

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 17, 2024 Town Hall

Present: Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Chair, Emily Savinelli, Vice-Chair; Jeff Semprini, 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, Police Chief Mike Bilodeau, Police Commission Chair Brenda Blonigen, Police Captain Brandon Smart, Police Executive Assistant Taylor Fiore, Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert, 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 10, 2024. J. Boston seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Police Department Budget Review:

J. Boston moved to tentatively approve the Police Department budget of \$2,088,647. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

M. Bilodeau said this past year has been challenging for the department. They were down three officers for nine months, which is hard on the officers especially when the department's service calls increased by 25%. M. Bilodeau said that it is hard to get qualified candidates to fill the open positions.

In 2023 the police investigated four sexual assaults involving children, an embezzlement case for more than \$100,000, antisemitic hate crimes, plus theft and drug investigations.

In the 2023 budget, the department overspent the overtime budget line by \$20,000, due to the officers working twelve-hour shifts, with four hours of overtime built in to this schedule, to cover the shortage.

J. Lamson asked about the longevity program, the police department has proposed, that is included in the 2024 budget.

M. Bilodeau said that they are looking at the longevity program as a pilot program. Other departments are offering hiring bonuses. For example, Lebanon is paying \$30,000 as a sign on bonus, Windham is \$21,000, Pelham \$21,000, Hooksett is \$15,000, NH State Police is \$10,000 and Litchfield was at \$5,000.

Retention of officers is the big problem now. A new officer costs the town between \$40,000 to \$50,000. They go to the Police Academy for 16 weeks and have field training for 12 weeks.

The longevity program was put into place to attract certified officers. The Newington Police Department does not have a sign-on bonus. M. Bilodeau said that the cost of the longevity plan in 2024 is \$17,000, which seems like a lot, but it isn't if you look at the big picture.

M. Bilodeau said that the Town does support the Police Department and it is appreciated. Augie, the Police dog, went on 19 calls around the Seacoast in 2023.

M. Bilodeau said that the department is in the second year of the four-year accreditation cycle. Every four years they are reassessed.

E. Savinelli asked about the equipment contract budget line that increased by 36% in 2024. M. Bilodeau said that new software was purchased for Rockingham County Dispatch. All the towns in the county agreed to this contract. The cost will decrease in 2025.

C. Wayss asked if there was enough money in the ammunition budget line. M. Bilodeau said yes. J. Lamson asked if they are required to destroy ammunition after a period of time. M. Bilodeau said that they recycle it. M. Bilodeau said that if they hire three officers in 2024, it will require hours at the shooting range and they supply the ammunition at the Police Academy.

C. Wayss asked about the Police communications budget line that was underspent in 2023. T. Fiore said that if equipment breaks then the expense comes out of that line. The department was lucky in 2023 because they didn't have a lot of repairs.

J. Semprini asked what the surrounding towns were doing to recruit officers. M. Bilodeau said that they are branching out their recruiting and have looked toward community colleges and have participated in job fairs.

M. Bilodeau said that Newington's salaries and benefits are the average for the area. It is important to retain the officers that the department currently has and the longevity plan should help with that.

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

Emergency Management Budget Review:

R. Stern moved to tentatively approve the Emergency Management budget of \$20,226.

J. Boston seconded the motion.

J. Lamson asked about the types of emergencies that this department would respond to. E. Hoyt said there are weather related emergencies and potential ones down on the waterfront and the mall area.

Discussion ensued about the different types of emergencies and which agencies would be called in to administer the emergency.

They have received a grant for \$170,000 to update the emergency communications equipment for the Emergency Operations Center.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Emergency Management budget. All were in favor.

Warrant Articles Review:

E Savinelli moved to tentatively approve the Police Department warrant article 1:

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$8,500 to be placed in the police related Body Worn Cameras and Cruiser Mounted Audio and Video Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

M. Cooke seconded the motion.

J. Belanger asked what the goal amount would be for this capital reserve fund. M. Bilodeau said \$50,000. R. Stern asked why more money wasn't being added to this fund. M. Bilodeau said that they have made concessions on their budget and warrant articles. There is no State law requiring body cams yet. This fund is not just for body cameras, it is also for cruiser cameras. Cameras in the cruisers is the first priority. There are currently no cameras in any cruisers. The average cost to install a cruiser camera is between \$15,000 to \$20,000.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Police Department warrant article 1 . All were in favor.

E. Savinelli moved to tentatively approve the Police Department warrant article 2:

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,500 to be placed in the Police Department Radio/Electronics Capital Reserve Fund.

M. Cooke seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Police Department warrant article 2. All were in favor.

E. Savinelli moved to tentatively approve the Police Department Warrant Article 3:

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,500 to be placed in the Police Computer Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

R. Stern seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Police Department Warrant Article 3. All were in favor.

R. Stern moved to tentatively approve the Highway Department Warrant Article A.

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000 to be placed in the Major Road Work Capital Reserve Fund.

M. Cooke seconded the motion.

J. Belanger asked if there was a cap on this fund. M. Roy said that if a cap was to be set it should be around \$2,000,000. M. Roy said that Shattuck Way is near the end of its life and will need to be repaved and drainage work should be done. Gosling Road North also needs to be done.

E. Savinelli questioned why Shattuck Way would have been crack sealed in 2024 when it is due to be paved. M. Roy said that Shattuck Way won't be repaved until there are enough funds to do it. C. Wayss said that the Town applied for a grant to repave Shattuck Way, but didn't get it. Newington is a working waterfront and Shattuck Way is the main travel for all the trucks to haul materials to the region. C. Lyons asked how much was added to this fund in 2023. M. Roy said that no funds were added last year. M. Cooke asked about the drainage on Shattuck Way and how it will be dealt with. M. Roy said that the Town has contacted Sprague about that specific issue and have been told that they are talking to their engineer about fixing it.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Highway Department Warrant Article A. All were in favor.

J. Boston moved to tentatively approve the Highway Department Warrant Article B.

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$15,000 to be placed in the Replacement of Vehicles Operated by the Highway Department Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Belanger seconded the motion.

M. Roy said that the Ford 350 is 20 years old. The Selectmen will assess it's replacement at a later date. J. Belanger asked if there was a cap on this fund. M. Roy said that there wasn't. If there was a cap, it should be around \$100,000.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Highway Department Warrant Article B. All were in favor.

J. Boston moved to tentatively approve the Highway Department Warrant Article C.

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$6,573 to be placed in the Municipally Owned Bridges Maintenance, Construction or Reconstruction Capital Reserve Fund.

E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

S. Bagley said that this money came from the State. The State gives these funds to towns but they can only be used on bridges. M. Roy said that there is no tax impact from this warrant article. R. Stern asked if that was the only place this money could have been placed. M. Roy said the Selectmen have chosen for the last two years for this money to go into this capital reserve fund because they don't see an immediate need for a bridge repair now. The State has inspected the bridge over Arboretum and say that it is in satisfactory condition. J. Belanger asked if the guardrail replacement could come out of this fund. C. Wayss said that it could potentially if it is qualifying.

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

J. Boston moved to tentatively approve the Town Hall Warrant Article A.

To see if the town will vote to establish a Town Hall Computer Equipment Capital Reserve Fund under the provisions of RSA 35:1 for the replacement of Computer equipment, servers and other IT technology at Town Hall and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$12,500 to be placed in said fund with the Board of Selectmen named as Agents to Expend.

M. Cooke seconded the motion.

M. Roy said the immediate need would be a new server for the Town Hall that would cost approximately \$50,000.

E. Savinelli asked if the Budget Committee could review this warrant article after they review the Executive Office's budget because their computer expense line increased by 76% from 2023 at \$24,312 to 2024 at \$42,903. C. Wayss said that the line includes contracts and warranties for the computers and they use both a cloud backup and a server backup. M. Roy said that the server is five years old. J. Belanger asked if the Town needs a physical server. Could the town rent a virtual server? The monthly IT services are rolled into the rent. J. Lamson said they could look at it in a couple of years to see if there is new technology before the Town purchases a new server. M. Roy said that a couple of years ago the Selectmen had a cyber security analysis done on all the departments. In that report it said that the Town should have a hard server and cloud backup.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Town Hall Warrant Article. All were in favor.

E. Savinelli moved to tentatively approve the Newington School District Warrant Article A.

Shall the Newington School District raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$25,000 to be placed in the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund previously established, with such sum to be funded from the June 20, 2024 unassigned fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2024, with no amount to be raised by additional taxation.

J. Belanger seconded the motion.

C. Wayss said the balance in this fund is currently \$136,893.43. The target amount for this fund is \$250,000. J. Boston said that the \$250,000 would cover the expenses for two children.

M. Cooke asked what this fund covers. J. Boston said that these funds would be used if a child moved into the district and needed special help. This fund is for unexpected needs, if a child moved into Town. The overall goal is to build up the trust funds. This amount will come out of unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year. There is no tax impact.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Newington School District Warrant Article. All were in favor.

Library Budget Revision Amount:

J. Lamson said that there was an computer formula issue. The amount in each line is the same but the bottom line has increased by \$1,500.

C. Wayss said that the budget line for professional training wasn't included in the bottom line.

The new bottom line is \$281,744.

J. Boston moved to amend the bottom line of the library budget to \$281,744. R. Stern seconded the motion.

J. Lamson reminded everyone to sign up to run for the Budget Committee from January 24th to February 2nd.

Carry Over Item: Police Body Worn Camera Capital Reserve Fund capped at \$50,000.

Adjournment: J. Boston moved to adjourn at 7:08pm. M. Cooke seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy
Recording Secretary