

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 10, 2024 Town Hall

Present: Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Chair, Emily Savinelli, Vice-Chair; Jeff Semprini, Alan Wilson, Cyndi Lyons, Maggie Cooke, Selectman's Rep. Chris Wayss, Jamie Belanger, Rick Stern, School Board Rep Jeremy Boston, Fire Chief EJ Hoyt, Assistant Fire Chief Pat Moynihan, Fire Engineer Chair John Klanchesser, Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert, Road Agent Len Thomas, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley and Martha Roy, Town Administrator.

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

Minutes: E. Savinelli moved to approve the minutes of January 3, 2024. J. Boston seconded the motion. All others were in favor.

Fire Department Budget Review:

J. Belanger moved to tentatively approve the Fire Department budget of \$2,242,125. J. Boston seconded the motion.

E. Hoyt said that most of the increases to the Fire Department's budget were contractual with the Fire Fighters union and the COLA increase for 2024. Other increases were for health and dental insurance. The amount of the operating section of the budget has essentially remained the same. With increases in the SCBA maintenance, computer and HazMat budget lines offset with a decrease in the fuel budget line. J. Belanger asked if the fuel decrease was due to less gallons used or a drop in price per gallon. E. Hoyt said it was due to a decrease in price per gallon. J. Lamson asked what the percentage salary increase was for the union. E. Hoyt said it was a 2.75% for a step increase and a 2% COLA.

E. Hoyt said that there is a proposed warrant article to convert four part-time positions to four full-time positions. They are not adding staff, just converting positions within the department.

E. Savinelli asked if E. Hoyt expected the health buyout budget line to increase considering the general increase in health insurance. P. Moynihan said that the difference will be fairly small.

R. Stern asked how long the union contract goes for. E. Hoyt said it was a five-year agreement; there are currently three years left on it. C. Lyons asked why there was no

increase in the vacation buyout budget line. E. Hoyt said that any increase in the vacation buyout budget line would be offset by a decrease in the overtime line. E. Savinelli asked if there was any potential to reduce the alarm maintenance line because you didn't spend it all in 2023. P. Moynihan said that budget line covers the radio boxes in town and there wasn't a lot of maintenance on those boxes in 2023. New developments and new businesses in town would cause that line to increase. A. Wilson asked about the 1996 Seagrave fire truck. E. Hoyt said that the Seagrave was turned over to the Selectmen and Engine 4 is now here. C Wayss added that the Seagrave is being listed by different Firetruck sales companies at \$44,950. We are advertising it in state for 10% less as that is the commission cost should one of the two Firetruck sales companies successfully sell it for the town.

R. Stern asked if the part-time firefighters are members of the union. E. Hoyt said that some of them are. It depends on different factors.

R. Stern asked about the repair of various equipment budget line and what items would be included in that. E. Hoyt said it would include the repair of saws, pumps and other smaller items.

C. Wayss asked about the training and education incentive budget lines. P. Moynihan said that the department couldn't do as much training due to being short-staffed and the incentive budget line is contractual.

J. Belanger asked about online training versus in person training. E. Hoyt said that it is a combination of both. There is some training that has to be done in person.

E Savinelli asked about the physicals budget line that was underspent in 2022 and what is the final amount spent out of that line for 2023 and is that number accurate. E. Hoyt said yes if everyone had the time to go get a physical. The full-time employees get their physicals done, the part-time employees are not as consistent.

J. Belanger asked if the fire department was getting a variable amount for the physicals and a variable amount for the training, is that hurting the quality of the firefighter. P. Moynihan said that they are not at a liability standpoint. Full-time employees breed consistency and consistency breeds better performance. All Newington firefighters regardless of whether they get a physical or not, are required to take a physical agility test at the fire station annually.

R. Stern asked what the Ambulance revenue was for 2023. E. Hoyt said Ambulance revenue was \$81,117, permits were \$55,388 and details were \$2,771 for a total of \$139,276.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Fire Department budget. All were in favor.

Fire Department Warrant Articles Review:

E Savinelli moved to tentatively approve the Fire Department warrant article A: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$60,000 to be placed in the Replacement of the Town Ambulance and any Major Medical Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

R. Stern asked what they were planning to buy for an ambulance.

P. Moynihan said that they would be presenting a proposal to the selectman on Tuesday for a replacement. It would be a four wheel drive Chevy diesel, like the one the department already has. It is expected to be delivered in 2027.

In 2027, the current ambulance will be 14 years old. The contract for the new ambulance will be at a fixed price until delivery for around \$390,000.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Fire Department warrant article A. All were in favor.

M. Cooke moved to tentatively approve the Fire Department warrant article B: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000 to be placed in the Replacement of Major Fire Department Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Fire Department warrant article B. All were in favor.

J. Boston moved to tentatively approve the Fire Department Warrant Article C: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$101,683 to convert the third position on shift from part time to full time on each of the four shifts. This amount includes all costs for salaries, benefits, and retirement. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

P. Moynihan said that they currently have 8 full-time firefighter positions, which means two full-time people on each of the four shifts. E Hoyt said that each shift has three positions that are on 24/7, 365. The fourth person on a shift is there nights, weekends, and holidays. This warrant article would take the third position on each shift and convert it from a part time position to a full-time position. Three positions on each shift will now be full-time. J. Lamson asked if the Town was paying for the whole thing or was there a grant that could pay for some of it. E. Hoyt said that they had applied for a SAFER grant earlier this year and they were not awarded the grant. J. Belanger asked if this would save money on the overtime issues in the department. P. Moynihan said that it will cost \$101,683 more in the Fire Department's overall budget.

M. Cooke asked if they were doing this because the part time positions were hard to fill.

E. Hoyt said that the department has been unable to fill the third person on a shift. Nearly all of Newington's part-time positions are filled by people that are full-time firefighters in another town. The other fire departments are having the same issues as Newington, so they are mandating their personnel to fill vacancies in their departments, so then they can't work for Newington part time, so then Newington firefighters are having to fill those vacancies here. For the past three years Newington has had a posting trying to fill the part time position. They have only been able to hire three people. They have lost eight people. Vacancies have gone up and coverage has gone down. Out of 365 days last year, the department only had full coverage on 100 days.

C. Wayss said that the Selectmen and the Fire Department have talked about this many times. C. Wayss commends the Chiefs and the Board of Fire Engineers for what they have presented tonight. The Board of Selectmen agrees with this approach to correcting the staffing issue at the Fire Department. It makes sense and is better for the fire fighters, better coverage for the Town. The Fire Department also removed some of their warrant articles.

C. Lyons asked if there is a formula to get their staffing numbers. P. Moynihan there are several different formulas, in several different places, with several different standards. All of the formulas say that they should have a lot of firefighters (15), but communities can't afford that number. They try to do the best they can with the budget that is allocated to the fire department.

R. Stern asked why they did a warrant article and didn't just add it to their budget. E. Hoyt said it was because they are adding full-time positions that have to be voted on at the town meeting because it is a permanent commitment.

M. Cooke asked if they thought they had people they could hire. E. Hoyt said that Newington is a good place to work with good benefits, so they think they will be able to recruit people to Newington. The benefits are good in Newington and that is what people are looking for. J. Klanchesser said that both Chiefs are really good, and people want to work for them.

E. Savinelli asked if they could apply for the SAFER grant again. E. Hoyt said that this grant is very hard to get. The bigger departments usually get grants.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Fire Department Warrant Article C. All were in favor.

Highway Budget Review:

R. Stern moved to tentatively approve the Highway budget of \$620,800. J. Boston seconded the motion.

M. Roy said that the \$42,000 difference between the Selectmen's budget and the department's budget \$30,000 for the McIntyre Road guardrail project came out of the contracted services budget line and \$12,000 was cut out of the resurfacing budget line.

R. Stern thought that the guardrail project is a safety issue and shouldn't be cut from the budget.

J. Belanger asked if there had been any discussion about removing that bridge.

C. Wayss said that the current guardrail isn't the most modern guardrail, but it is up to standard. The Town is not being mandated to replace these guardrails. R. Stern is concerned about the Town's liability if something should happen. C. Wayss said that the guardrail is to standard. R. Stern said it was an old standard that nobody uses anymore. J. Lamson asked if the Town doesn't replace the guardrail this year, would the Town have to replace them at a future date. M. Roy said that there is not a regulation that says the Town must replace them. J. Lamson asked how long the guardrails have been there. L. Thomas said 50 years.

E. Savinelli asked about the reduction to the resurfacing line. C. Wayss said that the Selectmen looked at the upcoming paving projects in 2024 and thought they had budgeted enough to cover the projects.

Discussion ensued about the weight limit on the McIntyre bridge, fire trucks driving across the bridge and being exempt from most of the road standards.

E. Savinelli said that she doesn't think that money should be spent on the bridge until the Town knows more about the future of the bridge.

R. Stern asked about the over expenditure of the resurfacing budget line in 2023. L. Thomas said the bad area on Shattuck Way had to be done. Fox Point and McIntyre were also paved in 2023. C. Wayss said the sinkhole on McIntyre cost extra money.

A. Wilson mentioned that a road in the Cemetery will be resurfaced in 2024. The funds will be taken out of the new Cemetery Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Semprini asked about the dying ash trees in town and could these trees get taken down before they come down on their own on the roads. L. Thomas said that they make a list every spring for the trees that they think need to come down. J. Boston said that he has reached out to the PDA about trees along McIntyre Road. They are meeting with them on the 24th.

J. Belanger asked about the upcoming culvert projects in Town. L. Thomas said that the Town engineer has gone around and looked at the culverts in Town and made a list of

which ones need immediate attention. The Highway Department had culverts cleaned out in the fall of 2023. E. Savinelli asked why the culvert budget line was vastly underspent in 2023 and do we need \$25,000 in the culvert budget line for 2024. Discussion ensued about the culvert on Shattuck Way and how it could be corrected. L. Thomas said yes because there are a lot more culverts that need to be cleaned out in 2024.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Highway budget. There were no members in favor.

E. Savinelli moved to approve the Highway budget of \$578,800. M. Cooke seconded the motion. All were in favor.

J. Belanger asked if there was a list of Town employees that included if they are full or part time and who is eligible for benefits for informational purposes. M. Roy stated that this will be developed for the Committee.

Adjournment: E. Savinelli moved to adjourn at 7:19pm. A. Wilson seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy
Recording Secretary