

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 4, 2023 Town Hall

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

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

Guests: Selectman, Ted Connors, , Sewer Commissioners Jack O'Reilly and Tom Hazelton, Sewer Plant Manager Denis Messier, Sewer Plant Manager Trainee Ariel Wright, Conservation Commission Chair Jane Hislop and Planning Board Chair Denis Hebert, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley

Minutes: C. Wayss moved to approve the minutes of December 7th and 14th, 2022. J. Lamson asked for the committee to vote each of the minutes separately. J. Lamson called for a vote on the December 7th minutes. All were in favor. J. Lamson called for a vote on the December 14th minutes. J. Kent Weiner abstained; all others were in favor.

Planning Board Budget:

D. Hebert presented the Planning Board budget to the committee. D. Hebert reviewed the projects that the Planning Board had worked on in 2022; Stoneface, the Capital Improvement Plan, Best Buy, height of residential buildings, a 14-lot subdivision, a hotel on Woodbury/Shattuck Way, a Unitil cleaning station, Chick-Fil-A and Sig Sauer. The NHDOT facility is scheduled to be built at the old drive-in theater space. The facility will be several buildings including office space and a washing station. They are working with the sewer department to make sure they can handle this new facility. The 2023 projects are the zoning variances for the Crossings, The Sears building and the inside of the Fox Run Mall has been sold to Torrington Properties. They have also bought Newington Park. Torrington is also trying to purchase the remaining stores in the mall: JC Penney and Macys. Sprague is considering putting in a facility that would take table scraps and turn them into gas. Wilcox is expanding, they have purchased the lot next to them. The Planning Board is asking for the same budget amount as in 2022, \$171,865. J. Semprini asked about the NHDOT's new facility being built on lots that Newington had designated as workforce housing lots. D. Hebert stated that the State keeps buying land that Newington has set aside as future workforce housing. J. Lamson asked about the contracted services budget line. D. Hebert said that November and December invoices are not included in that number. The Planner's contract is going to increase in 2023 and 2024. The Planner works 2 days a week or more if needed. D. Hebert said that the budget is calculated on 2 days a week for 52 weeks. D. Hebert

explained that since the Planner is contracted, the Town can charge applicants for the time he spends on their projects. The Town is reimbursed part of his salary. J. Kent Weiner asked about the legal expense line that was underspent in 2022. D. Hebert said that their legal expenses were low in 2022. Other years it has been as high as \$50,000. The Planning Board budgets \$25,000 each year. C. Wayss asked about the recording secretary expense line that only had \$6,000 spent in 2022. D. Hebert said that the Planning Board had fewer meetings in 2022. J. Belanger asked about the Planning Board's planning for population increases and the effect it will have on the school, police and fire. D. Hebert said that they always take that into consideration.

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Planning Board budget of \$171,865. J. Belanger seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote and all were in favor.

Conservation Commission Budget:

J. Belanger moved to tentatively approve the Conservation Commission budget of \$9,342. R. Stern seconded the motion.

J. Hislop presented the budget to the committee. J. Lamson asked about the Consultant budget line that wasn't spent in 2022 and still budgeted in 2023. J. Hislop said that they need to have it in the budget just in case they need to hire one. The cost is usually reimbursed to the Town by the developer etc. J. Belanger asked if the Conservation Commission could do anything about the erosion at Fox Point. J. Hislop said that they have looked into it, and it is very expensive. J. Hislop is concerned that the new water line installation at Fox Point could cause more erosion. The Board of Selectmen are talking to Portsmouth Water about this issue. B. Arsenault said that the Board of Selectmen has worked with the Conservation Commission on a new conservation trust fund that would be funded by the money the commission receives when land is taken out of current use. The Conservation Commission receives 10% of the current market value. The interest from this trust fund would fund the conservation fund that the Conservation Commission would oversee. J. Hislop said that if they had these new funds the Conservation Commission wouldn't have to come to the town for money to acquire new easements etc. J. Belanger asked if it would be a burden to wait until town meeting to get approval for a new easement. J. Hislop said that most easements take over a year to go through the whole process. C. Wayss asked about the Town Forest maintenance line being at zero. J. Hislop said that managing the Town Forest is handled by the Board of Selectmen. Discussion ensued about the difficulty in finding a forester, the maintenance of trails in the Town Forest and the dump sites in the forest.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Conservation Commission budget. All were in favor.

Sewer Budget:

C. Wayss moved to tentatively approve the Sewer budget of \$1,290,912. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion.

D. Messier presented the budget to the committee. He explained that it is the same amount as prior years. They must do more testing to get permits from the EPA. The sludge disposal and testing increased. The state of Maine is no longer accepting sludge for disposal, so they have to send it further away, which is more expensive. J. Belanger asked if the Air Force could help pay for some of the testing. D. Messier said no. J. Belanger said that there has been an issue about the sewer rates being too high and asked if any progress had been made to decrease the rates. D. Messier said that the Sewer Commissioners took \$300,000 out of the enterprise fund to lower rates. One of the reasons the rates are high is because of the bond payments for the next 16 years, because they had to replace the main force line because of leaks. Discussion ensued about the Major Maintenance expense line being overspent in 2022 and was there a need to increase this budget line in the 2023. If needed, J. Lamson advised the Commissioners to bring it up at the Budget Public Hearing in February. J. Kent Weiner said that the sewer rates have to be looked at in the overall picture of doing business in Newington because our taxes are low. D. Messier said that the plant is running at 50% capacity. More flow would mean lower rates. The enterprise fund balance is \$1.35 million, which is about the amount of 1 year of operating expenses. B. Arsenault commended D. Messier and the commissioner for finding a way to lower rates and to come in with a level funded budget. J. Kent Weiner asked if there was an RSA about how much money could be kept in the enterprise fund. D. Messier said no. The auditors look at the fund every year and have never said anything about the balance. J. Lamson explained that the Sewer department doesn't have any capital reserve funds to go to if a big repair or equipment purchase is needed, they would take it out of their enterprise fund.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Sewer budget. R. Stern abstained. All others were in favor.

J. Kent Weiner said that she appreciated the memo from the Sewer Commission explaining the budget, line by line, and thought it was very helpful. D. Messier said that Gail Klanchesser had prepared it for the commission and had done a good job.

Adjournment: J. Belanger moved to adjourn at 7:14pm. C. Wayss seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy, Recording Secretary