

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 18, 2023 Town Hall

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

Present: Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Emily Savinelli, Jamie Belanger, Jeff Semprini, Chris Wayss, Maggie Cooke, Alan Wilson, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Rick Stern, Selectman's Rep. Brandon Arsenault and School Board Rep. Jeremy Boston.

Guests: Police Chief Mike Bilodeau, Police Commission Chair Brenda Blonigen, Police Captain Brandon Smart, Police Executive Assistant Taylor Fiore, Fire Chief EJ Hoyt, Asst. Fire Chief Pat Moynihan, Board of Fire Engineers Chair John Klanchesser, Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert, Library Trustee Chair Jack O'Reilly, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley, Town Administrator Martha Roy.

Minutes: C. Wayss moved to approve the minutes of January 11th, 2023 as amended. M. Cooke seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Police Department Budget:

Police Chief M. Bilodeau presented the Police Dept. budget to the committee. He explained that the challenge in 2022 was trying to hire and retain officers. They didn't lower their hiring standards, so they had to work very hard to find people to hire. They used social media which expanded their base for bringing in potential candidates from across the country. Many departments in the area are adding a sign-on bonus up to \$20,000 to try and recruit officers but then departments are concerned about what the officers that are already working there think; don't they also deserve a bonus? After reviewing the Seacoast Police Association Salary Survey the department decided to move the pay grade steps up in order to compete with other towns. The department's salaries expense line has increased for 2023 but their operating budget has decreased. The Newington Police Department hired 2 new officers in 2022, they are at the Police Academy now. They will be at the Academy for 16 weeks and then come and train with Newington for an additional 12 weeks before they are able to work. J. Kent Weiner asked if the department had considered bonuses for officers instead of increasing the salary which becomes a recurring expense every year instead of a onetime expense. M. Bilodeau said that they looked at it and they looked at their longevity plan but decided on increasing the pay scale steps. J. Lamson asked how do the Newington police salaries compare to other towns. M. Bilodeau said that they looked at similar towns; Rye, Greenland, Stratham and Durham and with the new salaries they are within 5% of these towns. The Newington Police Department has 11 full-time officers. C. Wayss asked what the starting salary was for a new officer. M. Bilodeau said that the starting salary is \$60,000 which is very comparable to other towns. C. Wayss asked about the

cost to hire and train a new officer. M. Bilodeau said around \$30,000. M. Bilodeau said that hiring police officers has been hard for everybody. The New Hampshire State troopers are down sixty officers. E. Savinelli asked about the recruit testing expense line that was overspent in 2022. M. Bilodeau explained that they had to try all different methods to recruit people this year that they've never had to before. They usually go through the Great Bay Community College but the amount of people attending that program at Great Bay has decreased significantly. There were 25 people from there that showed up for interviews for 36 departments. J. Belanger asked if they had the officer sign a contract that requires them to work for Newington for a certain amount of time. M. Bilodeau said no. B. Arsenault said that Newington was not going to buy their way out of the situation but needed to be in the middle of the pack as far as salaries go. J. Belanger said that the cost of turnover is real, and they have to appropriately compensate officers. E. Savinelli asked about any organizations that could help get more people to become police officers. M. Bilodeau said that there is an ongoing conversation within the different organizations in New Hampshire. There are peaks and valleys to the interest in becoming a police officer; after September 11th the interest was very high, after George Floyd the interest was very low. Retention is important. M. Bilodeau said that the Town of Newington gives the Police Department a lot of support and it's a good place to work. C. Wayss asked about the fuel expense line being overspent in 2022. M. Bilodeau said they went over by \$5,000 because at the end of 2021 he had projected fuel would be \$3.20 a gallon and it went much higher than that in 2022 and that's why he overspent the line. C. Wayss asked if the tire expense line had enough in it. M. Bilodeau said yes. M. Bilodeau said that they were going to get one cruiser in 2023 that money comes out of the capital outlay account so that will be reviewed when the town presents their budget to the committee. R. Stern asked about the recruit testing expense line that was overspent in 2022. M. Bilodeau explained that they hired two people in 2022. He doesn't expect to do the same in 2023.

J. Kent Weiner thought that the Police Department should make sure that it is known at the Public Hearing that the salary increase is within 5% to comparable towns. It is a very important point for the public to know.

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Police Department budget of \$2,017,483. R. Stern seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Emergency Management Budget:

J. Belanger moved to tentatively approve the Emergency Management budget of \$20,670. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor.

E. Hoyt and M. Bilodeau presented the budget to the committee. E Hoyt said there was a small increase in the budget this year. The increase in the stipend line is due to the COLA. Telephone prices have increased, and the Emergency Management department

is going to be purchasing cones for big events, such as the air show in 2023. They purchased barricades in 2022 and signage in 2021. There will be an air show in at Pease in September of 2023. M. Bilodeau said he was not sure who was sponsoring the air show this year, but he is not anticipating any budget expenses due to the Air Show. E. Savinelli asked if the recording secretary expense line had been spent. E. Hoyt said yes.

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

2023 Warrant Articles:

J. Lamson asked why there wasn't a warrant article for major roads this year.

B. Arsenault explained that the major roads warrant article was cut by the Board of Selectman. They believe the capital reserve fund is in good shape. They are currently following the Rockingham County Planning Commission Road Plan that was done three years ago. It's a good plan with some additions. The big projects this year are Fox Point and McIntyre Rd.

Article 4: To add \$150,000 to the Replacement of Vehicles Operated by the Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund.

C. Wayss moved to recommend Warrant Article 4. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

C. Wayss asked if this amount included what was needed for the new truck. E. Hoyt said yes, there would be \$16,000 remaining in the account after the purchase. This capital reserve fund is for all Fire Department Vehicles except the ambulance.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 4. All were in favor.

Article 5: To add \$60,000 to the Replacement of the Town Ambulance and Any Major Medical Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

C. Wayss moved to recommend Warrant Article 5. M. Cooke seconded the motion.

E. Hoyt said the plan is to order a new ambulance in 2024. The cost would be between \$460,000-\$470,000. It currently takes two years to get an ambulance after it is ordered. It is a fixed price contract. A deposit is paid up front and the balance paid at the end. It is similar to the fire truck purchase. E. Hoyt reminded the committee that this capital reserve fund also includes the purchase of major medical equipment.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 5. All were in favor.

Article 6: To add \$30,000 to the Replacement of Vehicles Operated by the Highway Department Capital Reserve Fund.

C. Wayss moved to recommend Warrant Article 6. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

M. Roy said that the next vehicle to be replaced will be the F-350, but it won't be for a couple of years. B. Arsenault said that the Board of Selectmen have increased the Highway vehicle maintenance line from \$10,000 to \$25,000 in an attempt to keep all the vehicles in top shape.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 6. All were in favor.

Article 7: To add \$20,000 to the Library Building Capital Reserve Fund.

C. Wayss moved to recommend Warrant Article 7. J. Belanger seconded the motion.

J. O'Reilly explained that this is part of the Library Building Capital Improvement Plan. The original Library building is over 100 years old. E. Savinelli asked if anything could be done about the 5 furnaces. J. Boston said that he had looked into it and found that it would be a very complicated and expensive project.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 7. All were in favor.

Article 8: To add \$10,000 to the Police Computer Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

C. Wayss moved to recommend Warrant Article 8. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 8. All were in favor.

Article 9: To add \$10,000 to the Historic Preservation Capital Reserve Fund.

C. Wayss moved to recommend Warrant Article 9. M. Cooke seconded the motion.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 9. All were in favor.

Article 10: To add \$5,000 to the Replacement of Major Fire Department Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Kent Weiner moved to recommend Warrant Article 10. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

E. Savinelli asked what the target amount for this fund. E. Hoyt said \$25,000.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 10. All were in favor.

Article 11: To add \$5,000 to the Body Worn Cameras and Cruiser Mounted Audio and Video Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

J. Kent Weiner moved to recommend Warrant Article 11. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

M. Bilodeau said that the department currently doesn't have body cameras or cameras in the cruisers. The capital reserve fund was established because M. Bilodeau believes body cameras will be mandated at some point. There should be grants available to help with the cost. J. Kent Weiner asked how much body cams would cost. M. Bilodeau said that it would be approximately \$98,000 to outfit everyone. M. Bilodeau believes that it would take 5-10 years to implement this program. Discussion ensued about the amount that should be added to the capital reserve fund, grants to help with the costs of storing the video from the cameras, the type of server that would be needed, incentives from the insurance company for departments with cameras and how long the cameras would be in service.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 11. All were in favor.

Article 12: To Add \$5,000 to the Police Department Radio/Electronics Capital Reserve Fund.

E. Savinelli moved to recommend Warrant Article 12. B. Arsenault seconded the motion.

M. Bilodeau said that this capital reserve fund is for the J-1 project. This project is to get printers in the cruisers and the tickets will go directly to the State. The State has given the Town \$6,000 for this project. This fund has a \$25,000 cap.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 12. All were in favor.

Article : 13 To Add \$4,562 to the Major Repairs of Vehicles Operated by the Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund.

E. Savinelli moved to recommend Warrant Article 13. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion.

E. Hoyt said that there is a \$50,000 on this capital reserve fund. The department spent \$4,462 on repairs to the Suburban in 2022. This amount will bring the fund back to \$50,000.

J. Lamson called for a vote to recommend Article 13. All were in favor.

New Business:

The Sewer Department would like to increase their major maintenance budget line from \$50,000 to \$80,000. They overspent that line in 2022 by \$30,000. M. Roy said that this item can be placed on the Board of Selectmen's agenda for Monday January 23rd.

C. Wayss said that no money had been spent out of the School's Capital Reserve funds since 2018. He now thinks that asking them to reduce their retainage amount from 5% to 2.5% is appropriate. B. Arsenault said that it is very important to not overtax the residents just to build investments. The School first asked for the 5% during Covid when there was so much uncertainty. Now 2.5% seems right. E. Savinelli asked what would be the procedure for lowering the percentage. It was a warrant article to increase the percentage. J. Lamson said that it would be a School Board vote. J. Boston said that there has not been a School Board meeting since this discussion started and it will be on their next agenda. J. Boston will let the School Board know what the Budget Committee is recommending.

B. Arsenault is still concerned about the amount of the SAU Admin budget. Two million for 15 employees. It is a very large budget. J. Belanger pointed out that it is the same as the Police Department. J. Kent Weiner said that the pie chart showing Newington's contribution was eye opening. C. Wayss asked if there was any information on the valuation calculation. B. Arsenault said that it is on the Board of Selectmen's agenda for Monday, January 23rd. J. Lamson thought this issue was worth pursuing. It will be an uphill battle with major hurdles, but it is a logical argument.

J. Semprini asked if the increased growth in surrounding towns had increased Newington's mutual aid calls and does Newington get any reimbursement from this. E. Hoyt said that they do help with medical calls which are billable. M. Bilodeau said that the Police Dept. does not get reimbursed. J. Lamson pointed out that Newington is a big benefactor of mutual aid.

B. Arsenault asked why the Budget Committee had moved the department's budget for the Library instead of the Board of Selectmen's budget. The Budget Committee had never moved a department's budget before. The letter that was presented was 28 years old and not from an attorney. J. O'Reilly said that the Library Trustees have that authority. J. Lamson suggested adding a third column to the budget worksheet. One column for the Board of Selectmen's amount, one column for the Budget Committee's amount and one for the department's amount. The State form that the town is required to use two columns; one for the Selectmen and one for the Budget Committee.

Adjournment: J. Kent Weiner moved to adjourn at 7:26pm. E. Savinelli seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eleanor Boy, Recording Secretary