

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 24, 2024 Town Hall

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

Present: Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Chair, Emily Savinelli, Vice-Chair; Cyndi Lyons, Jamie Belanger, Maggie Cooke, Selectman's Rep. Chris Wayss, Alan Wilson, Rick Stern, School Board Rep Jeremy Boston, Town Clerk Doreen Caradonna, Moderator Jack O'Reilly, Special Projects Coordinator Paul Deschaine, Board of Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley and Martha Roy, Town Administrator.

Minutes: E. Savinelli moved to approve the minutes of January 17th, 2024. M. Cooke seconded the motion. J. Kent Weiner abstained. All others were in favor.

A. Wilson moved to tentatively approve all the budgets on the agenda for \$1,845,965. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Budget (\$115,265):

J. Lamson asked about the increase in the workshops line. D. Caradonna said that she is in the process of training to be a certified Town Clerk/Tax collector. It is a week-long program, each year for four years. She has already completed one year of the training.

Elections Budget (\$26,889):

J. O'Reilly said that the voting machine is old and needs to be replaced. The State has narrowed down the choice of the new voting machines to two. The new machine would cost around \$7,000. That is the reason for the increase in the budget. The wages line increased due to four elections on 2024.

Executive Office Budget (\$384,034):

The Executive Office has a 2% increase from 2023. E. Savinelli asked about the copier lease budget line increase. M. Roy said that the expense was due to more colored copies and regular copies. There is a 2% COLA reflected in the budget. E. Savinelli asked about the increase in the computer expense budget line. M. Roy said that four computers will be replaced in 2024.

E. Savinelli asked about the \$27,000 fee from RMON. M. Roy said that it was their annual fee for their service. A few years ago, an IT committee was formed to pick the best

company for the Town Hall and the Highway's computer support and RMON was chosen.

E. Savinelli asked about the Comcast fees in the budget and thought it was very high. A. Wilson asked if the Town had thought of converted to fiber internet. J. Boston said that he had looked into that, but thought the price was too high. He will look into it again. J. Kent Weiner asked if the Town could look into getting better service to the Town. C. Wayss said that the Town will call and try to get the price down. J. Belanger thought that the IT committee should meet again because technology has changed a lot in the last five years. C. Wayss said that threat protection for the Town is the most important item. The contract with RMON runs out next year. C. Wayss said they will be bidding that out in 2024. M. Roy said that the town's insurance carrier has said that RMON is one of the best vendors for computer security. P. Deschaine talked about the difference between a cloud server and a physical server. The Town Clerk's office is not supported for a cloud-based server. RMON is very proactive with security. E. Savinelli asked if the Town was going to upgrade the webpage and thought it should get a facelift. P. Deschaine said that they could, but it would be very expensive.

Debt (\$27,672/Capital Outlay (\$81,000) Budget:

J. Lamson pointed out that the Town has very little debt, which is good especially when interest rates are high.

Town Buildings Administration Budget and Town Buildings Budget:

J. Boston said that he had added \$2,500 to the Town Hall budget for landscaping around the building including the garden out front. C. Wayss said that the Town is currently battling with the State to get them to do something about the center islands along Woodbury between the lights at the top of Woodbury and the roundabout. The area along Woodbury by Walmart was cleaned up by having the brush cut back and the sidewalk cleaned up. M. Cooke asked about a previous conversation at a Budget meeting about the different landscapers for all the Town buildings. J. Boston said that the current landscaper does all the grounds on Town property. J. Boston did look at other landscape businesses to get a better price and found that the current landscaper's price was better.

E. Savinelli asked about why the heating fuel line for the Town Hall was increased for 2024 when it was underspent in 2023. J. Boston said that he wanted to leave a little bit of a buffer because he didn't want to run short. He did cut back on the fuel and electricity budget lines. J. Boston said that a major expense in 2023 was the HVAC system at the Town Hall.

E. Savineeli asked about the fuel and electricity lines increase at the Old Town Hall. J. Boston pointed out that the Old Town Hall is being used two or three times a week now for activities for the Recreation Committee. J. Kent Weiner asked about the insulation at the Old Town Hall. J. Boston said that insulation is good in the addition, but doesn't know about the older part of the Old Town Hall. J. Kent Weiner asked if an assessment of the building could be done in 2024. J. Boston said that there is horsehair plaster in the old section and didn't know if they could open up the walls to blow insulation in, but thought a blower door test in the old section was a good idea. E. Savinelli asked if there were any grants available to look into the energy efficiency of the older buildings. P. Deschaine said that the NH Saves program is something to look into for energy savings and said that the sooner you apply for it the better. J. Boston said they are still looking into Community Power for savings in this area as well. They are scheduled to meet with them after town meeting. E. Savinelli asked about the difference in the Old Parsonage budget (Selectmen's budget line versus the department's budget line). J. Boston said that in his original budget there was painting for 1 ½ sides of the building and it was cut to just paint one side of the building. E. Savinelli asked why the Town wasn't using a google calendar or other free software. P. Deschaine said that Google had some problems which led to the federal government no longer using their software. However, google calendar probably could be used because there isn't sensitive material on it. Microsoft 365 is also available to use.

Code Enforcement Budget:

J. Boston said that the Town took in \$200,000 in building permits and \$40,000-\$50,000 in other permits. The department is going to be switching over to a portal based permitting and inspection software. People will have the option to pay online and the Fire Department and Police Department will also be using this software for their permits.

J. Belanger asked if the Town would be paying for the credit card fees. J. Boston said no, there would be a separate charge applied, just like the Town Clerk does now when you use a credit card to pay your taxes or register your car. C. Wayss said another benefit from this software is that the Fire Department will no longer be able to collect some of their fees that they have been chasing because many of the bigger businesses only pay with credit cards. It will be much more efficient, less paperwork and reduce delays in obtaining permits.

Land Management Budget:

J. Kent Weiner asked why Fox Point was listed in the land management budget and not in the town buildings budget.

J. Lamson said that it probably started when the Town acquired Fox Point and there weren't functioning town buildings there. C. Wayss thought it would be worthwhile to get the Carriage House and rental house into the Town Buildings budget. J. Boston agreed.

R. Stern asked how much money was left in the Fox Point Capital Reserve account. M. Roy said \$0. The repairs to the dock and the stairs in 2023 took it to \$0.

J. Boston said that he will be doing some maintenance on the Carriage House in 2024. Soft washing the roof and staining one side of the building. J. Kent Weiner asked when this was last done. J. Boston said that a fair amount of money was spent a few years ago and it is in good shape. Now, it is just keeping up with the maintenance.

C. Lyons asked about the annual hydrant fee, the rate didn't seem correct. M. Roy will look into it. E. Savinelli asked if the hydrant rate was negotiated. M. Roy said no, Portsmouth tells all of the towns what the rate is going to be.

J. Boston said that this year they went over the Care of Trees budget line. This year he is asking for \$10,000. There is an issue with the Ash trees in town and many have to be removed.

Finance & Assessing Budget (\$106,083) and the Legal Budget (\$50,001):

The Assessing budget has increased in 2024 because of the revaluation. J. Kent Weiner asked if \$10,000 was enough in the 320 budget line in the legal budget. C. Wayss said that that budget line is meant to pay for our legal fees for the doner town issues. The Board will watch this line carefully. R. Stern asked if the Town had contracts with Sprague or Newington Station. M. Roy said there is a five-year contract with Sprague. Newington Station's and EP Newington's contracts are up. E. Savinelli asked about the trust management fee budget line. M. Roy said that the Trustees of the Trust Funds switched some of the Town's funds management to a private company, Three Bearings Investments. They charge the Town a percentage.

Transfer Station Budget (\$87,152) and the Residential Waste Collection Budget (\$91,410):

C. Daigle has recommended to the Selectmen that the Town purchase a compactor to reduce costs. It is in the Capital Outlay budget for \$37,000. The work for the compactor will start in the Spring. C. Wayss said that the compactor is a good idea because the trucking fees for the recyclables is high. The compactor will reduce the number of trucking trips. This project is under a three-year payback for the Town's investment in

the compactor. M. Cooke suggested adding a piece in the monthly newsletter reminding residents to break down their cardboard boxes at the transfer station.

M. Roy said that the Board bids out the residential waste contract. The current contract is for three years. The amount is less in 2024 because of the new trash cans.

J. Belanger asked if recycling was still worthwhile considering the costs. C. Wayss said that if recycling was stopped, the tipping fees would go up, plus other items. The Board also got a bid for curbside recycling and it was much higher.

Insurance Budget:

M. Roy said that the Board asked her to bid out insurance and no bids came back except our current insurance carrier, Primex. It has been an annual bid for several years.

Regional Associations Budget:

The committee had no questions about the Regional Associations budget.

Street Lighting Budget:

E. Savinelli asked if this budget was just for electricity for the street lights. M. Roy said yes, the maintenance of the lights comes out of the Highway budget. Discussion ensued about the expenses in the traffic lights budget line and how high it was. What was included in the traffic light expenses and how many traffic lights in Newington. C. Wayss said that they will look into this budget line and get back to the committee.

Pest Control Budget (\$0), the Health Budget (\$1) and the Welfare-Direct Assistance Budget (\$1):

M. Roy said that the Town paid \$31,000 for pest control in 2023. C. Lyons asked why this item was cut from the budget. C. Wayss said that many residents had requested that their property not be sprayed, plus it was to save money. J. Kent Weiner suggested adding \$1 to this budget.

J. Kent Weiner moved to amend the Pest Control budget from \$0 to \$1. M. Cooke seconded the motion. All were in favor.

J. Lamson called for a vote on all the budgets on the agenda of \$1,845,966. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

The budget public hearing is on Wednesday, February 7th at 6pm.

Adjournment: J. Boston moved to adjourn at 7:56pm. M. Cooke seconded the motion with all in favor.

Carryover Item: To move the Carriage House and the rental house at Fox Point out of the Land Management budget and into the Town buildings budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy, Recording Secretary