

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Public Hearing Minutes
Wednesday, February 7, 2024

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

Present: John Lamson, Chair, Emily Savinelli, Vice-Chair, Cyndi Lyons, Alan Wilson, Rick Stern, Jeff Semprini, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Maggie Cooke, Selectmen's Rep, Chris Wayss and School Board Rep, Jeremy Boston.

Guests: Board of Fire Engineer Chair John Klanchesser, Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert, Sewer Plant Manager Ariel Wright, Library Trustee Chair Jack O'Reilly, Cemetery Trustee Peggy Lamson, Denis Hebert-Planning Board Chair, Mike Bilodeau-Police Chief, EJ Hoyt-Fire Chief, Patrick Moynihan-Assistant Fire Chief, Lara Berry-Library Director, Newington School Principal Peter Latchaw, SAU50 Superintendent Stephen Zadravec, SAU50 Business Manager Susan Penny, Sheryl Bagley-Finance Director and Martha Roy-Town Administrator. Other residents and employees were present.

J. Lamson said the first item up for discussion is the school's warrant article 1, which is the proposed school operating budget of \$2,759,690.26. This is the Budget Committee's recommended amount. This is \$78,030.74 less than the School Board had presented to the Budget Committee.

Public Comment:

Chris Russo spoke in favor of adding the \$78,030.74 back into the School Board's budget. This would solve the school's problem of not being able to offer consistent programming in foreign language and art, music and culture. C. Russo pointed out that Newington's school budget is not the largest portion of the Town's budget, compared to other towns in the area. C. Russo recommended that a motion be made to reinstate the \$78,030.74 that was removed from the School Board's recommended budget.

Jack O'Reilly spoke in favor of reinstating the \$78,030.74 to the School Board budget because the arts are a critical part of education. Newington has always supported the school and wanted the best for the students.

Jessica Morgan spoke in favor of reinstating the \$78,030.74.

Peggy Lamson spoke in favor of reinstating the \$78,030.74 and asked J. Kent Weiner why she had made the motion to cut this amount from the budget. J. Kent Weiner said that the Town is experiencing an increase in the tax rate and are trying to minimize expenses for a year until the Town can get the tax rate in a better place. The Budget

Committee didn't say don't hire the position and then it would be up to the School Board to come up with the money in their budget.

School Board member Mandy Murphy spoke in favor of reinstating the \$78,030.74 in the school budget. M. Murphy said that the arts are very important for a child's mental health. The future of Newington's children shouldn't be the place to pinch pennies.

School Board member Brian Semprini spoke in favor of reinstating the \$78,030.74. B. Semprini explained that the school budget that was presented to the Budget Committee was one that had many cuts made to it before it went before the Budget Committee. The School Board worked very hard to reduce the budget.

Ann Hyland Hebert questioned how many students in the school were from Newington and how many of them were tuition students. A. Hyland Hebert thought that the most important thing was to make sure that tax dollars are focused on Newington students. A. Hyland Hebert said that the new position would have to cover very diverse subjects and wasn't sure that would be the best for the students and thought part time teachers would be able to teach all these subjects better.

Newington School principal Peter Latchaw said that there are 46 students in the school and six of them are tuition students. P. Latchaw said that they have tried to hire part time teachers for many years, but haven't been successful. The budget the school presented to the budget committee was very lean, there is no place to find extra money for this position. The most important thing in this budget is this position, so they can offer the most well-rounded education to the students.

J. Lamson said the second item up for discussion is the school's warrant article 2, which is the proposed to appropriate \$25,000 to be placed in the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund previously established, with such sum to be funded from the June 30, 2024 unassigned fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2024, with no amount to be raised by additional taxation.

There were no comments. J. Lamson closed the Public Hearing on the school budget and opened the budget committee meeting.

Article 1: Proposed School Operating Budget. J. Boston moved to amend Article 1 to add back in the \$78,030.74 for a new operating budget amount of \$2,837,721. R. Stern seconded the motion.

E. Savinelli asked about the enrollments for the kindergarten, first and second grades and said that they all have their own teachers now, which is different than in the past. E. Savinelli asked how many students out of the six in kindergarten, the six in first grade and the seven in second grade are tuition students.

P. Latchaw said there are two tuition students.

E. Savinelli said that her concern was that there have been more positions created in the last couple of years for small class sizes.

J. Semprini said that he had originally voted to reduce the school budget and understands both sides of the discussion, but sees the value in having music in the school and the value to the Town for concerts etc. J. Semprini now supports this position and understands how hard it is to hire part time people.

M. Cooke said that in the past the first grade and second grade students were taught by one teacher and now there is one teacher for each grade and wondered why these two grades couldn't be combined and then there would be money for a music teacher.

J. Boston said that combining classrooms has been discussed by the school board, but switching a teacher to now teach music isn't the solution.

C. Wayss asked if the school board has discussed a restructuring and if the new teacher hired to teach music would be the first to be released if there was a restructuring of staff at the school.

J. Boston said that would have to worked out with the SAU and P. Latchaw. There are contracts and seniority to be reviewed to fully answer this question.

J. Semprini thought that this discussion wouldn't even have been happening if there wasn't such a large increase in the budget for insurance.

S. Penny said that if any change in health insurance was proposed it would have to be approved by the teacher's union.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the amendment to restore \$78,030.74 to the school operating budget. R. Stern, J. Boston, A. Wilson, J. Semprini, J. Lamson and C. Lyons in favor. C. Wayss, E. Savinelli, M. Cooke and J. Kent Weiner opposed. The amendment passes. 6-4.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Article 1: Proposed School Operating Budget of \$2,837,721. J. Boston moved to amend Article 1 to add back in the \$78,030.74 for a new operating budget amount of \$2,837,721. R. Stern seconded the motion. R. Stern, J. Boston, A. Wilson, J. Semprini, J. Lamson, and C. Lyons in favor. E. Savinelli, M. Cooke and J. Kent Weiner opposed. The amendment passes. 6-4.

School Warrant Article 2: Shall the Newington School District raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$25,000 (twenty-five thousand dollars) to be placed in the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund previously established, with such sum to be funded from the June 30, 2024 unassigned fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2024, with no amount to be raised by additional taxation. (Majority vote required). **R. Stern moved to recommend School Article #2. J. Boston seconded the motion. All were in favor.**

J. Lamson explained that the Town is facing similar problems with hiring part time employees as the school explained earlier. The Fire Department has a warrant article to address this problem and the Police Department has included a new longevity program in their budget to attract more officers to Newington. The utilities in Newington have had a decrease in value of forty million dollars.

J. Lamson opened the public hearing on the town budget.

J. O'Reilly said that there are two ways to balance the budget. The first is to increase revenue and the second is to cut expenses. J. O'Reilly questioned what the Economic Development Committee was doing with their \$6,000 budget because there are many open lots in Town.

Article 1: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the Budget Committee recommended sum of Eight Million, Seven Hundred and Fifty Six, Nine Hundred and Fifteen Dollars (\$8,756,915) for the operating budget. This article does not include appropriations voted in special or individual warrant articles addressed separately.

J. Kent Weiner moved to recommend Article 1. J. Boston seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

C. Wayss said that the Economic Development Committee has only three members and has struggled to get additional members for that committee. The original thought was to cut their budget entirely, but thought it was important to leave some money so the committee could restart this year and get some traction to do something positive. C. Wayss encouraged residents to volunteer for this committee to help bring more revenue to the Town.

J. Lamson called for a vote on Article 1. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 2: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Hundred One Thousand Dollars, Six Hundred Eighty-Three Dollars (\$101,683) to

convert the third firefighter position on each of the four shifts from part time to full time. This amount includes the additional costs for salaries, benefits and retirement.

J. Lamson opened the public hearing on all the warrant articles.

E. Hoyt explained that article 2 would convert the third firefighter position on each of the four shifts from part time to full time. The department has very few part time fire fighters and has had a difficult time recruiting part time fire fighters. The full-time fire fighters are getting burnt out from covering these shifts for the part timers.

M. Bilodeau explained the issues the Police Department has had recruiting and retaining officers. The department is currently down three officers and have been for nine months. The cost to hire a new officer and train them is \$45,000. So, they developed a longevity plan.

A. Hyland Hebert pointed out, in response to J. O'Reilly's comments that no new businesses are being attracted, that Chick-Fil-A is coming to town, a new hotel has broken ground and Wilcox Industries is expanding. They will all be paying big taxes to the Town.

E. Savinelli moved to recommend Article 2. M. Cooke seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 3: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of Sixty Thousand Dollars (\$60,000) to be placed in the Replacement of the Town Ambulance and any Major Medical Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

E. Savinelli moved to recommend Article 3. J. Boston seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 4: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000) to be added to the Major Road Work Capital Reserve Fund.

M. Cooke moved to recommend Article 4. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 5: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Fifteen Thousand Dollars (\$15,000) to be added to the Replacement of Vehicles Operated by the Highway Department Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Boston moved to recommend Article 5. M. Cooke seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 6: 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 *Twelve Thousand, Five Hundred Dollars* (\$12,500) to be placed in said fund with the Board of Selectmen named as agents to expend.

J. Kent Weiner moved to recommend Article 6. E. Savinelli seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 7: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Eight Thousand, Five Hundred (\$8,500) to be placed in the Body Worn Cameras and Cruiser Mounted Audio and Video Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Boston moved to recommend Article 7. M. Cooke seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 8: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Six Thousand, Five Hundred and Seventy-Three Dollars (\$6,573) to be placed in the Municipally Owned Bridges Maintenance, Construction or Reconstruction Capital Reserve Fund.

E. Savinelli moved to recommend Article 8. R. Stern seconded the motion.

C. Wayss clarified that no money will be raised from taxes for this warrant article and asked M. Roy to add that language to the article. This money came from the State and can only be used for this purpose.

C. Wayss moved to amend this warrant article to add the language “with State funds and no money to be raised by taxes” at the end of the warrant article. M. Cooke seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the amended warrant article. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 9: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Five Thousand (\$5,000) to be placed in the Replacement of Major Fire Department Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

M. Cooke moved to recommend Article 9. E. Savinelli seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 10: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Two Thousand Five Hundred (\$2,500) to be placed in the Police Computer Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

M. Cooke moved to recommend Article 10. E. Savinelli seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

Article 11: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Thousand Five Hundred (\$1,500) to be placed in the Police Department Radio/Electronics Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Kent Weiner moved to recommend Article 11. M. Cooke seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote. All were in favor 10-0.

J. Lamson explained that the committee needed to approve some changes in the 2024 budget. The bottom line did not change. M. Roy said that the Selectmen recommend that the 2024 traffic signal budget should be reduced by \$5,363 and increase the hydrant rental budget lien by \$5,363. The bottom line will remain the same.

E. Savinelli move to make these recommended changes to the 2024 budget. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor 10-0.

Minutes Approval:

J. Boston moved to approve the 1-24-24 minutes. A. Wilson seconded the motion. All were in favor.

J. O'Reilly said that the Town election will start at 8:00am instead of 11am, due to a state representative special election being included on the ballot.

J. Boston moved to adjourn at 7:19pm. M. Cooke seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted, Eleanor Boy Recorder