

**Hill Budget Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
November 10, 2021**

Accepted November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Present:** Carol Asher, Marshall Bennett, Betty Hanks, Joann Irving, Paul Meyerhoefer, Paula McDonough, Don Moyer, Thomas Pavelka, Wendy Rosa, Thomas Seymour, Chris Vlitas.

**Public:** Niki Mahoney, Jillian Reise, December Fortin, Steven Laroche, (Representatives Parks & Recreation)

Shaun Bresnahan Jr (Presenter of Town Spending Year to Date)

Donald Reese

**Meeting Minutes:**

Called to order 7:00 PM

Chair, Don Moyer, announces that Water Commission will not be present. More on that later. Next item on agenda is a presentation by the Parks & Recreation Department.

The department presented a new budget that asked for the same gross amount as they did last year. The largest part of their \$15,079.00 request is a subscription to access the Tapply-Thompson Community Center which is centered in Bristol, but has programming in a number of local towns. Five years ago, Hill's fee was re-assessed. Unfortunately, overnight, the cost was greatly increased. The Town and the center entered into negotiations and agreed upon a schedule where, over five years, the sum charges would increase incrementally, so as to not put a sudden sharp burden on overall funding needed for the department. We have now arrived at that stasis, and the Department reports that the cost should remain the same for a few years more. Next year, we are expected to pay the TTCC \$10,679.00.

The Committee asked what do we get for that 10K? It was relayed, that depending upon the year, 70 to 100 unique individuals from Hill participate in activities offered at least once. Those residents range in age from toddler to retired. Many utilise the center proper each weekday, as a good portion are students that engage in after school offerings. Then they also participate in Summer programs.

The Tapley-Thompson center applies the same formula to all Towns that subscribe to their resources. It is primarily based on use the year prior. Yes, the virus did reduce our overall participation. It is hoped that will be in our past and that this next year will see a return to normal rates of use. Therefore, we are asked to pay the same.

This being the end of their presentation, Paul Meyerhoefer asked if there were any funds encumbered from last year. The answer was, no. However, as there was an expected \$1400.00 under-run this year, the department did anticipate asking for an encumbrance. Their intent was to use that money to purchase new pic-nic tables for the pond area. Increased use of the pond, season in and out, warranted more tables be available. Some of the money would also be used to purchase supplies to re-treat existing tables to insure longevity.

Then conversation moved to the trials and tribulations of the 2k added by the Budget Committee last year to the Parks and Recreation's presented budget, which was summarily rescinded in the online public session which substituted for a portion of our accustomed in person Yankee Town Meeting.

Paul Meyerhoefer then asked about the possibility of the Road Department mowing instead of Parks and Recreation contracting that portion of their appropriation. Mr. Seymour relayed that indeed, last year this was the case. However, those hours billed were payed out of Parks and Recreation's account. This transitioned into a discussion of how none of those hours were worked by our Three full time employees. Rather, last year it was attempted to also employ a part time seasonal worker for various tasks.

In the past, the Town Selectboard has found itself under fire for under-utilising the pay scale of our Road Department. To avoid that situation ever again, it was thought that a part time person, at obviously a lower rate of pay, could do many things the full time employees had been tasked to take up slack on, and keep taxpayer equanimity. Unfortunately, partially given to Covid, the part time participation has become increasingly almost impossible to secure. The thought now is to look at combining tasks, like mowing, which appears in multiple departmental budgets, and find a singular contractor to do all. That will take time.

Joann Irving asked how much it cost to keep the pond plowed in the winter. So far, that has been done voluntarily. It was proffered that any help in getting the word out to expand the number of volunteers would be appreciated. There has been a resurgence in use of the pond to ice skate since more of an effort has been made to keep it clear. The ideal would be to agglomerate enough volunteers to keep the ice maintained the entire season. Even if we get another four foot storm this year!

It was at this point that Paula McDonough started a deliberation to add Two Thousand Dollars to their budget. December Fortin opined that 2k could be used to repair the stairs that link the Ball Field, to the School and Library/Town Offices Building. That is used frequently during the School year for activities of every class in the Jennie D. Blake School.

Wendy Rosa asked if that 2k could be used to ensure a season of plowing on the pond. It was thought that could be enough. Ms. Rosa then asked about the status of the Diamond in the ball field. Indeed that is on their slate for the next year. It was thought that since some Taply-Thompson offerings in the past had been held on our field, that if we doubled down and rejuvenated, they would come again. Mrs. Asher then asked what they thought would be required for use by the Center in Bristol to occur once again. Once again, that hinged upon Covid being in the rear-view mirror.

At this point the Parks and Recreation Department took a brief consensus and agreed that if 2K were added to their budget, they would allocate those funds into repairing the steps previously mentioned as an expenditure through their line item of Park Maintenance. In a non-binding vote, the Committee split with Joanne Irving and Paul Meyerhoefer opposed, all others for.

Having reached the time of 7:20 PM, Parks and Recreation departed, and Sean Bresnahan Jr., Select-person, began the arduous detailing of Town spending Year To Date. While long and dense, the entire board was thoroughly immersed and educated in the details of what goes into all Town Departmental spending. (Please note that the School District is another entity and was not subject to any review this evening.)

The Executive Budget, operations of the Select Board, was first to be splayed out for consideration.

Like almost all to follow, some of the line items were already overspent. However, it was never the case, given a macro enough view of total sectional spending, that the bottom line would exceed expected need for funding. A particular line that did draw attention was payroll. They are expected to eclipse expectations by almost Two Thousand Dollars. The fine print was that it was attributed to the Administrative Assistants position which, is not a salaried position, but is billed by the hour. For several reasons, not the least of which is the ironical effect of increased public participation in their governance. Since more persons are showing up to attend, and not just audit, Select Board meetings, the meetings themselves are lasting longer. In addition it was relayed that typing of minutes has concomitantly increased as they have expanded from a page or two to at least four or more.

Joann Irving then asked about the Town's Zoom subscription. It was no longer active. There was no money allotted for a new one. It was hoped we would not need it again. If we did, then we would broach that issue when presented.

Paul Meyerhoefer then asked about the Covid money that had been accepted by the Select Board. This referred to the approximately 56K received recently as a first disbursement from the American Rescue Plan. Mr. Bresnahan relayed that while the money had been received, it was during looking over the fine print that reservations began to crop into consideration. Because of them, the spending of that money has been tabled. The Select Board are now making sure they are completely aware of not only the requirements restricting that money being spent, they also want to make sure they are well versed in what they have to do to document, then relay that documentation to the Federal Government, from which the money came, to insure we are not asked to pay that money back for some fine print.

Should the Select Board successfully navigate the waters of Federal Bureaucratic red tape, they would, ideally, like to apply that money to replacing and entering into a maintenance contract for the AC in Town Offices. Currently, none of the Mini-Splits are functional. It seems they all need bi-annual maintenance that has here-to-fore not been undertaken. If the Select Board are to replace them, they are committed to make sure that maintenance is undertaken to prevent per-mature failure again.

There was discussion of the limited sanctioned use of the money received, and how it might be spent if done in those pursuits other than HVAC. Among the possibilities were application to the Water Commission or High Speed Internet. Paula McDonough expressed a desire it be used to repair the infrastructure of the Town Offices.

Mr. Moyer then had a question about the possible use of the unexpended funds slated for new equipment, and if audio-visual support for in person Town Meeting could be updated. Mr. Seymour thought it might not cover it. Mr. Bresnahan offered that the balance might be offset with unencumbered funds.

Ms. Irving then asked about the financial software update that was discussed in last year's Executive Budget. Much looking had been done, but no solution so far was enticing enough to purchase. This will mean that the Town Offices will continue to do books with off the shelf accounting software.

Along the same lines, Ms. Irving then queried about the necessity expressed last year about a new printer needed because the State relayed our printer would not interface with State software used in the office. Seems that so far the State is inaccurate. Shelly Henry continues to be able to print everything. At moments the printer has fits, and produces gibberish, but with perseverance, she coaxes a clearly legible document.

Other neat tidbits in this section were the fact that most Town employees can opt to participate in a Retirement Plan, but only 2 do so. One is full time, the other part. The Town match to their contributions is 3%. In addition, the Town is mindful of the proven trend of inflation and is seeking to lock in a year long price on heating oil.

As it seems no year can go by without an unexpected bill, the one that kept raising its ugly head was the costs associated with our four foot bonanza snow fall last December. It caused the need to hire out snow remediation of several Town Building roofs. Then there was the crushed septic pipe and someone, for reasons unbeknownst, flushing copier paper down the toilet...

Mr. Bresnahan continued down the plethora of breakout expenditures when, the Department of Police came under scrutiny. Mr. Moyer asked that since there is no Chief, who is going to present in January? There was the continuing hope, on the part of the Select Board, that it would be resolved by then. Should it not, they themselves would act as presenter. There was a involved discussion of the events leading up to this point, and the realities of where to go from here. It was admitted that three basic ideologies are present in Town. One is to do without, one is to continue the present level of funding, the third is to pony up and significantly increase funding. It was, secondly admitted, that public input and perhaps a committee to study the various sentiments was necessary to move forward with respect to its existence and funding.

Joann Irving asked about the money encumbered to purchase radio equipment. The radio in question is in our possession and awaits an active patrol person to put into service. Mr. Moyer then asked what was to become of the 50K that was definitely not going to be expended and left in the budget. The reply was standard. The Select Board could choose to divert that money into something needed but not accounted for in anticipated spending, and do so this year. Or, more than likely, it would wind up in the Unreserved Capital fund.

Next in line, and of interest to Carol Asher was the money spent on Ambulance Service. She wanted to know how that cost was arrived at. It was detailed that each year, the provider, had a formula that was mostly based on the number of service calls provided the previous. A mitigating factor was the amount of insurance money that was received in any billing, on their part, during that period. Essentially, that line is non-negotiable if we want to continue to use Bristol as our Ambulance Service.

Although it was not explicitly stated in YTD spending, some time was spent discussing the increased staffing of the Fire Department and an expected need to fund basic gear for them. A standard set of boots and overalls, top, neck gator and helmet runs Three and a Half Thousand. Multiply that by six new members and it starts to add up. The prevailing wisdom is that we will spread this out over more than this next year, and that encumbered funds, or the usual suspect of Cap-unreserved would be relied upon to cover these new costs.

Talk then moved to the Road Department and it was re-iterated that our current agreement has an 80/20 split for benefits. Employees pay 20% of the cost, and the Town covers the remaining 80%. Salt is costing more. Quelle surprise? The specter of inflation striking diesel was also covered. Then came the usual split on whether we should be providing a clothing allowance. This is separate from the line that provides new foot-ware, safety vests and helmets each year. A new intricacy came into play. It is now understood in the Town Offices that providing 500.00 per year per employee may need to be accounted for as taxable income on the part of the employee. To address this, the Select Board has undertaken a different means by which the disbursement occurs to limit taxable exposure.

As the Water Commissioners came next on the list of expenditures YTD, their absence was now taken to task. Mr. Moyer relayed that he had only been informed at 2 PM that afternoon they would not present. He further, justifiably, categorized this as **inexcusable**, as they were informed of this date to present 7 weeks ago. Why it was not apparent to the Commissioners that they were not prepared in due time, and why they did not give more appropriate notice is still a mystery to the Budget Committee.

If slack were to be given in this situation, it would be to the Water Commissioner. It was accepted that as a function of the Town, it is comparably unique. The Water Commissioners preside over a service that is not funded in any way shape or form of general taxation. Rather, its entire operations are funded by the monthly service fee and volume charge billed to customers. It is a function of the idiosyncrasies of Government financing that requires it to be a line item on the Budget, and therefore, something to be considered by the Budget Committee. However, as it is divorced from Taxation, it was wondered how important it was for the Budget Committee to extend oversight over. The final feeling of the Committee is that we do owe it to the rate payers to extend some consideration to their intents. Accordingly, it was ruminated upon and decided that we could listen to their presentation and deliberate upon it on January 5th, along with the Town Clerk/Tax Collector and Police Department. The factors being that the combination would not be over lengthy; especially considering that the Police Department discussion portended to be wholly philosophical surrounding the nature of Policing, rather than the minutiae of appropriations.

As if time were on tap like a keg, the Committee veered into the realities of the Water Commission once again. This scrutiny was applied to the nature of bills of late. Paula McDonough wondered about the basic issue of service dues. It seemed that water used was no longer being billed; for months on end. It was relayed that our past electronic device that would couple with meters had gone belly up. True to fashion, despite timely ordering of a new one, it probably wound up bobbing off the coast of Long Beach. But, have no fear, it arrived in Town Offices today! Soon enough, someone will be scooting about reaching through the ether to finally account for all the cubic feet of water you have used in the interim. Your next bill will be a doozy!

Enumeration next illuminated the existence of a perennial Five Thousand that we slate for Welfare. In our context this fund is focused on helping those in need of a bridge to keep warm or lights on. Each year we have agreed to set aside Five Thousand Dollars to this endeavour. As Carol Asher studiously informed the Committee, from her previous involvement in disbursing these funds elsewhere, the hoops you have to leap through to qualify are extensive. Mr. Bresnahan, backed up this fact, by relaying, without naming names, several instances where applications had been made. However, upon the Select Board asking for supporting documentation, the applicants ceased conversing. In the end, of the 5k appropriated, \$1400.00 have been spent. All expenditures were checks written to vendors, and never the individual applying. If ever our Government could be described as philanthropic, this line item most definitely qualifies.

Segments of discussion here recorded a general sense that while we have done good so far, inflation could be the great upset of our budget for the next year.

It was noted, by both Carol Asher and Paula McDonough that such a job was done by Mr. Bresnahan Jr. that he should be thanked not only for the depth of his knowledge, resulting from his long time residency as well as varied and lengthy service on multiple Boards and Committees, that the Budget Committee benefited from his presentation, and ability to answer questions broad and in depth.

The Committee next set about to review and revise the meeting minutes of last session. The revisions were brief. The main point discussed was the timing by which the revisions would be accepted via email, such that they could be published in a timely fashion.

Chair Moyer reinforced the need for, and preparation of, data on wages from each Department over the last 5 years. It was with this data, along with Cost of Living metrics over the same period, that the Budget Committee would attempt to reach a consensus in approving or declining any and all pay increases.

At this point Mrs. Asher moved to adjourn the meeting. Betty Hanks Seconded. It was so moved, and the Budget Committee meeting of November 10th, 2021 closed at the hour of 9:45 PM.