minimize unnecessary details and limit the amount of information within those minutes. Discussion continued pertaining to quality of minutes. The consensus of the Committee was to continue minutes format with the addition of listing a summary of what the discussions pertained to in the minutes.

Motion to approve January 23, 2024, meeting minutes as amended by Mr. Regan, second by Mr. Kenney. Motion passed, 6-0. Amendments consisted of grammatical errors.

Motion to reopen discussion on December 19, 2023, meeting minutes by Mr. Regan, second by Mrs. Sodano. Amendments consisted of rewording and adding to line #4140 Elections, Registrations, and Vital Statistics. Motion to close discussion and approve December 19, 2023, meeting minutes as amended by Mr. Regan, second by Mrs. Sodano. Motion passed, 6-0.

Correspondence:

Mr. Regan noted correspondence from Mrs. Cavanagh and Mrs. Sodano regarding quality of minutes.

Mr. Therriault stated each member had a copy of the NH Municipal Right to Know Laws available on their laptops and noted that the RSA regarding non-public sessions does not require it to be listed on the agenda to enter a non-public session. Mr. Regan stated though it may not be required by law, it would be better practice to do so.

Member/Select Board Comments:

Mr. Therriault requested that the Basic Law of Budgeting and Budget Bylaws be added onto the laptops for reference during the Public Hearing.

The Committee Members discussed the date of the Public Hearing, keeping to February 6, 2024, as the date, and Wednesday, February 7, 2024, as an additional date for the Public Hearing if necessary.

Discussion by the Committee on additions to the draft copy of the Budget Committee's section for the Town Report. Mr. Regan will finish the additions and submit the final copy to be included in the Town Report.

Staff Comments:

None

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, February 6, 2024, in Town Office Meeting Room A – Public Hearing

Wednesday, February 7, 2024, in Town Office Meeting Room A – if necessary

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 9:21pm by Ms. Dion, second by Mrs. Sodano. Motion passed, 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shannon Wharton