



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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NEW LONDON BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Whipple Memorial Town Hall

6:30 PM

BUDGET COMMITTEE PRESENT: Chris Lorio, (Chair), Colin Beasley (Vice Chair), John Wilson, Mark Christensen, Lyndsay Harkins, Lou Botta, Melissa Leintz, Charles Kelsey, Bill Helm, Selectman Representative (sitting in for Selectman Casey who was unable to attend)

BUDGET COMMITTEE ABSENT: Hannah Bianchi

STAFF: Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator; Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer

ALSO PRESENT: Robert Harrington, Department of Public Works Director; Police Chief Emily Cobb; Fire Chief Jay Lyon; Adam Ricker, Town Planner and Zoning Administrator; Putnam Kidder, Recreation Director; Will Kidder, Town Clerk-Tax Collector; John Ellis; Bob Lyon; Travis Sniffen.

Chair Lorio opened the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Selectmen's Update

Selectman Helm provided updates on grant submissions for the Police Department and the Twin Pines housing project. The warrant for Town Meeting has been approved, and there will be more conversations upcoming on what the November 20th Superior Court ruling regarding adequate school funding could mean for the Town.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of February 7, 2024 were reviewed. Colin Beasley asked for clarification from Kim Hallquist on what would happen, from a budget standpoint, if the \$900,000 petitioned warrant does not pass at Town Meeting. Ms. Hallquist explained that if the article for the \$900,000 bond fails, there will be a motion to reduce the amount requested for payment of principal and interest of long-term debt.

MOTION WAS MADE (Lou Botta) and SECONDED (Melissa Leintz) to approve the minutes of February 7th. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Discussion of Process for Preparation of FY2026 Budget

Chris Lorio asked Kim Hallquist to give an overview of how the agenda for the evening was prepared. She explained that Budget Committee members had the opportunity to email topics they wanted to discuss, and she organized them as subtopics for discussion.

Colin Beasley asked to start the conversation with some contextual information regarding the proposed increase to the budget, noting that he may have over simplified comments made at the previous meeting by Peter Bianchi who stated that there is a 13% increase in the Budget. Mr. Beasley noted that he went back and looked at the material and found that if you look at 2024 over 2023 the amount to be raised by taxes is going up 17% and if you assume the same use of fund balance of \$450,000, the tax rate is going up 19.7%. He concluded by observing that those two data points are important and the reason for the conversation on process.

Chris Lorio asked for the members who submitted each topic to open the discussion. John Wilson provided an overview of the pros and cons, as well as the historical context, for scheduling Town Meeting in March instead of May. There was a conversation around the procedure for moving the date of Town Meeting and how that might impact attendance, the Kearsarge Regional School District budget approval, and the budget planning cycle. It would need to be voted on at a Town Meeting, which could not happen earlier than 2025. The first possible time it could be moved would be 2026, if approved by voters in 2024. Ms. Hallquist mentioned that asking voters at the 2024 Town Meeting, while not binding since it is not on the warrant, could gauge interest of the voters present. Will Kidder, Town Clerk-Tax Collector, offered his opinion on the increased workload and cost of moving to a May Town Meeting because two elections would need to be conducted: one in March for the school and one in May for the Town. He suggested if attendance at March meetings is a concern, better marketing and outreach could be an option.

John Wilson noted that he had suggested an updated schedule for budget meetings, based on the possibility of moving to a May Town Meeting, however it was not necessary to go over that timeline if Town Meeting was likely to stay in March.

Chris Lorio noted that he is interested to hear feedback on the one-day session where each Department Head presented their FY2025 budget to the Board of Selectmen. Many participants spoke in favor of the one-day meeting as a more efficient use of time for everyone involved. Charles Kelsey, a first year Budget Committee member, would like to see a process that creates more dialogue and engagement, particularly if the discussion can happen sooner in the budget process. Other Budget Committee members also spoke regarding the challenges of being a new member and getting up to speed in a short time.

There was a discussion on service levels and how they impact the budget. Colin Beasley suggested that a more formalized budget process, including analytics, could allow the Budget Committee to maintain their independence, while adding value to the budget by reducing costs with an understanding of how that relates to services. He is interested in educational sessions, particularly in how the Unreserved Fund Balance relates to the budget. Selectman Helm suggested that getting someone from NH Municipal Association to speak about the issue might be possible. Kim Hallquist noted that the Town Auditors could be another good resource for a detailed session on that topic.

The Master Plan and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) were referenced by several committee members, and the public, as tools to guide the budget process. Adam Ricker, Town Planner and Zoning Administrator, explained some differences between the two documents. The Master Plan is more of a high-level visionary document that is only updated every ten years. There is an implementation table in the plan and some of those recommendations have been moved forward by other committees such as the Waste Reduction Committee and the Housing Commission. The CIP is developed by a sub-committee of the Planning Board. The structure of the sub-committee also includes a member of the budget committee. The CIP is updated yearly, which makes it more useful for the Budget Committee to reference. There was a discussion of how the CIP is developed, and how the items included are the CIP are prioritized.

Colin Beasley provided an overview of his suggested modified schedule of budget meetings for the upcoming year. He feels the modified schedule could provide more time for analysis of year end results. Chair Lorio noted that some members may have more free time outside of regularly scheduled meetings than others. Sub-committees were suggested as an option to address that issue. There was a conversation around the purpose of changing the meeting timeline and the relationship between Department Heads and the Budget Committee, particularly in the areas of communication, consideration of workflow, and scope of authority. It was agreed that keeping other members in the loop on communication to individual Department Heads would help avoid duplicate work.

John Wilson is interested in having a “cut-off” date for budget submissions to allow for the Budget Committee work to be completed efficiently. Chair Lorio noted this was a discussion to include the Board of Selectmen in.

There was a conversation of ethics, member conduct outside of meetings, and freedom of speech. Different

avenues for sharing information with the public were discussed, including social media as an efficient option. Chair Lorio noted that although there are many different opinions on the Budget Committee, being respectful is required and he appreciates the conversation as a good reminder to all members.

Selectman Helm thanked the three outgoing members for their three years of service: Melissa Leintz, Hannah Bianchi, and Colin Beasley. He noted that the Board of Selectmen will work with the new Budget Committee to address some of the topics discussed.

Chris Lorio suggested that short-term goals could include some of the proposed changes for more educational sessions and potential sub-committees, and more changes can be considered after Town Meeting when the new members are elected.

Public Comment

John Ellis asked if there was an update on when a town building maintenance assessment would be completed. Kim Hallquist noted that the 2024 budget includes funds to purchase asset management software. Once the budget year begins in July the software will be purchased and the process of getting off of the buildings inventoried and into the system will begin. It takes time to set up and begin using the software and there is no guarantee of an implementation timeline, however it is a priority.

IT WAS MOVED (Lyndsay Harkins) and SECONDED (Charles Kelsey) to adjourn the meeting. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Cara Leone
Recording Secretary

Note: RSA 91-A:2, II provides that “*Minutes of all such meetings, including nonpublic sessions, shall include the names of members, persons appearing before the public bodies, and a brief description of the subject matter discussed and final decisions.*” A video of the entire meeting may be available for viewing on the town website, NewLondon.NH.gov, if more than the brief description contained in these meeting minutes is desired.