

**Hill Budget Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 22, 2021**

Present: Carol Asher, Betty Hanks, Thomas Pavelka, Don Moyer, Thomas Seymour, Chris Vlitas, Paula McDonough, Paul Meyerhoffer.

Absent: Marshall Bennett, Joanne Irving (emailed would not be able to attend).

Public: Don Reese, Wendy Fuller Rosa, Tom Angeley.

Meeting Minutes:

Called to order 7:02 PM

Brief look over agenda is followed by discussion of first bullet point, which is for each current member to introduce themselves and indicate why they are serving on the Budget Committee.

Mr. Moyer starts by outlining that he has been a resident for 16 years and as he attended meetings and hearings he noted the hard nature of service on the Budget Committee. Wanted to contribute to the community and felt that shouldering some of that work would be a way to do so.

Carol Asher clarifies that she serves first as the Chair of the School Board. Pursuant to State RSA 32:15, which enumerates that both the School Board and Selectboard's Office are to have a participating member on the Budget Committee with full voting rights, she also serves in that role. Titled an Ex-Officio position, she is there as the representative for the School Board. She serves on the School Board because she is proud of the work that the Staff does for the kids and wants to support their commitment by being a part of the School Board. She is especially proud of the efforts required to educate in the middle of a world wide pandemic.

Betty Hanks is a resident of 56 years and first started to participate in community governance by being a Register of the Checklist. Then joined the Budget Committee as a means to keep learning in her later years.

Paula McDonough has been in Hill for 18 years and this marks her 3rd time being a member of the Budget Committee. She serves to also keep learning throughout her life. As a parent of two children that have been through our school system she hopes to bring that perspective to her participation. She also is there to help the community be represented in its government. As a final comment she thanked the Chair in advance because of the nature of being a board member. It is voluntary and often results in more complaints being expressed towards members than gratitude for doing the work. Every year it is basically the Chair that expresses the most thanks to the members, so she would like to pay it forward and thank the Chair.

Chris Vlitas, a ten year resident, relayed that he never thought that his countenance was a good fit for committee work. However, as he had received 2 votes to serve, he decided to participate as best he can from an elected position, as opposed to partaking of governance solely as a resident.

Thomas Pavelka has been a denizen for 22 years, the preponderance of which he spent as a recluse from Town government. Time spent online in the past year exchanging opinions had resulted in him being met multiple times with the response, "If you are not involved, you should not carp at circumstances." So, he decided to get involved.

Paul Meyehofer has been a resident so long, he might predate the Abenaki. Given his all around sense of community, he has served on the budget committee through the years. The longtime secretary looks forward to being able to fully participate, now that Mr. Vlitaz is charged with taking minutes.

Tom Seymour is the other Ex-Officio member; this one from the Selectboard office. He has been in town for 20 odd years and 10 of them ago decided to help the community by running for Budget Committee. That turned into a run for Selectperson. Once in office he was immediately nominated and voted to be their rep in the Budget Committee. He has been doing it ever since.

Don welcomes everyone and gives a brief summary of what each should expect this year. It is his hope that each person has one voice and one vote. To that end, he would like for every one to feel that they can ask any and all questions they have about each department at hand. That framework will result in many a long night, so all should expect that to be the norm.

Discussion moves on from here to the filling of the final seat on the Budget Committee. The nominated person will serve until the next election cycle in March. After which, they have the option to run for re-election or step down. Each of the three candidates was then asked to introduce themselves.

Don Reese is a 20 year resident who has for his time in Hill, up until recently, worked two jobs. As he has pared down to just one, and has concerns over wants versus needs, decided to use an opening in time available to serve on the Budget Committee.

Wendy Fuller Rosa comes from a family that can trace residence back 50 years or more. She returned to Hill 8 years ago in part to take care of an aging parent. Never sure if she was going to anchor, she stayed away from committing to public service; although always deeply caring about this community. She now feels that Hill is going to be a long term harbor, and felt that, like Mr. Pavelka, if she was to have difference with the ways in which things are run, she should be a member of government writ large, not just a voice opining.

Tom Angeley recently retired and started building last November. He finally moved in this April. Formally an Operations Manager for a brick manufacturing company, he felt his background in budgeting and finance would be a resource for the Committee. He also has attended many meetings of the Selectboard along with Planning and Zoning Boards. His general observation of empty seats and limited Tax Base inspired him to get involved in his new community from the get go.

Mr Moyer opened the floor to general debate or input on the candidates.

Tom Seymour asked a question to be answered by all.

"What do you see as the #1 issue from a budgeting perspective?"

Mr. Reese replied that he was concerned with the difficulty in finding answers to staffing levels in several departments, the nebulosness of maintenance on the Road Department's garage and the nature of

Warrant Articles actually being about needs instead of wants.

Wendy Fuller Rosa agreed with Mr. Reese in the difficulty in getting answers. She added that she is also concerned with a lack of Police Department and the relative priorities surrounding spending.

Mr. Angeley expressed a concern with the extreme lack of commercial tax base and how that limits our ability to fund true needs. He secondly is concerned about a general sentiment that seeks to provide Big City level of services on such a limited resource base; especially since our population seems to be increasingly aging / retired / on a fixed income. He summed up by stating that we need a solid Fire and Police Department to provide security for all, but that should be approached with trepidation of not Taxing ourselves in over our heads.

Open to the floor for discussion among the members formal, Mrs. McDonough relayed a narrative of how she was once a transplant and somewhat flummoxed by the lack of stop signs in Town. She took her concern to the Road Agent of the era, the Step Father of Wendy Fuller Rosa. Mr. Wheeler informed her in a manner only a born and brewed Yankee could, "No matter what was what where you came from, just learn the rules of the road and you will integrate just fine."

This was expounded upon Mr. Moyer and others that indeed, we are a melting pot, and that by listening to long time residents we could find a way to adjust to the ways of the Hill. Discussion then turned to a topic of import; that of listening.

The general thrust was that we each as members of the Budget Committee need to do just as much listening, if not more, than we do opining. It was expressed that we should each attempt to gauge public sentiment by being in the public sphere, eg going to cruise night, and attempt to listen to the conversations being held there. To note the nature and content of said public sentiments, then to bring them back to the group, report our observations and then incorporate them into our deliberations.

Carol Asher reinforced this point by indicating that the Budget Committee is the place to ask questions and get answers. She iterated that we should work as a group, ask the honest questions and make sure that the answers are similarly grounded in truths. This was the only way to counter misinformation, which is present in gossip and telephone game which exists almost anywhere. She hoped that we would all be clear with one another and that every uncertainty would be dispelled by full scrutiny.

At this point the current members were polled for their vote of candidate. The result was a two way tie between Don Reese and Wendy Fuller Rosa; with three votes each. The two members that voted for Mr. Angeley were asked to re-cast their vote for one of the two that had received three votes. In the end it was 5 votes for Wendy Fuller Rosa, and 3 for Mr. Reese. She was later sworn in as the 11th member of the Committee for this season.

Having resolved the issue of the empty seat, the Chair recognized a question from the public in attendance. It came from Mr. Angeley.

"If the public attends a Budget Committee Meeting, can they ask questions in addition to the Committee proper?"

The answer is complicated. There is no explicit, according to RSA, right for the public to interject themselves into the proceedings or deliberations of a Budget Committee Meeting proper. However, it is

within the operative rules of facilitation to open a Meeting to Public interaction. This would depend, primarily, on the timeliness of proceedings as they are held.

Certainly, it was proffered, that if a meeting was transpiring at pace, whereby it would not be adjourned in the wee hours of the following morning to accommodate public inquiry, indeed public inquiry would be heard. If, however, there were so many questions from the Committee itself that it was going to burn past the midnight hour, the public would be asked to understand that there was no time to consider their inquires. In the end, it will be the facilitation by Chair that decides whether a particular night and presentation can allow for any or all public input.

Which is not to say the public could be avoided. As always, the public is the prime stake holder in the Hearings proper which are held by the Budget Committee in March. There fore, if any question is not answered in the regular session of the Committee, it would be forwarded, and considered germane to discussions during the Hearing proper in March.

Discussion then diverged into the possibility that the public could pre-load a session with questions to a Department via email to the Committee. It was resolved that, allowing the same considerations of in person questions, email submissions would be entertained. To that end, it was resolved that a new general email account would be created for the Budget Committee. That Email address will be published online, and that would be polled for public input as well as in person attendance.

Discussion now turns to the progression of presentations to be made on certain dates by each department that appears in front of the Budget Committee. The ensuing repartee was completely concerned with the dates on which the School District would present and discuss their budget.

The predominate issue, as presented by Carol Asher was that the School District and the Town operate on two different fiscal years. As such, it was proffered that the School District was being impinged upon by having to participate so early in the Budget Committee season. There was a good amount of going back and forth, not the least of which was poignant exchange spearheaded by Paula McDonnough

Mrs. McDonough relayed that this was not the first time that the School Board, nor its Business Administrator, had to present to the Budget Committee. It should matter not that the Town's fiscal year does not align with the School District's. That being a given, the School District should not put undue expectations on the deliberations of the Budget Committee. If the Budet Committee were to re-arrange, then any of the Town Departments would be put on the spot to come up with their budget in an less than ideal time frame.

The Chair was deferential to both sides, and brokered a compromise, as the School Board was suggesting that it's deliberations be put off until after January 1st.

Discussion moved to an aside with an ask from the public to opine. Mr. Reese observed that as a portion of total Town Appropriations, some departments got an undue amount of time in front of the Committee as compared to others. To flesh out the point, he pointed out that the Library, along with Parks and Rec, commanded a whole session. He then went on to opine that the School should warrant more than two sessions, given that the budget for Education was in the millions, as compared to the others which are less than 100k combined.

Mr. Vlitaz seconded the emotion. Mr. Moyer interjected that indeed, last year, the unscheduled dates of

January, turned at least one into an additional session to solely discuss the School District. This left no doubt, this year, contingency dates are prudent and necessary.

The brokered meeting schedule represents key Milestone dates that Town Departments and School Board are expected to hit. The Chair's job is to monitor progress towards those dates through frequent discussion with Departments and School Board. If it is determined that certain dates are at risk, the Chair will raise that issue with the Budget Committee and work to develop an alternate plan.

At this point it was motioned to vote on the schedule. It was passed unanimously.

Proceeding then turned to the nature of a Budget Committee and its abilities / duties.

Mr. Moyer forwarded that it is absolutely the nature of the Budget Committee to put each and every department on the Hot Seat. While each department is at liberty to ask for what they want, it is the responsibility of the Budget Committee to ask the questions of whether or not it is right for the Town to fund that request. He then went on to ask if the Budget Committee should have more power?

A discussion evolved across many members. Much of it involved questioning the authority of the Committee to get involved with the minutiae of budgeting. Part of the discussion fleshed out the nature of a Bottom Line Budget.

Mr. Vlitas proffered that in essence the Committee acts as a Check and Balance. Either the Selectboard or School Board will proffer that they can do their duties for the year on X dollars. Essentially, the Budget Committee can opine that they feel that number to be copacetic, or the Committee felt that another number could achieve the same goals. Now, in their deliberations, the Budget Committee would reach their decision by scrutinizing the fine print. However, at the end of all said, the Selectboard, or the School Board, would have ultimate edict over how the gross appropriation was spent. That is the nature of our governance, and the Selectboard and School Board are the ultimate authorities to spend the sum total of Appropriation that is approved by the Plebiscite that is Town Meeting / District Meeting proper.

Discussion moved on to a presentation of Gross spending by Town and School District over the last five years. Of particular interest is the trend of wages through history from each department. Each Department is expected to bring that information with them. It is forwarded the yearly data should be a factor in deciding the next year's wages. For example, if one department has experienced wages increase every year in the past five, they should expect that at least one year of flat funding of wages this year.

Paula McDonough interjected at this point an interaction between Robert Dupuis and Carol Asher, during a previous School District Hearing, that because of documented year after year of pay increases for the School District, that this be paid more attention to than has previously.

Talk then moved to the compliance, according to RSA 91:3, in providing access to the public to a transcription of events that unfolded during a Budget Committee Meeting. In the cross conversation it was recognized that the Budget Committee has a legislative obligation to provide access to meeting minutes within 5 days of holding a quorum qualifying meeting.

Talk transitioned among the fine points of documenting a draft of the meeting, as opposed to the minutes adopted in a formal session that follows. Further, it was involved the very nature of email communications that might insanely complicate issues by encompassing a quorum of members, by

default, as a result of electronic communications. By far a sticky wicket.

In the end, we as a group unanimously resolved to accept the Meeting Minutes of May 26th. It was additionally accepted that email discussions of the intricacies of the Budget Committee should remain a one on one in nature. That is, to say, that if a member has a specific question, it should be directed, in a sole dialogue, with the Chair. The Chair would then decide if a greater number should be included in the response / dialogue.

The above were all agreed upon, moved for vote, and unanimously approved.

Having reached the hour of 8:32 PM, and having no other business, Paula McDonough moved, with Don Moyer seconding a motion to adjourn. It was so voted unanimously.