

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 1, 2021 Town Hall

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

Present: Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Chair; Jamie Belanger, Alan Wilson, Emily Savinelli, John Chamberlain, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Chris Wayss, Selectman's Rep. Ted Connors

Guests: Selectman, Mike Marconi, Selectman, Bob Blonigen, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley, Cemetery Trustees; Margaret Lamson and Cosmas Iocovozzi, Historic District Commission Chair Lulu Pickering, Recreation Committee Chair Rebecca Navelski, Recreation Committee Members; Bill Wright and Jack O'Reilly, Economic Development Committee Chair Jeff Hiatt, EDC Members; Mike Donahue and Bob Raymond, Board of Fire Engineers Chair John Klanchesser, Board of Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert Planning Board Member Chris Cross and Martha Roy, Town Administrator.

Minutes: J. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of September 29, 2021. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Tax Rate: M. Roy explained that the 2022 tax rate is \$9.98 per thousand. That is a .09 cent increase from 2021. J. Kent Weiner asked why the tax rate only increased by 9 cents compared to the 61 cents that the budget committee was told in September. M. Roy said that the assessed value of Newington properties increased more than expected and the cuts made in 2020 helped offset the decrease in the EP Newington's assessment amount.

J. Lamson reminded everyone that money not spent is not money lost. The money not spent goes into the unassigned fund balance that is saved for a rainy day. The Board of Selectmen have \$2,000,000 in the unassigned balance which is why the town doesn't have to borrow money to keep the town running before taxes are paid. Many other towns have to do that every year.

J. Belanger thinks it is important for the budget committee to know the town's long term master plan. The committee needs a tool or process to align their short-term decisions to the master plan and to minimize line items that are against the town's long-term plan.

Cemetery Budget:

M. Lamson presented the Cemetery budget to the committee. The 2022 budget is \$200 more than the 2021 budget. M. Lamson said that Alan Wilson, Chair of the Cemetery Trustees, has done an excellent job on the "four corners" project in the Southern Division of the cemetery. One change in 2022 budget is that the general care of the cemetery will be taken out of a capital reserve fund instead of the general fund budget. J. Lamson explained that there will be a vote at town meeting about this change. It is not an expenditure of new money; it is money the town already has in capital reserve accounts. M. Lamson said that some of this money will be used to maintain abandoned cemeteries in town that the town is required to maintain by state law. J. Kent Weiner asked how much was in the capital reserve fund. M. Lamson said about \$96,000. E. Savinelli asked what the \$3,795 in the ground's maintenance line would be used for. M. Lamson said that the grounds are treated for grubs every year.

J. Kent Weiner moved to approve the 2022 Cemetery budget of \$20,333. J. Chamberlain seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Historic District Commission Budget:

Chair L. Pickering presented the Historic District Commission budget to the committee. The 2022 budget is \$15,536 more than the 2021 budget. The HDC has been working hard to make the Old Parsonage a more useful building. They are installing mini splits so there will be heat and air conditioning. This was all paid for with the money from Eversource. In 2021 the HDC hired a company to do an archeological dig around the cemetery and Meeting House. L. Pickering just received the report yesterday. They found three items of interest. Buried headstones from 1787 and 1743. They didn't find anything by the horse shed. The report gives recommendations to preserve these unmarked graves.

The increase of the 2022 is due to a proposed project to preserve historic town records. The HDC would like to hire someone to work for 6 hours one day a week to complete this project, that would be 350 hours at \$20 per hour. Volunteers will continue to volunteer, but this will just move the project along. J. Kent Weiner thinks that \$20 is high and if we paid them less then we could get more hours of work. L. Pickering said that she has asked people at UNH that have helped other HDCs in other towns and \$20 an hour is the lowest number in their range. L. Pickering said that the volunteers would be working with this new person. J. Kent Weiner asked if the town employees could do the work? M. Roy said that she would volunteer, but doesn't think anyone at Town Hall has time to help. J. Kent Weiner said she would volunteer too. J. Belanger asked if there were other people they could ask, town employees, fire fighters, library personnel. J. Belanger thinks this is a wonderful project. J. Kent Weiner also supports this project and suggested that the cost could be lowered by reducing the hours for 2022 and stretching the project out longer. She supports the Selectmen's budget number of \$2,000 for wages.

J. Chamberlain moved to increase the wages line in the HDC budget to \$12,000. There was no second to the motion so it failed.

J. Belanger asked if the Selectmen were asking the committee to have a conservative budget in 2022. J. Lamson said that he thought the committee was conservative every year. T. Connors said that 2021 was one of the toughest years for the town and expects 2022 to be even tougher due to the decrease in the valuation of the utilities.

L. Pickering thinks that this is a worthwhile project. Historical records are very important. L. Pickering thought that starting a capital reserve account for this project might work. This project needs to be as important to the town as a new fire truck or a new police cruiser. J. Lamson said that there is still time to submit a warrant article.

E. Savinelli moved to increase the wages line to \$3,500. and a corresponding change to the FICA line. This is half of what the HDC asked for. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion. All were in favor.

J. Belanger moved to approve the total 2022 Historic District Commission budget for \$16,568. A. Wilson seconded the motion. All were in favor.

The Building Inspector said that the Stone School stairs are not safe for people to be using. L. Pickering said that the commission agrees with the building inspector.

J. Lamson told L. Pickering to submit the warrant article as soon as possible.

Economic Development Committee Budget:

Chair J. Hiatt presented the budget to the committee. The 2022 budget is \$34 less than 2021. The main goal of the EDC is to bring businesses into town and maintain the ones that are already here. J. Hiatt reviewed the committee's activities and projects in 2021. C. Wayss asked why the "Dues and Subscriptions" expense line had \$3,000 budgeted when only \$25 has been spent in 2021. M. Donahue explained that the \$3,000 is for participation in the Seacoast Economic Development Shareholders Group. During 2020 and 2021 free participation was available during Covid. The committee is hoping this might continue and will utilize it again, if not they will need to join the other group. J. Kent Weiner thinks that the wages for the Economic Development Coordinator are too high at \$40/hour. J. Hiatt read off a list of all the items that the coordinator does for the committee and town. M. Donahue said that they looked at other coordinators in other towns and found this wage was the average. J. Chamberlain asked how the committee supported the NH Ports and Harbors. J. Hiatt said that they wrote letters to our congressional delegation, they went to the PDA to urged them to approve the gap funding for the project. This project is a really big deal for Newington and the deep-water port. E. Savinelli asked if the committee has done any work with the sewer

department about their rates. M. Donahue said that they had met with the operator and are setting up a future meeting with the Selectmen, Sewer Commission and EDC. The town needs to look at the new federal money to see if we can do some upgrades that will help with the rates. Newington won't be able to attract any biotech companies because they use a lot of water and it would be too expensive. The sewer plant has plenty of capacity. M. Roy said that the town's retail sector has complained about the high rates also.

C. Wayss moved to approve the 2022 Economic Development Committee budget for \$14,610. J. Chamberlain seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Recreation Committee Budget:

Chair R. Navelski presented the budget to the committee. The 2022 budget is the same as the 2021 budget. The committee is hoping to have more activities for adults in 2022. Maintenance on the ball field at the school will be done in 2022. The Recreation Committee has submitted a warrant for \$10,000 to hire a part time Recreation Director. Camp Newington needs someone to oversee the program. The YMCA has pulled out of summer camp last year and they need more stability. They would also like the director to help with Septemberfest. M. Roy notified the Budget Committee that the Board of Selectmen voted against the warrant article for the director. M. Roy talked to the YMCA director today and she said that the YMCA is willing to move forward with Newington in 2022. R. Navelski would like to see a contract with the YMCA before the budget public hearing. The Recreation Committee would still like to get a director even if the YMCA runs the summer camp.

The Budget Committee would like to get a list of the pros and cons of having a Recreation Director.

J. Lamson reminded everyone that this was not the time to talk about the warrant articles, it is a time to talk about the budget. Discussion ensued about raising the summer camp tuition.

J. Kent Weiner moved to approve the 2022 Recreation Committee budget for \$51,850. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Adjournment: E. Savinelli moved to adjourn at 8:26pm. J. Belanger seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy
Recording Secretary