

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 9, 2020 Via Zoom

Chair John Lamson called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

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, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Alan Wilson, Jamie Belanger, John Chamberlain, Ted Connors-Selectmen's Rep, Samara Robertson, School Board Rep, Lara Berry, Library Director, Library Trustees; Cathy Hazelton, Chair, Peter Welch and Jack O'Reilly, Mike Marconi, Selectmen, Ken Latchaw, Selectman, EJ Hoyt, Fire Chief, Pat Moynihan, Assistant Fire Chief, John Klanchesser, Chair Board of Fire Engineers, James Fabrizio, Fire Engineer, Ann Hyland Hebert, Fire Engineer, Brenda Blonigen, Chair Police Commission, Derrick Willson, Martha Roy, Town Administrator and Eleanor Boy, Recorder.

J Belanger moved to approve the minutes of November 19th, 2020. E. Savinelli seconded the motion with all in favor.

Library Budget Review:

B. Arsenault moved to tentatively approve the Library budget of \$255,892. T. Connors seconded the motion.

L. Berry presented the Library budget to the committee.

J. Kent Weiner asked about the changes to the budget that were included in a memo that was sent to the committee this afternoon. L. Berry explained that the changes were in the descriptions of the expense lines. No change in the numbers.

J. Kent Weiner asked about the increases in the budget for health insurance. L. Berry explained that the increase was due to a change in employee status. M. Roy stated that there is a 6.4% increase in rates for 2021. B. Arsenault asked if the Town had looked into lower priced plans for employees. M. Roy said that the Town had bid out the insurance. J. Belanger asked that a review of benefit plans be added to the "carry-over" list. E. Savinelli thought that it was important to review health insurance every year so the increases aren't passed on to the tax

payers each year. B. Arsenault asked about the detail in savings for 2020. L. Berry explained that \$7,000 was used from the trust funds instead of the town budget, the handyman wasn't used as much in 2020 because of the shutdown, employees had fewer hours in general and there were no programs.

L. Berry hesitated to take out anything in the 2021 budget because so much is unknown. J. Lamson asked if the Library will be able to expand hours in the Spring with the current budget? L. Berry is hoping to but so much is unknown. J. O'Reilly mentioned that the urn, in front of the library, needs to be repaired, the cost will be approximately \$2,000. P. Welch added that they haven't gotten a quote yet. B. Arsenault thought that 2021 may not be a good time to spend money on fixing the urn since the economic forecast looks dim. L. Berry said that trustee money would be used to repair the urn. L. Berry had prepared a Power Point presentation for the Budget Committee that she will email to the members. B. Arsenault thought that the expense line 830, could be cut from \$500 to \$1. Discussion ensued about combining expense lines in the library budget. L. Berry explained that combining lines is not that easy because there are some expense lines that the town pays the bills for and there are lines that the library pays the bills for. J. Lamson said that NH Law states that New Hampshire libraries have a lot of independence. E. Savinelli thought that the library had done a good job with their budget and managing their expenses.

B. Arsenault moved to reduce expense line 830 from \$500 to \$1. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the amended Library budget of \$255,393. J. Lamson-yes, B. Arsenault-yes, W. Wright-yes, J. Kent Weiner-yes, A. Wilson-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Belanger-yes, S. Robertson-yes, T. Connors-yes. All in favor.

The 2021 Library budget does not reflect the \$80,000 encumbered funds for the Library parking lot.

Fire Department Budget Review:

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Fire Department budget of \$1,869,135. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

This is the Selectmen's recommended amount that does not include the \$6,000 in the legal expense line.

Chief Hoyt presented the Fire Department budget to the committee.

The 2021 budget is 2.2% less than the 2020 budget.

The fire alarm maintenance line increased by \$10,000. There are over 100 boxes in town. Businesses get charged for their boxes. The health buyout line increased because an employee chose that option. The salary line and health insurance lines both decreased due to some new employees choosing different plans. The physicals line increased due to a new vendor being used. The previous vendor no longer does all of the components of the physicals that are required. The department purchased new software to track equipment, maintenance and time "out of service".

J. Belanger would like to add combining internet and IT between departments to the "carry over" list.

E. Hoyt explained that the Fire Department replaced their server in 2020 for \$4,000. Every department has their own IT company. The Fire Department doesn't pay a monthly fee, they just pay as needed. M. Roy added that she is currently getting a quote from the Fire Department's IT person. J. Kent Weiner mentioned that different departments have different IT needs. They could have different IT companies as long as it is efficient and cost effective.

E. Savinelli asked about the assessment that was completed on the Fire Department and station.

E. Hoyt said that there were 48 recommendations at the end of the assessment. Some of the recommendations have already been completed and some are in the works.

J. Kent Weiner asked what the rationale was for getting the assessment. E. Hoyt explained that an outside look at the department was needed to make sure that the direction he was leading the department was justifiable. The cost of the study was \$12,250. E. Savinelli asked about the section of the report about the layout of the building and the recommendations. The assessment report recommended adding a second floor. E. Hoyt found some plans from 2008 for adding a second floor. E. Hoyt thought that a study should be done to make sure that the Fire Station could support a second floor.

J. Lamson asked about the current fire trucks. E. Hoyt explained that a fire truck should run for 10 years on the front line and 15 years on the back line. Engine 5 will be 25 years old this year and needs to be replaced. The ladder truck is used for the commercial and industrial properties. All engines have to be certified each year. Discussion ensued about the different trucks and their uses. B. Arsenault mentioned that the town had made a commitment for 25 years when

the 2012 Smeal was purchased. J. Lamson thinks it is important to put money aside to purchase trucks, but doesn't think it should be an automatic purchase when the money is there. J. Chamberlain asked how many miles were on the back up engine. E. Hoyt said 43,892 miles. P. Moynihan said that he and E. Boy had worked on a 20-year capital plan for the Fire Department. P. Moynihan explained that if an engine is not costing the town more in maintenance than the cost of a new truck, then the time it is used will be extended. The capital improvement plan includes a warrant article for \$200,000 to be added to the Fire Department vehicle capital reserve each year, but if the warrant article isn't passed, it will throw off the whole plan. P. Moynihan said that leasing a new fire truck would be significantly less each year but includes \$90,000 in interest over the ten-year lease. The town would own the truck at the end of the lease. The lease would have an interest rate of 2.66% for 10 years with a \$100,000 down payment. The truck would be built for Newington. J. Kent Weiner asked P. Moynihan to put together a spreadsheet to show the different options. J. Lamson thought the Town should have a chance to consider a lease as the tax payers may want to avoid a tax increase next year.

J. Chamberlain asked how many calls the ambulance goes on each year. P. Moynihan said 600. J. Chamberlain thought that \$70 from each call should go into a fund to purchase the next ambulance. It could pay for itself. Discussion ensued about revolving fees and putting it towards a new ambulance.

B. Arsenault asked how much the Fire Department was going to give back to the general fund for 2020. E. Hoyt said \$200,000. Most of the money came from salaries and benefits. Several long-term employees have been replaced by lower paid employees.

W. Wright asked about the Fire Department being involved in the distribution of the Covid vaccine. E. Hoyt said they are not involved with the vaccine.

B. Arsenault asked about the Fire Department budget that included \$6,000 in the legal line. A. Hyland Hebert explained that if the Fire Engineers need legal advice, they would like to have the money in the budget. It would be another tool in the tool box. In order to get fair representation, they need to have it in the budget. The Board of Fire Engineers has shown that it is careful with the budget and this line will be no exception. T. Connors explained that the Town has a legal team that represents all departments in town. The Board of Selectmen have never turned down any department that needs legal advice. E. Savinelli thought that the amount the town spends on legal advice, \$100,000, is crazy and thought that confidentiality is an issue for some departments and believes the Board of Fire Engineers should have a legal budget. J. Kent Weiner agreed. J. Lamson thought that if we can't work out our interior differences, we aren't doing our

job. B. Blonigen mentioned that the Police Commission was also asking for \$6,000 in legal. The Police Commission would like to choose the attorney to hire. T. Connors said that they can pick their own attorney.

E. Savinelli moved to amend the Fire Department budget to include \$6,000 in the legal expense line. B. Arsenault seconded the motion.

J. Kent Weiner explained that this is the way that legal expenses were handled 10 years ago. E. Savinelli doesn't see the savings if it is in the Selectmen's budget. J. Belanger thought that this is a good "check and balance" for the system. It is a reasonable ask. J. Chamberlain said that most corporations have one legal counsel. They don't want each department to have a legal budget. W. Wright agreed. S. Robertson said she would abstain from the vote and thought the whole discussion was disappointing.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the amendment to the Fire Department budget to include \$6,000 for legal expenses. J. Lamson-no, B. Arsenault-yes, W. Wright-no, J. Kent Weiner-yes, A. Wilson-no, J. Chamberlain-no, E. Savinelli-yes, J. Belanger-yes, S. Robertson-abstain, T. Connors-no. Four members in favor, five members against. The amendment doesn't carry.

J. Lamson called for a roll call vote on the Fire Department Budget of \$1,869,135. J. Lamson-yes, B. Arsenault-no, W. Wright-yes, J. Kent Weiner-no, A. Wilson-yes, J. Chamberlain-yes, E. Savinelli-no, J. Belanger-yes, S. Robertson-yes, T. Connors-yes. Seven members in favor, three members against. The motion carries.

J. Lamson commended the Fire Department on their excellent presentation and lowering their budget.

2020 Budget Reductions:

The current savings are approximately \$500,000. There are several items that will be purchased before the end of the year, they include; the Police cruiser for \$50,000, the building LED conversion for \$18,000, \$51,000 for the Fire Department and \$5,000 for anti-microbial HVAC for the Town Hall, Fire Station and Police Station.

E. Savinelli mentioned that the school had gotten the anti-microbial HVAC system and it was a lot more than \$5,000. M. Roy stated that the school had their HVAC ducts cleaned for over \$6,000.

Tax Rate Analysis & 2020-2021 Tax Base Comparison:

M. Roy referred to the list given to the Committee of 2020 abatements that had been granted. They totaled over \$216,000. This includes an abatement of \$150,000 for Granite Shore Power- Newington Station. EP Newington's assessed value could decrease by \$140 million in 2021. A \$140 million decrease in value means roughly a \$1.40 increase to the tax rate. The Donor town issue is back on the front burner. This issue is about an adequate education for NH school children and who should pay for it. Property rich towns, like Newington, could be asked to pay a larger portion than other towns. Fighting this issue could continue for a couple of years. Newington is in a Coalition of Communities fighting the donor town methodology and they will be hiring a lobbyist.

M. Roy said the unassigned funds balance is approximately \$2.3 million.

K. Latchaw added that every year there are challenges from the utility companies about their assessed value. It is very important for Newington to attract new businesses to offset this loss in assessed value.

J. Kent Weiner asked how the revenues were coming in. M. Roy said that they are on track.

J. Belanger moved to adjourn at 9:23pm. A. Wilson seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

**Eleanor Boy
Recorder**