

Town of Newington, NH
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 18, 2019 Town Hall

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

Present: John Lamson, Chair, Brandon Arsenault, William Wright, Emily Savinelli, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Mike Marconi-Selectmen's Rep, Ted Connors, Chair Board of Selectmen, Mike Bilodeau, Police Chief, EJ Hoyt, Fire Chief, Jack Hoyt, Police Commissioner, Skip Cole, Sewer Commissioner, Conservation Commission Co-Chair, Jane Hislop, Denis Hebert, Planning Board Chair, Erika Mantz, Planning Board Vice-Chair, Peter Welch, Planning Board Member, Martha Roy, Town Administrator and Eleanor Boy, Recorder.

M. Marconi moved to approve the minutes of December 11th, 2019. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

Amendments to the December 11th minutes were discussed. J. Kent Weiner thought that on page 2 in the paragraph about "Jerry Coogan's pay" should read "the Planner's pay" instead and on page 3 Katherine Latchaw should be changed to Ken Latchaw.

M. Marconi moved to approve the amended minutes of December 11th, 2019. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion, with B. Arsenault abstaining and all others in favor.

Sewer Budget Review:

Denis Messier presented the Sewer budget to the committee.

The 2020 budget is 4.4% less than last year and basically the same from 2019. The first payment for the Force Main line is not until 2021. B. Arsenault asked if the sewer rates would be stable or lower in 2020. D. Messier expects them to remain stable. Many surrounding towns are going to see an increase in their sewer rates due to new facilities being built to meet the new nitrogen requirements. Newington was ahead of the game with their upgrades and are one of the first towns to see the increase. J. Lamson asked about the 1.6% COLA increase for the Sewer Commissioners' stipends. M. Roy stated that the various officials who receive stipends have always received the town COLA increase except for the Selectmen who have declined receiving the COLA.

B. Arsenault moved to approve the Sewer budget of \$1,342,049. J. Kent Weiner seconded the motion. J. Lamson called for a vote and all were in favor.

Planning Board Budget Review:

M. Marconi moved to tentatively approve the Planning budget of \$171,922. B. Arsenault seconded the motion.

Denis Hebert presented the Planning budget to the committee.

J. Lamson thanked the Planning Board for all their work on behalf of the town. D. Hebert explained that the Planning Board is trying to keep the town competitive and bring businesses to town.

The Contracted Services line has increased by \$24,000 because there will be a new planner in 2020 that will be working 4 hours more a week, plus there will be an overlap between the old planner and the new planner for training purposes. This expense line will decrease in 2021 because there won't be an overlap. E. Savinelli asked if D. Hebert thought that there was enough money in the professional training line. E. Savinelli thought that Planning Board members should be encouraged to attend training and maybe the meetings wouldn't take so long. D. Hebert stated that Newington's meetings are a true form of democracy. Residents can come in and ask questions, he would hate to not have that because the board was trying to speed up meetings. E. Mantz mentioned that she and Russell Cooke have been to training recently and found it very helpful.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Planning Budget of \$171,922. All were in favor.

Conservation Committee:

J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Conservation Committee budget of \$6,268.00. B. Arsenault seconded the motion.

Jane Hislop presented the Conservation Committee budget to the committee.

The Selectmen reduced the legal line to be centralized under the general legal services. The BOS recommended the town forest line item to be reduced to zero and added to the Care of Trees budget line.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Conservation Committee of \$6,268.00. All were in favor.

Police Department Budget Review:

Police Chief Mike Bilodeau and Police Officer Andrew Wood presented a proposal to add an explosive K9 to the Newington Police Department. This would be funded completely with donations and wouldn't have any effect on the tax rate. The department has already collected \$10,100 from businesses and \$5,000 from residents for the program. There isn't a K9 unit in the seacoast. The dog has a working life of 7 or 8 years. There would be no additional cost for insurance. The initial cost of the dog is \$3,000, but all training and recertification is free. There are many unattended packages in Newington. Boats from 18 different countries have come into the port in Newington during the last year.

**J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Police budget of \$1,780,375.
B. Arsenault seconded the motion.**

Discussion continued about the proposed explosives K9 unit. The money is in the Police Officers Fund. It can be a revolving fund or a trust fund. J. Lamson thought the dog should be in the budget even though it is funded by donations. The dog is the town's responsibility. M. Bilodeau would like to have a revolving account so the donations don't have to be used in the calendar year. J. Kent Weiner asked about the recurring costs. M. Bilodeau stated that it will be \$1,200 a year. J. Lamson explained that the dog is an employee of the town and the stream of donations and expenses should go through the town budget. The department could carryover the excess donations from year to year. B. Arsenault asked if the Police Department could set up a trust fund like the Library and Cemetery for the dog. Discussion ensued about surrounding towns contributing to the cost of the program, the training of the dog, Officer Wood's overtime because of the dog and the backup plan if Officer Wood leaves the department. M. Bilodeau explained that Officer Wood will have a contract that states that he will stay with the department during the working life of the dog. B. Arsenault wanted to know if the billable hours of overtime will be taken out of the donation account.

J. Kent Weiner would like to see the numbers on paper and something that explains all the aspects of the K9 explosive unit to include a Plan A - if donations continue and Plan B - if the donations dry up. D. Hebert would like to know who would cover Officer Wood's shifts if he is called out all the time to other locations. He thought that Pease and the Port Authority could pay into the costs. J. Lamson thought that the K9 unit was a good idea but the committee needed a lot more information and details. B. Arsenault thanked the Chief for the new ideas and his commitment to the community.

M. Bilodeau explained that his current issues are the retention of officers, department salaries and the modernization of equipment in the department.

The department hasn't received the 2019 cruiser yet. There are 7 vehicles currently, they will be turning in a vehicle to the town and requesting a new one in 2020. J. Kent Weiner asked about the current staff, why are people leaving. The Chief explained that they had a couple of personnel issues in 2019 and one person left to go to a bigger department for more money. B. Arsenault thought that it wasn't the town's responsibility to make the department a good place to work. The Chief explained that hiring and retaining good people is a problem.

The Chief would like to buy a life scan finger printing system for the department. The finger prints come back in 15 minutes.

W. Wright, who also serves as a Police Commissioner, explained that the commission did a survey of the wages of the other departments in the area and found out that Newington is below the average. The department is proposing a 3% increase for the patrolmen.

E. Savinelli asked about the increase in health insurance expenses. M. Roy said that the insurance rates have increased by 7%. M. Bilodeau added that one officer had a baby, so he went from a two-person plan to family, another officer got married and went from a single plan to a two-person plan, plus there is one position open and the finance director added a family plan in the budget for that position. Town employees pay 10% of the cost of insurance. J. Lamson asked how 10% compared to other towns. M. Roy will look into it and get back to the committee.

E. Savinelli asked if the Fire Department and the Police Department could both train at the Police Department. M. Bilodeau explained that when people come to the Police Department, they have to have an officer with them at all times, so it wouldn't be feasible.

E. Savinelli asked about the increase in the equipment contracts expense line. M. Bilodeau explained that the Police Department changed its IT provider to Daystar in Newington. J. Kent Weiner asked what the department was gaining with the new service to justify the increased expense. M. Bilodeau said that their virus protection has increased significantly and 24-hour service.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Police Budget of \$1,780,375. B. Arsenault opposed with all others in favor. B. Arsenault explained that he was opposed because of the Police Dog proposal and not having enough details about how the donations and expenses would be done.

M. Roy explained that the Town Attorney and the Board of Selectmen are looking into the details of starting a town trust fund for the Police Explosives K9 program.

Emergency Management Budget Review:

B. Arsenault moved to tentatively approve the Emergency Management budget of \$18,307. E. Savinelli seconded the motion.

Police Chief Mike Bilodeau presented the Emergency Management budget to the committee. The \$3,000 that was budgeted in 2019 for contracted services was not used. They were hoping to find someone to write the grants for them, but they never found anyone. The equipment maintenance expense line increased from \$2,000 in 2019 to \$3,220 in 2020. M. Bilodeau was not sure why there was an increase because the Building Inspector oversees the generators. E. Boy explained that there is more maintenance being done on the 4 generators in town. Chief Hoyt added that there are two kinds of maintenance done each year, a minor maintenance and a major maintenance.

J. Lamson called for a vote on the Emergency Management Budget of \$18,307. All were in favor.

M. Marconi moved to adjourn at 8:23pm. W. Wright seconded the motion with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

**Eleanor Boy
Recorder**