

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 9, 2020 Town Hall

Chair John Lamson called the meeting to order at 6:30pm

Present: Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Chair; Jamie Belanger, Alan Wilson, Emily Savinelli, John Chamberlain, Brandon Arsenault, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Bill Wright, Selectman's Rep. Ted Connors, SAU 50 Business Administrator, Mindy Ryan, Martha Roy, Town Administrator and Eleanor Boy, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Selectman, Mike Marconi, Selectman, Ken Latchaw, EJ Hoyt, Fire Chief, Mike Bilodeau, Police Chief and John Klanchesser, Board of Fire Engineers, Chair, Branda Blonigen, Police Commission, Jack Hoyt, Police Commissioner, Jeff Hiatt, Economic Development Committee, Chair, Lulu Pickering, Historic District Commission, Chair, Lara Berry, Library Director, Jack O'Reilly, Library Trustees, Chair, Leila Wilson, Library Trustee, Keri Wareing, Police Department Administrative Assistant.

J. Lamson reminded the committee that this meeting was to review the end of the year school budget and the $\frac{3}{4}$ of the year Town budget.

J. Lamson wanted to go on record that the Newington School has a larger enrollment than New Castle for the 2020-2021 school year.

School Fiscal Year 2019/2020 Budget Review: M. Ryan reviewed the school year- end budget. She noted that there was a 20% savings in the busing budget last year. In 2020-2021 transfers will be done between budget lines. When an expense is needed and would overspend a budget line, the expense will be approved first with an indication of what expense line the money is going to come from, then the transfer will be made. There is a surplus of approximately \$100,000. There are 52 students enrolled this year. Of those 52 students 6 of them pay tuition. There are 12 kindergartners. T. Connors wanted to commend P. Latchaw for doing an outstanding job during this difficult time. Newington School is not receiving any money from the CARES ACT grant. They will try again in May 2021. The students are physically in school Monday-Thursday and will learn remotely on Friday. The school will be cleaned every Friday. There is no bus contract currently, it is in negotiations right now. J. Kent Weiner asked if the school was part of the 15% cut. M. Roy stated that the school is separately run and not part of the 15% cuts.

The Budget Committee reviewed the Carryover items from the 2020 Budget meetings.

The first carry over item was:

J. Lamson would like M. Bilodeau to come to the budget meeting in September 2020 with a list of days when the K9 unit is performing out of town and the overtime that has been spent in 2020 on the K9 program.

M. Bilodeau explained that all the monies that are spent on the Police Dog program are donated. 8 hours of overtime have been spent covering for the dog when it is performing out of town. All the dog duties have been on day shifts thus avoiding any other overtime coverage. There have been 9 requests to use the Newington dog patrol. Requests included; a 4-star general, Air Force One, the Air National Guard. Pease would like to use the dog at the airport more.

Police Department Update:

B. Arsenault asked what had changed for the Police Department during Covid-19. M. Bilodeau responded that the building is closed, they have not been able to be as proactive and they would like, there are more mental health issues, there have been more DUIs. B. Arsenault asked how the budget was affected. All training has been done thru webinars, they had to buy equipment so they could do the court cases by video, they had to patrol the retail areas more during the shutdown. J. Belanger asked if the Police department was able to make the 15% cut the Board of Selectman asked for. M. Bilodeau explained that he had submitted three different options to the selectmen.

T. Connors explained that the NHMA (New Hampshire Municipal Association) had suggested that the towns ask for a 15% in anticipation of lost revenue from taxes in December. The 15% is a worst-case scenario, the town is in decent shape as of now, but is worried about the tax payments in December and the negotiations with the Utility companies.

B. Arsenault mentioned that the first stimulus payout helped the retailers pay their rent and thought that there will be a massive shortfall in December.

J. Kent Weiner thought that it would be helpful for the committee if they got a copy of the revenues.

M. Marconi mentioned that the Board of Selectmen didn't want to cut personnel.

J. Lamson pointed out that it seems reasonable to hang on to good people because it will be hard to get them back when the economy gets going again.

B. Wright asked if the Police Department is delaying the purchase of the cruiser in 2020. M. Bilodeau said that he had ordered the cruiser but hasn't paid for it yet.

T. Connors explained that the Selectmen asked departments to "hold off" on large purchases until we know more. The Board may release funds later in the year.

J. Lamson expressed his concern for the 2021 budget.

W. Wright pointed out that the Police Department runs on a lean budget and 15% is a significant amount.

J. Kent Weiner thought that the discussion is premature because the town won't know until the revenue comes in December.

J. Lamson explained that the Board of Selectmen have the right to underspend the budget. The 2021 tax rate could go up and product services could go down.

J. Belanger thought that it was important to get the best value for tax dollars.

M. Marconi said that the Selectmen are just looking at the worst-case scenario, the future is unknown.

Fire Department Update:

The committee reviewed the Fire Departments Carry Over Items from the 2020 Budget Meetings:

E. Hoyt said that he agreed with all of the Fire Department carryover items.

E. Hoyt explained that the Fire Department was able to save \$93,000 in the salary line by not filling open positions immediately. Beginning on Monday September 14th, the department will be running with a full staff for the first time in 2 years. If the department were to cut 15%, they would have to lay off some people.

The Fire Department had to get a new server in 2020. E. Savinelli pointed out that one of the carryover items was to combine servers in the future. M. Roy said that the department heads have been talking about it. J. Belanger thought that there should be no "on-site" server a cloud server is the best option. E. Savinelli pointed out that IT in general should be combined in the future. J. Kent Weiner thought the town was way behind in IT and doesn't have the service to be

effective. E. Hoyt said that the fire department has been doing a lot of work and expects them to be 85% paperless soon. The tablets do a huge amount of work.

K. Latchaw commented that the departments need to work more towards consolidating.

J. Lamson thought that there should be a central strategy to manage the town's IT better.

During Covid ambulance calls have dropped off because people are afraid to go to the hospital, so the ambulance revenue is down.

B. Arsenault asked how the Fire Department's OT was doing in 2020. E. Hoyt said it was a little over budget.

Discussion ensued about the Fire Station addition. M. Roy explained that a "clean room" would be added to the station. This room would store gear so the harmful elements wouldn't be brought into the station. Construction is expected to start soon. E. Hoyt expressed concern that he had not been consulted more than two times about the addition.

J. Belanger asked how moral was at the Fire and Police stations. The Police officers understand the issues, the Fire department is good.

J. Lamson expressed how much the town appreciates the job that the first responders do and thanked them.

B. Arsenualt asked if the Police Department could skip a year for buying a cruiser. M. Bilodeau thought that if they skip a year it just backs up everything and the older cruisers need more maintenance and repair.

Library Update:

L. Berry explained that she is very grateful that the Library Trustees decided to pay the library employees through the Covid crisis. Morale is very good; the staffers feel valued. She was able to maintain her entire staff. There are two full time and two part time staffers. The library is currently 15% lower in expenses for the year and hopes to continue the trend until the end of the year.

J. Lamson commented that he likes the appointments at the library but looks forward to when everything is back to normal. L. Berry said the staff misses the interactions with residents as well. J. Belanger asked if the parking lot expansion was moving forward. J. O'Reilly said it was a good time to do it when the library

is closed. Also, if the library doesn't spend the money this year it may not get funded next year.

J. Lamson thanked J. O'Reilly for doing a great job with the election. T. Connors praised the election team for their efforts.

Town Budget through 8/31/20 Review:

M. Roy explained that town projects that are a health or safety issue or have been paid for out of the capital reserve account have gone forward in 2020. The Gosling road project has been completed. The Airport Road and Hodgdon Farm Road paving projects have been put on hold. The Wilcox Way project is also moving forward because the town made a commitment years ago. A FEMA grant is covering the cost of the tent rental for outside meetings. The Safety Lane committee's application for the grant has gone to the county and then the state.

Discussion ensued about the Safety Lane Project.

The project would cost \$700,000, the town would be responsible for 20% or \$140,000. \$20,000 has already been spent out of the Selectmen's budget on engineering and surveying for the project. The committee questioned why the Board of Selectmen would be spending the money now. B. Arsenault asked why the Board had not delayed the project for a couple of years until the Town is more stable. B. Wright, a Safety Lane committee member, explained that the committee had done a survey of residents and found out that 75% of people that responded to the survey were in favor of the project. The application for the project was sent in last week. B. Arsenault asked if the funds aren't spent would they go back into the general fund to reduce taxes? J. Lamson said that the funds have been earmarked by the town for a specific reason. J. Belanger asked if the safety lane is in the master plan? M. Roy said yes.

E. Savinelli pointed out that the Fire Station addition warrant article that was passed at town meeting included ADA bathrooms and now they aren't included. K. Latchaw said that the clean room was the #1 priority and any other improvements would be included if the numbers work out. B. Arsenault pointed out that the warrant article was for the clean room, bunk room and ADA bathrooms. K. Latchaw explained that the clean room bid came in higher than anticipated and the bunk room and bathrooms upgrade had to be cut.

J. Belanger thanked E. Savinelli for streaming the town committee meetings. He would like to see the Board of Selectmen find a way to do the streaming/recording for E. Savinelli. Watching a video of a meeting is the most accurate and the information can get to the town quickly and accurately. B. Arsenault asked if there was money in the budget for this. E. Savinelli said the library has equipment for this. K. Latchaw thought that all committees should

record their meetings and make them available to the residents. J. Lamson suggested that a new line item be added to the budget in 2021 for this purpose.

E. Savinelli pointed out that the Board of Selectmen's budget cuts were mostly form events that didn't happen and that it is a lot harder to cut funds from a department that is 24/7.

J. Lamson solicited a motion to accept the efforts that the School Board and Board of Selectmen have made to realize savings and postpone expenses in light of the budgetary shortfalls due to Covid-19.

J. Belanger moved to accept the efforts that the School Board and Board of Selectmen have made to realize savings and postpone expenses in light of the budgetary shortfalls due to Covid-19. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion with all in favor.

The upcoming Budget Committee meetings for 2020 will be on December 9th and 16th.

Election of Officers: B. Arsenault nominated J. Lamson to the position of Budget Committee Chair. J. Kent Weiner nominated B. Arsenault to the position of Budget Committee Vice-Chair. Hearing no further nominations, the vote was called, and all were in favor.

Adjournment: J. Belanger moved to adjourn at 8:43pm. E. Savinelli seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy
Recording Secretary