

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 6, 2021 Via Zoom

Chair John Lamson called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this Board is authorized to meet electronically.

Present Via Zoom: John Lamson, Chair, Brandon Arsenault, Vice-Chair, William Wright, Emily Savinelli, Sandy Sweeney, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Alan Wilson, Jamie Belanger, John Chamberlain, Ted Connors-Selectmen's Rep, Samara Robertson, School Board Rep, Mike Marconi, Selectman, Ken Latchaw, Selectman, Denis Hebert, Chair Planning Board, John Krebs, Town Planner, Lulu Pickering, Chair Historic District Commission, Jane Hislop, Co-Chair Conservation Commission, Jim Weiner, Co-Chair Conservation Commission, Denis Messier, Waste Water Treatment Plant Manager, Skip Cole, Chair Sewer Commission, Mike Bilodeau, Police Chief, Keri Wareing, Police Executive Admin Asst, Brenda Blonigen, Chair Police Commission, Police Captain Mike Sullivan, Fire Chief EJ Hoyt, Assistant Fire Chief Pat Moynihan, Derrick Willson, Martha Roy, Town Administrator and Eleanor Boy, Recorder.

T. Connors explained that the State had notified the town about the progress of the "donor town" issue. The numbers don't look good and could cause a significant increase in the tax rate for Newington. J. Lamson asked when this would take effect. T. Connors said maybe next year, but the town is not sure yet. Paul Deschaine is working on this issue on behalf of the town.

T. Connors also said that the Red Cross flag will be on display at the Town Hall in honor of the health care workers and first responders during the pandemic. Also, lights will be on in the Historic District to honor the workers.

Minutes Approval:

B. Wright moved to approve the minutes of December 16th, 2020. A. Wilson seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Planning Board Budget Review:

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Planning Board budget of \$171,865. B. Wright seconded the motion.

D. Hebert and J. Krebs presented the Planning Board budget to the committee.

The 2021 budget is the same as the 2020 budget. D. Hebert explained that there are many projects anticipated in 2021 including 2 big commercial projects, 1 big subdivision and the Town of Newington Capital Improvement Plan update, that has been postponed the last couple of years, will be completed in 2021. The Planning Board returned \$39,000 to the town from their 2020 budget. J. Krebs explained that the Planning Department continued to work during the pandemic in order to keep the town business moving. D. Hebert mentioned that he intended to put \$1 in the following seven budget expense lines, salaries, longevity, sick pay, health insurance, dental insurance, life & disability and retirement, and would like to add them now and decrease the Master Plan budget expense line by \$7. D. Hebert explained that he would like to keep those expense lines open in case the board has to bring in additional help.

J. Belanger moved to propose an amendment to the Planning Board budget to add \$1 to the seven budget lines; salaries, longevity, sick pay, health ins., dental ins., life & disability, and retirement and reduce the Master Plan expense line by \$7. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

J. Kent Weiner asked what the Capital Improvement Plan was. J. Krebs explained that the State requires towns to update their capital improvement plan every 10 years. The plan can be for 10, 15 or 20 years. The plan includes items that the town will have to purchase over the years, the plan is to help space out the expenses and keep the tax rate stable. The current CIP is beyond the 10 years. The Police and Fire Chiefs are working with the Planning Board on this. J. Chamberlain asked about the legal fees included in the budget. D. Hebert explained that the Planning Board needs to have legal review for land use interpretations and development and also to review the town's ordinances. J. Lamson explained that state law allows the Planning Board to have their own

legal fund. J. Chamberlain asked why the GIS expense line was so low. J. Krebs explained that the town has an outside source for GIS. It is needed infrequently.

D. Hebert found three more budget lines; GIS, FEMA Flood Maps and Equipment Purchases that he would like to add \$1 to and reduce the Master Plan budget line by an additional \$3.

J. Belanger moved to propose an amendment to the Planning Board budget to add \$1 to the three additional budget lines; GIS, FEMA Flood Maps and Equipment Purchases and reduce the Master Plan expense line by an additional \$3. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Planning Board budget as amended. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Historic District Commission Budget Review:

L. Pickering presented the Historic District Commission budget to the committee.

The 2021 budget is the same as the 2020 budget. The HDC will not be applying for a CLG grant in 2021.

J. Kent Weiner asked what the special project for the HDC will be in 2021. L. Pickering said that in 2020 the cannons got painted. The HDC received \$20,000 from Eversource and is hoping that heating and an electrical upgrade can be added to the Old Parsonage making the building more usable. The HDC would also like to explore the burials that are outside of the cemetery walls by the Meeting House. An archeological study of the horse shed is also under discussion.

B. Wright moved to tentatively approve the Historic District Commission budget of \$4,800. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

J. Chamberlain moved to propose an amendment to the Historic District Commission budget to increase the Town Records Restoration expense line

from \$1, 500 to \$10,000. J. Lamson asked for a second to the motion. There was none, the amendment doesn't pass.

J. Lamson asked that the Board of Selectmen work with the HDC to create a system to preserve the Town's historic records. J. Chamberlain said that there is nothing more important than the Town's history. L. Pickering explained that she has tried to advance this project. The members of the HDC are doing all this work for free and often use their own funds to get supplies. B. Wright asked if the town could use some of the empty buildings to generate income. L. Pickering explained that she is hoping if the Old Parsonage gets heat and electricity then the "Old Tavern" could be back in business. It would give the residents some place to meet and talk instead of the Transfer Station. E. Savinelli asked about the train depot and land at Bloody Point. L. Pickering said that the State has decided to sell it and keep the money. M. Roy said that the Selectmen have sent the State Bureau of Right of Ways a letter explaining that the Town would like the depot and land revitalized and donated to the town.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Historic District Commission budget. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Conservation Commission Budget Review:

J. Belanger moved to tentatively approve the Conservation Commission budget of \$8,518. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

J. Hislop and J. Weiner presented the Conservation Commission budget to the committee.

J. Weiner explained that from 2012 to 2020 the Conservation Commission budget has decreased by 68%. The Commission returned \$2,691 to the town from their 2020 budget. The commission is not submitting a warrant article in 2021 because they have secured \$120,000 from Eversource that was deposited in the Conservation Fund.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Conservation Commission budget. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Sewer Budget Review:

B. Wright moved to tentatively approve the Sewer budget of \$1,318,428. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

D. Messier and S. Cole presented the Sewer budget to the committee.

J. Lamson reminded the committee that the entire Sewer budget is funded by the user fees charged to the commercial businesses and utilities, plus 6 or 7 residents. B. Wright asked if there was an impact on the sewer budget because of Covid. D. Messier said that there was no impact, they were considered essential workers and business. E. Savinelli asked about the astronomically high sewer bills that are sometimes more than tax bills. D. Messier said that no one asked for an abatement in 2020. E. Savinelli asked why there were legal funds in the sewer budget. M. Roy explained that the Sewer fund is an enterprise fund, which means that all expenses need to be identified in their budget. J. Belanger expressed concern about the high sewer rates and how that is affecting the businesses in town. D. Messier explained that the Town has expressed their concerns about the rates and the Sewer Commission will consider these concerns when the 2021 fees are set. B. Arsenault said that the fees are affecting businesses who are considering coming to Newington. It is a serious concern. J. Kent Weiner asked how long the rates are in effect. D. Messier said one year. J. Belanger asked how much it would cost to bring down the rates by 5%, 10% or 20% and asked D. Messier to bring those numbers to the committee next year. All employees at the sewer plant are contracted workers. J. Chamberlain thought that the budget cost of \$500,000 was a lot for three employees. D. Messier explained that the \$500,000 was for a lot more than three employees' wages. The company pays for the expenses of the sewer plant like electricity, gas and maintenance. E. Savinelli asked if other towns hire companies to run their sewer plants. D. Messier said his company runs four in NH. S. Cole explained that the Sewer Commission bids out the services on a regular basis. The last time they bid out the services five or six companies sent in bids. The Sewer Commission discovered that the lower bids were for reduced services and was not a good deal. J. Lamson asked that the next time that the services are bid out, that they give the bids to the Board of Selectmen to give to the Budget Committee.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Sewer budget. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Police Department Budget Review:

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Police Department budget of \$1,828,990. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

Police Chief Mike Bilodeau presented the Police Department budget to the committee.

The 2021 budget is 2.7% higher than the 2020 budget.

J. Chamberlain asked if the sick pay expense line was only for exempt employees. M. Bilodeau said that it was for everyone except the 4 part time employees. He is the only exempt employee in the department.

The Police Department presented a slide show to the committee. It showed the savings in the 2020 budget. \$120,000 will returned to the Town from the 2020 budget. M. Bilodeau thanked K. Wareing for her excellent work on the budget. J. Chamberlain asked why they had overspent the equipment purchases line. M. Bilodeau explained that they had to buy a couple of radios that they hadn't anticipated and they had to replace the firewall. B. Arsenault asked if the K9 program was still breaking even. M. Bilodeau said the program is doing great with donations still coming in. The first year of the program was expensive because Officer Wood had to stay in a hotel during the training. B. Wright asked about the mandate from the governor for cameras on the state officers and asked if the town would have any. M. Bilodeau said there were no plans yet but anticipate that it will be a significant cost in the future. J. Kent Weiner asked how much body cams would cost. M. Bilodeau said between \$95,000-\$100,000. M. Bilodeau understands the need for bodycams, but believes that the department is covered with the cruiser cams now. M. Bilodeau doesn't want to purchase the bodycams and then find out that the state is going to mandate and fund the cameras. B. Arsenault asked about the cruisers getting older and needing more maintenance. J. Lamson asked if the department was ok with one cruiser a year. J. Belanger asked if the department has considered switching to another make of cruiser that would take less maintenance. M. Bilodeau said that there are certain brands that are specifically made for police cruisers. M. Bilodeau thought that the Police Department could take some of the money that they make from details and put it in a revolving account that would be used for purchasing cruisers and equipment replacement. B. Arsenault thought that the purchase of one cruiser a year was a good thing, but the department needs to retire the oldest cruisers each year to reduce the vehicle maintenance expense. M. Bilodeau thinks the department is doing a good job of rotating cruisers.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Police Department budget. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Emergency Management Budget Review:

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Emergency Management budget of \$19,074. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

M. Bilodeau explained that the Town is lacking in communications, signage and food supplies for emergencies. J. Lamson asked how much food are we supplying for how many people. M. Bilodeau said that the food would be for 50 people for a couple of days. E. Savinelli asked about what kind of equipment is needed. M. Bilodeau said that the greatest need is for signage, generators and a code red program that would alert people in the area with a text.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Emergency Management budget. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

The next Budget Committee meeting is Wednesday January 13th, 2021 at 6:00pm.

J. Belanger moved to adjourn at 8:07pm. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote. T. Connors-yes, S. Robertson-yes, J. Belanger-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, S. Sweeney-yes, B. Wright-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, J. Lamson-Yes. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

**Eleanor Boy
Recorder**