

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Public Hearing Minutes
Thursday, November 19, 2020 Town Hall

Chair John Lamson called the meeting to order at 6:31pm

Present: John Lamson, Chair, Brandon Arsenault, Vice-Chair, William Wright, Alan Wilson, Jamie Belanger, John Chamberlain, Sandra Sweeney, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Selectmen's Rep, Ted Connors

Present Via Zoom Audio: Emily Savinelli and Samara Robertson

Guests: Ken Latchaw- Selectmen, Mike Marconi-Selectman, Mike Bilodeau-Police Brenda Blonigen-Police Commission Chair, John Klanchesser-Board of Fire Engineer Chair, Ann Hyland Hebert- Fire Engineer, Derrick Willson-Safety Lane Committee Chair, Martha Roy-Town Administrator, Eleanor Boy, Recorder and Addison Mueller, Video Recorder.

Minutes:

All were in favor of accepting the September 9, 2020 minutes.

2020 Budget Review:

T. Connors gave an overview of the 2020 budget. The Board of Selectmen don't believe there will be a revenue shortfall in 2020. \$571,000 is anticipated as unspent funds for 2020. The \$571,000 represents 7.5% of the total budget. The Board anticipates problems in 2021 when the stimulus money runs out.

J. Lamson thought that the \$571,000 surplus should be rolled into 2021. J. Belanger thought the 2021 budget should be a bare boned budget. T. Connors commented that departments have submitted lean budgets. J. Kent Weiner asked why the tax rate had increased such a significant amount. M. Roy explained that the power plants in Newington have gone down significantly in assessed value (\$160 million). J. Kent Weiner would like to see a detailed list of the abatements to justify the increase. M. Roy said that the Newington Station abatement is settled, but EP Newington and Sprague are still outstanding. B. Arsenault would like to get a breakdown of all the money left over in 2020 and how many of these dollars aren't going to be spent in 2021.

J. Kent Weiner questioned how the town could be in good shape. M. Roy said that the tax dollars were coming in so the Board of Selectmen were cautiously optimistic. J. Kent Weiner thought that the Board of Selectmen were taking advantage of the current situation.

J. Lamson pointed out that the town votes for the budget at the town meeting in March and then the Board of Selectmen set the tax rate to cover the budget that was voted on.

If there is money left over at the end of the year then the money goes into the unassigned fund balance. A. Hyland Hebert said that the Fire Department would have around \$117,000 money left over from their 2020 budget if everything goes as planned until the end of the year. J. Lamson explained that the leftover funds could be encumbered or rolled over to the unassigned balance. J. Kent Weiner thought that residents shouldn't get penalized with a higher tax rate because special projects are still going on.

M. Roy said that the unassigned balance as of 12-31-19 was 2.3 million and the current cash on hand was 1.8 million.

J. Lamson thought that the saved funds from 2020 should be rolled over to next year's budget. J. Belanger thinks that if a department saves the money this year it should be spent next year.

B. Wright thought that Newington has had a very low tax rate for a long period of time. The town has enjoyed the advantage of the waterfront industries. The town is now entering into a period where the assessed values of these utilities are going down and we have to figure out how we are going to get through it.

B. Arsenault is still unclear with the 2020 budget cuts. What amount of money is being returned to the town and what would this money be spent on.

J. Lamson would like to know what amount of funds the town is encumbering and what money the town is rolling over.

J. Kent Weiner would like to get a detailed description of the tax base and 2020 abatements.

At the next budget committee meeting on December 9th, J. Lamson would like to see a comparison of the tax base this year vs next year, the savings that will be turned in at the end of 2020, the amount of money that is going to be encumbered and a basic review of the tax rate. T. Connors said that the committee would receive this information a week before the December 9th meeting.

J. Kent Weiner commented that we are going through some challenging times and we need to make sure that we are headed in the right direction to be a successful town.

J. Belanger thought that some projects in town should be put on hold.

D. Willson explained that the Bike/Safety Lane is a very important project for the town. There have been discussions about this project for at least eight years. The town is in the process of applying for a grant that would pay for 80% of the project. The

bike/safety lane committee did a survey of the town and found out that 76% of residents were in favor of the project with the grant and 58% of residents were still in favor of the project if the grant wasn't given. In a 2017 visioning survey 60% of residents were in favor of a bike/safety lane. \$21,000 has been spent on surveying and engineering for the project in 2020. J. Kent Weiner pointed out that the \$21,000 had not been budgeted. T. Connors explained that it had not been budgeted because the \$140,000 for the bike/safety lane was voted in at the town meeting after the budget had been set.

E. Savinelli thought that the money that has been spent of the bike/safety lane should have been spent on something else, like a fire truck or police cruiser. There should be more transparency with projects.

B. Arsenault thought that it is tough to see the Board of Selectmen overspending an expense line for surveying of the bike lane and then asking the first responders to make a 15% cut in their budgets. The departments were asked to make cuts and then the money is going to projects. The departments savings should be returned.

A. Wilson moved to adjourn at 7:42pm. S. Sweeney seconded the motion with all in favor.

**Respectfully submitted,
Eleanor Boy, Recorder**