



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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NEW LONDON BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, December 20, 2023

Whipple Memorial Town Hall

6:30 PM

BUDGET COMMITTEE PRESENT: Chris Lorio (Chair), Colin Beasley (Vice Chair), John Wilson, Hannah Bianchi, Mark Christensen, Melissa Leintz, Charles Kelsey, Lou Botta, Bebe Casey, Selectman Representative

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lyndsay Harkins

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

ALSO PRESENT: Police Chief Emily Cobb; Will Kidder, Town Clerk-Tax Collector; Fire Chief Jay Lyon; Crystal Schimpf, Library Director; Sherry Williams, Library Trustee; Robert Harrington, DPW Director; John Ellis, Rich Epstein, Karen Epstein.

Chair Lorio called the meeting to order at 6:30PM. He asked if there were any additional changes to the minutes of December 6th. There were none.

Approval of minutes:

IT WAS MOVED (John Wilson) and SECONDED (Colin Beasley) to approve the minutes of December 6th as amended. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Selectmen's Report

Selectman Casey reported that the Board will form a Sidewalk/Mobility Committee after the holidays in response to resident requests. Ken Jacques from the Springfield-New London Water Precinct gave a detailed update at the December 14th meeting. She encouraged everyone to watch the meeting video for some excellent information on the Precinct. They will be starting the water main project in the spring and an RFP will be going out soon.

The Winter Gathering had approximately 100 people and was very successful. There will be a Public Hearing on January 9th on the zoning amendments.

Selectman Casey also gave an update on legislation regarding the excess funds for schools. The Kearsarge School district receives approximately one million back from excess property tax funds collected by the towns in the district, which currently comes back to the district. The legislation that is pending would allow the state to redistribute those dollars to other school districts. Coalition Communities 2.0, of which we are a member, has filed motions on this legislation for a stay pending appeal.

Selectman Casey suggested we think about funding a CRF to prepare for the potential cost if the legislation passes and becomes retroactive.

Public Works

Buildings

Bob Harrington highlighted the items that were changing from last year's budget. He stated that Whipple Maintenance was up but Town Building Maintenance was down.

Chair Lorio asked about electricity for the building. Lynn Lewis stated that the estimates are based on the current Eversource rates and we may spend less when we go to Community Power. She was asked by the committee to reach out to Jamie Hess from the Energy Committee and see if he had any thoughts on where the rates would go next year.

Cemetery

The main change is that the maintenance line was zeroed out as we are going to take that money from the Capital Reserve Fund.

Highway

Mr. Harrington stated that there was a decrease to part-time wages, computer support. Medical services was increased.

There is a new line for CDL (commercial driver license) training at \$8,000. This will allow the town to have employees train to get their CDL license. It is difficult to hire people with a CDL license.

Colin Beasley asked if we would require them to stay a period of time after training, so we don't lose an employee that we paid to gain the CDL license. Kim Hallquist stated that we could certainly do that and have them pay back a portion if they leave within a certain amount of time such as 2 years. Melissa Lientz stated that some companies have the employee pay upfront and then they are reimbursed. Kim stated that we do that with lifeguards, however the CDL license is much more costly and harder for the employee to pay up front.

There was a discussion about uniform cleaning. Bob Harrington stated that the employees are in a harsh environment such as sewage and transfer station, so we do not require that they wash their own clothes.

The overtime amount was questioned since the requested amount is higher than the previous year however it has not been expended in past years. Bob Harrington stated that OT is dependent on weather. Charlie Kelsey noted that the budget request has increased 21% but actuals have not gone over \$46,000 in the last few years. Bob Harrington stated that COLA and step increases affect those numbers. Lynn Lewis was asked if she provides that number. She responded that she does not; department heads provide that amount to her. She stated that she would look at the numbers with Bob Harrington.

Highway and Streets

Bob Harrington stated that he has increased the budget request for tree takedown services, general supplies, maintenance & repairs, and gravel roads. He was able to lower equipment. The calcium chloride line looks like it was not spent in 2023 but that was an encumbered expense. Melissa Lientz asked if there was an environmental consequence to using calcium chloride. Bob Harrington responded that there is more of a problem without it as dust ends up everywhere and the road erodes.

Charlie Kelsey asked why we use an outside service to take down trees. Bob Harrington stated that these are large trees and bucket trucks and cranes are required. Charlie Kelsey asked about why the equipment repairs & maintenance line was at \$80,000. Bob Harrington stated that he level funded this and even though repairs are down, prices are very high. Less repairs are costing more to do.

There was a discussion about what happens if the Budget Committee approves a lower amount and the actual go higher. Kim Hallquist explained that if other lines in the budget are under spent, the Board of Selectmen could transfer money to those lines. If the overall budget was to be overspent, that would require involvement of the DRA to resolve.

Colin Beasley asked if DPW did any of its own repairs to equipment. Bob Harrington responded that they do some minor repairs but use outside services for repairs and inspections. There was a discussion about the possibility of an in-house mechanic but that would require a large space to do the work, tools and supplies. Colin Beasley asked if we have ever tried to develop a contract with any of the local repair shops. Kim Hallquist stated that we do try to secure good rates with these companies.

There was a discussion about the possibility of a gas tank like we have a diesel tank. Bob Harrington stated that the gas cards work well especially for out-of-town purchases of fuel when we are picking up parts or supplies in Concord or Claremont.

Transfer Station

Bob Harrington stated that he decreased the amount for medical services since he does not have any employees with a CDL. The general supplies line is also down.

There was a discussion about the transfer station hours and Bob Harrington stated that the Transfer Station is fully staffed and having it open on Sundays helps to ease the traffic flow on other days.

Solid Waste

There were no questions.

Sewer

Bob Harrington stated that the contracted and professional fees are up due to cost increases. The maintenance and repair line are down. There was a question about the line item for Sunapee. Kim Hallquist explained that our fees are based on flow levels and the budget is set by Sunapee. We do not have the budget yet so we estimate and will adjust when we see the actual budget. Sam and Chris have done an excellent job of decreasing infiltration and lowered the flow to Sunapee which lowers the percentage of the wastewater treatment plant expenses that New London must pay.

Melissa Leintz asked why there was no postage in FY2022. Lynn Lewis stated that it had to do with the timing of the bills that went out that fiscal year.

Colin Beasley stated that since Jay Lyon had to answer the questions about removing \$30,000 from the budget it is only fair to ask all department heads. Bob Harrington stated that he would take it from gravel roads, line painting, or paving but then we would be playing catch up next year. Bob Harrington also stated that if he was given \$30,000 he would add more to the gravel roads to help with the rain.

Charlie Kelsey asked why we have a Post Office in Elkins as it seems to be a duplicity of service. Kim Hallquist stated that it is very popular with Elkins residents but if the US Postal Service didn't renew the lease, or voters decided not to renew it, the Post Office would close. Charlie Kelsey stated that critical services are important but some services that are popular could go away. Selectman Casey pointed out that the town does get revenue by leasing the building to the US Postal Service.

There was a discussion about lifeguards being able to clean bathrooms to save on cleaning costs. Kim Hallquist stated that they used to do it before Covid. Now we have an outside service to ensure a more thorough and professional cleaning.

It was asked if we have a traffic count for the Transfer Station. Bob Harrington replied "No."

There was a discussion about sewer being a user expense so not much the Budget Committee could do about it. The costs could be lowered but it does not affect the tax rate as the budgeted amount is received

as revenues.

Library

Crystal Schimpf, Library Director, discussed the roof inspection that requires a substantial repair. The Library Board is recommending a bond for the roof and other repairs such as the windows and doors, that are necessary for the upcoming year. The full estimate is \$375,000. They asked for the Capital Reserve funding to be reduced since the bond would take care of the work that was listed to be taken from the CRF.

They would like to have the stone wall and tree removal to come from the CRF. She was asked if they would be willing to piggyback the roof repair with a roof repair at Whipple. She stated that the Library Facilities Committee might consider that.

John Wilson asked about the \$600,000 library fund and Crystal Schimpf stated that they can only use the interest for expenses but not the principal. They have initiated a research project to further understand the restrictions on their trusts.

There was discussion about tracking the spending of the Town appropriation and other funds the Library utilizes. Crystal Schimpf stated that they used a different fund on the GL for those expenses that are paid from the appropriation. Any monies left over from other funding sources sit in a sub-account on the GL.

There was a discussion about the Library not using VC3 and if it might be cost effective to add the Library. We are charged per license and per computer so they could not just be absorbed for no additional cost.

It was noted by John Wilson that we are discussing relatively small numbers when the big concern should be the school appropriation and the information that Selectman Casey spoke about at the beginning of the meeting.

There was discussion about the upcoming schedule. January 10th is Social Services and Revenues. January 17th and possibly 24th for Capital Reserve Funds. There would need to be one meeting for finalizing the budget and another to reconcile it with the Selectboard. Then there would be a public hearing probably on February 7th.

There was a discussion about having a last meeting to set some processes for the next budget cycle. Generally, the Public Hearing is the day after the deadline for petition warrant articles, which is the 6th.

The Public Hearing needs to be announced 10 days in advance. It was discussed that it seems like the meetings are squeezed in and would be rushed by having the Public Hearing on February 7th.

Colin asked for an updated schedule and updates on the action items. Lynn Lewis stated that she did not speak to Jamie Hess yet about an estimate from Community Power. She was also asked about a report to show vehicle expenses. She stated that the report only came out with two lines, one for police and one for fire.

Colin Beasley asked Kim Hallquist to have a committee listed with each item on the Master Plan so they know who is responsible for it. He spoke with Adam Ricker, Planning and Zoning Administrator, about having a score card for each item and was told that would probably fall under Planning Board. Colin Beasley suggested that should be done at some point and used to inform decisions about the Town.

A meeting was added for January 3rd to discuss processes but was later cancelled. It will be scheduled after the Public Hearing.

There was a discussion about how the budget is done and there needs to be more discussion about items and the Budget Committee has only made minor changes to the Selectboard budget. There should be more discussion and a closer look at the budget. Chair Lorio stated that he believes the Budget

Committee was doing that these past weeks and the reconciliation happens with all of the Budget Committee voting. In past years, the committee has voted in such a way that it has been reconciled before going to Town Meeting.

Chief Cobb requested to speak to the questions of taking \$30,000 out of the budget or adding \$30,000 to the budget. She stated that she puts time and effort into crafting a very responsible and appropriate budget for her departments and would not change anything. She would neither add nor remove \$30,000 because the budget she submitted is exactly what she needs to provide the services that the Town of New London expects from her department.

**IT WAS MOVED (John Wilson) AND SECONDED (Hannah Bianchi) to adjourn the meeting.
THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The next meeting will be held on January 10th.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn Lewis
Finance Officer

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.