

Town of Newington, NH  
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, December 8, 2021 Town Hall

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

**Present:** Budget Committee members: John Lamson, Chair; Brandon Arsenault, Vice-Chair, Rick Stern, Jamie Belanger, Alan Wilson, Emily Savinelli, John Chamberlain, Jennifer Kent Weiner, Chris Wayss, Selectman's Rep. Bob Blonigen

**Guests:** Selectman, Mike Marconi, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley, Library Trustees; Jack O'Reilly, Peter Welch and Cathy Hazelton, Library Director Lara Berry, Fire Chief EJ Hoyt, Assistant Fire Chief Pat Moynihan, Board of Fire Engineers and Fire Engineer Ann Hyland Hebert and Martha Roy, Town Administrator.

**Minutes:**

E. Savinelli and C. Wayss asked for two changes to be made to the December 1, 2021 minutes. **J. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of December 1, 2021 as amended. E. Savinelli seconded the motion. R. Stern abstained. All others were in favor.**

**Library Budget:**

**E. Savinelli moved to tentatively approve the Library budget of \$260,148. R. Stern seconded the motion.**

L. Berry presented the Library budget to the committee. The library was closed for the first six months of 2021, but the library staff continued to work keeping appointments to service the residents of Newington. Even with all the challenges of 2021 the Langdon Library was #2 in most categories for libraries in NH per capita. People are still reading physical books. The library predicts the same high, pre-pandemic, numbers for 2022. The library has 300-400 active patrons which is very high in a town of only 800 residents. They only have one non-resident membership. In 2021 the library got a grant for \$1,088 to benefit the library services. They decided to buy ukalaylies to loan out. It is a great creative opportunity. C. Wayss asked why the wages for 2021 didn't decrease considering the library was closed for the first six months of the year. L. Berry said that the staff was 60% saturated with work when the library was closed. Three staff members almost worked their full hours when the library was closed. L. Berry is very proud that the library didn't lay off any employees and was able to retain their whole staff. Many libraries in the area are having a hard time finding employees. J. Belanger asked if the library employees could help with the HDC scanning files project. E. Savinelli asked what the process for wage increases was at the library. L. Berry said

that she evaluates the staff and the staff evaluates her. In comparison to wages for libraries in the seacoast all four employees are below average in pay. The library has merit raises instead of a COLA. The library substitutes' pay was increased from \$12 to \$15 in 2021. B. Arsenault asked why there was an increase in wages for 2022 because the 2021 wages were lower than predicted. L. Berry explained that a couple of staff members were out for extended periods of time and substitutes covered for them at a lower rate. Hopefully, in 2022 everything will be back to normal. Greenland hired a new library director for the same rate that L. Berry gets paid now and she has been here for six years. E. Savinelli asked why the electricity and water expense lines were overspent. L. Berry said that they use a lot of water for the lawn in the summer. She is not sure why the electric line is overspent. B. Arsenault asked if the operating expenses line was going to be overspent. L. Berry said no. Everything in this line is paid by the library. J. Kent Weiner asked how the trust fund was doing. J. O'Reilly said that the library receives approximately \$1,600 a quarter from the trust fund. J. Kent Weiner suggested that they use that money for the wage increases. L. Berry said that they have only limited access to the trust and can only spend the interest. B. Arsenault asked if the library used the trust fund expense line this year. L. Berry said no and explained that they use the town budget money first and then use the trust funds.

**J. Lamson called for a vote on the Library budget. B. Arsenault opposed with all others in favor.**

#### **Fire Department Budget:**

**J. Kent Weiner moved to tentatively approve the Fire Department budget of \$1,884,790. R. Stern seconded the motion.**

E. Hoyt and P. Moynihan presented the budget to the committee.

The wage increase is only for the chief's and assistant chief's, cola and step increases. The union firefighters contract will be in a separate warrant article at the 2022 town meeting. If approved the new contract will be for April-Dec this year. Salaries and benefits increased by \$9,401.

J. Kent Weiner asked how much the ambulance revenue was for 2021. E. Hoyt said it is \$35,000 for the first 10 months. The Fire Department is changing ambulance billing companies in 2022. E. Hoyt is hoping the change will increase revenue for the ambulance. Revenue was \$77,000 for 2019, \$58,000 for 2020 and \$35,000 for 2021. Newington has the highest ambulance fees in the state. P. Moynihan said that they have higher fees because they have fewer calls. J. Kent Weiner asked if they had considered hiring an ambulance service. E. Hoyt said that they had explored different options. P. Moynihan said he knows the Newington service is good because he knows the firefighters and they have been trained by him. P. Moynihan said that the quality of

service isn't the same with an ambulance service. J. Kent Weiner asked if the department could save money if they didn't staff the ambulance. P. Moynihan said that they would still have to staff the fire trucks, so it wouldn't be a huge savings.

C. Wayss asked if E. Hoyt expected any increase in PPE expenses in 2022. E. Hoyt said no.

Discussion ensued about the alarm service expense line. It has an offsetting revenue account. P. Moynihan believes that the Newington Fire Department responds 5-7 minutes quicker because of this alarm system. They charge \$350 for alarms. J. Lamson thought that this was a positive service.

The 2022 Fire Department budget is \$15,654 more than 2021 and it does not include the new union contract.

The Fire Department's total revenue for 2021 was \$115,000, which includes the ambulance revenue.

J. Kent Weiner thought that the Fire Department revenue could be used to help the tax rate.

The department only had to buy a couple of protective clothing sets in 2021 because the staff retention in 2021 was very good.

J. Belanger asked if the Fire Department had applied for any federal funds grants. P. Moynihan said that they have been working on grants to offset costs. E. Hoyt said that the Board of Selectmen had approved three grants at their Monday meeting. J. Kent Weiner asked if there were any strings attached. E. Hoyt said no. The Town's portion of these grants will be taken out of the capital reserve accounts so there will be no effect on the tax payer.

B. Arsenault asked if they were going to buy any equipment for the boat in 2022. P. Moynihan said no. J. Belanger asked if they get special training for the fire boat. P. Moynihan said that they are all licensed and will hopefully be certified as rescue boat operators by the Coast Guard this Spring.

**J. Lamson called for a vote on the Fire Department budget. All were in favor.**

J. Lamson asked who was in the union bargaining group. P. Moynihan said 2 Board of Selectmen and 2 Fire Engineers. J. Lamson reminded the committee that the Board of Selectmen can place the union warrant article on the town meeting warrant, the budget committee can not.

B. Arsenault asked about the 2022 fire department warrant articles. E. Hoyt said that they are asking for \$200,000 for the new fire truck that is part of the capital improvement plan, \$50,000 for the ambulance that is part of the capital improvement plan and \$5,000 for equipment replacement. B. Arsenault asked about the fire station improvement warrant article. P. Moynihan said that it was removed because the report has not been completed yet. Once the report is completed then a capital improvement plan for the station will be done.

**Adjournment: C. Wayss moved to adjourn at 8:16pm. R. Stern seconded the motion with all in favor.**

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Boy  
Recording Secretary