

**Hill Budget Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 12th, 2022**

Accepted January 19, 2022

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

Public: Shaun Bresnahan Jr, Christopher Gronski (Representing Select Board)

Meeting Minutes:

Called to order at 7:00 PM

Before Mr. Bresnahan could begin the final Town Presentation, Ms. Irving had a question about next weeks review of revenues and whether the Budget Committee was to have a recommendation on those as well. Mr. Bresnahan gave an overview of what the revenue presentation would include. Also discussed was how revenues could be used to offset the need for taxation. It is the norm for the Town to cover 30% of yearly appropriations in operating functions and warrant articles. This leaves about 70% of the monies required levied as property tax.

Ms. Irving posed a question about reducing the Town Budget by 100,000.00 and the possibility of the Town still having enough money to do all that it does. This analysis stems from the yearly under-run in Town Spending that is always then applied to the following year's funding equation. She felt that money should be left in the pocketbook of the Tax Payer. This year, the Town spent 194,000.00 less than allocated. Mr. Seymour countered that even if it was possible, it would be a one time only recoupment. The following year, the Town would have to increase taxes as there would be no under run to offset subsequent taxation. This is how idioms like "Rock and a hard place," come to be.

Rev. Asher asked when the offset was applied to taxation. Mr. Bresnahan relayed that the negotiations with New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration take place in November, and the resulting tax rate is reflected in bills due December.

Ms. Irving then raised a spending issue in multiple "Speed Bump" sized deposits of salt on Village Streets. Cross talk developed over the setting of sander controls, which was swiftly swatted by Chair Moyer as being way beyond the scope of the Budget Committee and a redirection back to the task at hand, which was Mr. Bresnahan presenting the final Town Budget.

Rev. Asher asked about the bottom line difference between the Department's recommended and Select Board. The Select Board reduced the Highway Department's request by \$9,000.00. They also reduced the Fire Department in lieu of encumbered spending.

Discussion then focused on the reduced Police Budget which still includes 32K in wages. Once again, Mr. Bresnahan conveyed that there several reasons to hire an administrative Police Chief. That person would be tasked with picking up loose ends from our defunct department, which includes taking care of what evidence still exists in Town and liaising with the county Judicial System. The other focus will be

on aiding the community decide where to go from here. This will take the form of creating a committee to explore solutions, and then the presenting of findings at a public hearing to get even more input. The likelihood is that will take most of this year to achieve. It is hoped that out of that process, the Town will have a clear direction and foundation of consensus that will ultimately result in the Select Board crafting a warrant article to cement our path going forward.

That article could take many forms. As discussed in previous meeting minutes, and re-iterated by Mr. Bresnahan, we may decide to outsource 100% of our policing needs to a contract with the State, like the Town of Salisbury. Ultimately, the Board is committed to a process that will allow for as much public input as the public can have, if they attend.

Mr. Meyerhoefer then asked for an accounting of funds encumbered. Mr. Bresnahan enumerated that only funds for the Fire Department were encumbered, and that 8k was for six sets of turn out gear, 2k was for pagers and batteries, and 1300.00 bought us flashlights.

Mr. Meyerhoefer then asked about the number of hours per week worked by the Administrative Assistant to the Select Board. As per previous weeks, Mr. Bresnahan relayed that where once the duties could be discharged in 26 hours, increased use of the office and increased participation in Board Meetings had precipitated hours to hover around 30. Mr. Meyerhoefer then raised the spectre of benefits being required if hours clocked increased much further. Mr. Gronski attempted to allay fears in that many of the increased hours could be linked to the necessary process encumbered in aligning previously discordance between the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustments. Having resolved those issues, the following year would not have meetings spent doing such. It was also proffered that we could be seeing a decline in the flurry of subdivision, development, and transfer of real property that was concomitant with Covid inducing the urban to seek the rural.

Mr. Bresnahan then returned to nuances of the finished budget contained in part with the filling in of a couple blanks from the last presentation. A full breakout was given of the line for Professional Services in the Town Clerk's office. \$1200.00 is for the Town to have Legal Representation present at the Town Meeting. \$300.00 is a contract to monitor the Alarm.

As per a request from Mr. Thompson, it was relayed the Mrs. Henry works and average of 25 hours per week. Again it was documented that the position is salaried, without benefits.

Discussion then detailed the final plan for updating the Town Tax Maps, which have gone without such since 2007. The Town had a couple of options and favored a payment plan as opposed to one time \$5200.00 bill. The Town has entered into a contract to pay \$2200.00 three years consecutively. During this time, should any adjustments be required, no matter how many, it will be included in our contract price. At the end of this, the Board will make a decision to see how numerous adjustments continue to be and plan accordingly for future need to update and at what interval.

Mr. Meyerhoefer asked if the 2k would go on forever. It was hoped not. Again it was relayed that this was thought to be the best fit for now, but as property buying habits are always fluctuating, a wait and see approach was being taken.

Ms. Irving wondered why this had not gone out to bid. Mr. Seymour related that the software used was the most common in NH, therefore it made sense to use it as opposed to other possibilities.

Next up was an actual reduction. Through the effort of Lisa Seymour, the Administrative Assistant to the Select Board, the new oil contract would save the Town \$2500.00 in heating the Town Building that houses the offices and Library.

Mr. Meyerhoefer wondered if the School could not be involved in that new contract. Rev. Asher thought that the School already had a contract but would look into the possibility in the future.

As part of the going over of the Police budget, Mr. Bresnahan informed the Committee that the Administrative Chief had removed a middle man. When a resident of Hill dials 911 now, it no longer goes first to Franklin Dispatch. As the rarely if ever actually task their force with our calls, but instead pass us on to the State 911 call center, calls now wind up there at the outset. Where seconds count, this will prove a shrewd decision.

The final takeaway from the Police budget should not go unnoticed. The new Administrative Chief is contracted to work 10 hours per week. The Select Board has asked for \$32,400.00 to be allocated in his wages. That is an effective pay rate of \$62.00 per hour.

Mr. Bresnahan then started to discuss the Highway Department's Budget which now includes money to hire out the much needed remediation of Ash trees in Town. As covered in previous meeting minutes, the borer is here and is munching trees gleefully. Those that are roadside present a hazzard. Therefore, we need to mitigate that liability. In addition, the perennial problem of mowing cropped up. As it has been hard to get locals to ride Town equipment, the thrust will be to hire the mowing out. Hiring out will cost us more, but without local involvement the Town's hands are bound to outsource.

Mr. Meyerhoefer asked if the town did not own a mower and why it was not used. Mr. Bresnahan re-enforced that due to lack of resident participation, and given that the mowers are not yet imbued with AI, the only option left, to insure mowing happens, is to hire out.

In order to avoid a moniker of Rubber Stamp, Mr. Vlitaz resurrected a conversation that had haunted the committee in several sessions. The initial concern had been raised on November 17th, 2021, by Ms. Irving. It surrounded the clothing allowance provided each year to all three of the Road Department's employees. She was not in favor of any allowance. Mr. Vlitaz proffered that if the Budget Committee were to have teeth, and to not be called a rubber stamp, her supposition should be held to a vote. To this end, he motioned to remove the \$1500.00 line item in-toto.

The resulting vote failed as only Ms. Irving, Mr. Vlitaz and Mr. Pavelka voted in favor. All else voted against.

The deliberation between motion and vote revealed an inclination to compromise. To that end, Mr. Meyerhoefer motioned to subtract \$750.00 from the line. Mrs. Hanks seconded.

After brief discussion the vote was called.

Mr. Meyerhoefer, Mrs, McDonough, Mrs, Hanks, Rev. Asher, Mr. Vlitaz, Mr. Pavelka and Mr. Bennett voted in favor.

Ms. Irving, Mr. Seymour, Ms. Rosa and Mr Moyer opposed.

Mr. Meyerhoefer then had a question about the nature of the the line that confuses almost all. Lumped in, at the end, with the Highway Department is an expenditure titled “Reconstruction of Highways : Offset with Grant.” Being that government is rarely straightforward, this line is a victim of the you have put it in to meet Budgeting Law. Technically speaking, the last time we spent the whole line was three years ago. However, the reality is that the Taxpayer is never expressly taxed to provide monies for this line. As long as the Town places this line in its budget, the State populates it with a number; usually in the vicinity of 47k.

In previous years, when we endeavoured to rip up 300 to 500 feet of roadway, replace the underlying ground with appropriate layers of aggregate suited to making up a rugged roadbed, and then paved it, we would use up all of the revenue received as a grant, and then some. Last year, truth be told, we only spent just over 2k of that line. The rest wound up in the Capital Unreserved fund, which is the source of at least 100k under run payed forward as tax offset; heretofore discussed in this meeting minutes and others. Who knows what will happen with this line in the new year. It may get used to redo roads, it may just be used to offset future taxation. As long as the State provides, it will be a part of the budget that vexes us all alike.

Attached at the hip comes the budget for the Transfer Station. Although hinted at in previous meeting minutes, a previously hinted at tightening of this budget did not occur. Although Mr. Meyerhoefer had admitted in the minutes of November 17th, 2021, wherein this department had been padded in previous years, the birds came home to roost. The most recent quote for per tonnage price to haul garbage had increased from \$70 to \$78 per ton. That is an 11% increase in cost. So much for pinching pennies. The Committee would find no savings here.

It was at this point that Mr. Meyerhoefer raised the issue of there being no provision of safety equipment for the two Landfill attendants specifically in the landfill budget. He therefore motioned a line to be added and an amount of \$250.00 be added. Ms. Irving Seconded, adding that they really should have this available as many a winter hour of operation was done well after nightfall. There seemed to be much agreement.

When the vote was had, only Mr. Vlitas and Mr. Pavelka voted in opposition.

Having covered all of the corners of the budget that was coverable, Mr. Bresnahan opened the floor to any other questions that might be of concern.

Talk then moved to a discussion of the nature of Water Department funding. Mrs. McDonough correctly indicated that lines in the budget for the Water Department were not filled in. As a procedural they would be, however, the purview of the Budget Committee to scrutinise was effectively moot, as the Water budget was 100% funded by billing, not taxation. In essence, the Water Department was not a responsibility in oversight by neither the Select Board, nor the Budget Committee. Again, it is a quirk of budgeting law that places its expenditures in the midst of the rest of Town functionality. The upshot is that any check and balance with respect to the Water Department rests on the shoulders of account holders, not Tax payers as a whole.

Mrs. McDonough then raised the issue of, to her knowledge, two distinct individuals that had applied for the position of meter reader that had yet to be filled. Discussion touched upon the general nature of people applying for position, positions that were lamented by Departments as being in need of filling, yet these applicants never hearing back from the advertising Department.

No real answer was ever had to the reason behind this discrepancy.

Mr Vlitaz then wrangled deliberations into the hard and fast of avoiding the slings of rubber stamping and bringing tooth to the procedures. He entered that to have integrity, having voted to reject pay raises for the School District, that the same should be recommended for the Town. He offered that it was a bit more complex in that he felt the FD should get its ask, as it had been too long since any wages in this Department had been increased at all. In addition, given that the Library increase is relatively minimal, they too get their increase. However, he was not at all in favour of the Highway Department, Tax Collector, Town Clerk, nor Administrative Assistant to the Select Board receive any increase. His basic premise is that we all need to share the burden of present economics. Yes inflation is raging, but the ability of the less well off needs to be a consideration in expectations of those employed by the government which experiences revenues solely through taxation.

Mr. Meyerhoefer felt the 3% appropriate for showing of appreciation of the job done by our employees.

Mrs. Hanks agreed, the very well deserved it, but the question remains can we afford it?

Mrs. McDonough stated the absolute reduction in that the Committee is but 11 people of 1100 in Town. Our recommendation could be upturned by the plebiscite in Parliamentary procedure of motion to amend at Town Meeting proper. Indeed, motions to amend the appropriation can be made to increase the Budget Committee number by 10%. Or, it could be amended to reduce that number.

Ms. Rosa felt much the same as Mrs. Hanks. Although she saw the merit in an increase, the cost was of concern.

Chair Moyer then briefly recited that the CPI for 2021 as a whole pegged inflation at 7%. Therefore a 3% increase should be reasonable.

Ms. Irving countered that not all were receiving a 3% pay increase, so therefore, that needed to be a consideration.

In the end, the Committee found itself split. Those in favor of limiting pay increases were Mrs. McDonough, Ms. Irving, Mr. Vlitaz and Mr. Pavelka.

The remaining voted against. The motion failed

Mr. Meyerhoefer then introduced a proffer to remove the 2k from the Parks and Recreation Budget. This harkens back to the November 10th, 2021 meeting, where the Department added this amount to their presentation as a response from a question by the Committee as to whether additional expenditures were not warranted. The Department members conferred for a few minutes and concurred that the steps leading from between the Town Buildings and School, which landed on the ball field, were in need of replacement and that would cost about 2k. There was no second to his motion, so it went no further.

Discussion then moved to finalise the gross amount the Budget Committee would recommend as operating appropriation for the Town of Hill. Marshall Bennett motioned for the amount to be \$1,176,287.00 or \$500.00 less than the Select Board's recommended appropriation. Betty Hanks Seconded.

Mr. Meyerhoefer, Mrs. McDonough, Mrs, Hanks, Rev. Asher, Ms. Irving, Ms. Rosa, Mr, Bennett, and Mr. Moyer voted aye.

Those against were Mr. Vlitas, Mr. Pavelka and Mr. Seymour.

Having thus concluded nominal discussions, the group then concerned themselves with ratification of the previous session's meeting minutes. They were not without difference of opinion on what is appropriate for said genre.

Rev. Asher had many issues with the nature of the minutes that she described as being more appropriate for exercises in creative writing. Mr. Vlitas and several members were dubious of his maligning the proceedings of a governmental body, especially at the level of small New England Town. In the end, rather than spending an inordinate amount of time wasted in debating the merits of being liberal with minutes, Mr. Vlitas accepted to strike all of the edits proffered by Carol Asher.

The rest of the edits were solely limited to spelling errors, and two words spaced that could have been truncated to a singular.

Having accepted the minutes as edited, the Committee moved on to general discussion of what was to come and how to schedule for it.

Ms. Irving raised a concern about audibility in the Amsden Auditorium. Ayuh, there could be better sound in there. However, funds to update and expand the PA available seem unavailable at present.

Mr Meyerhoefer raised a concern about a seemingly missing page from the Town Report which had not been in place since 2017. The page in question was titled, "Appropriations, Revenue and Tax Rate." He was adamant that this page provided much needed basic information and asked it be included from this point forward. Mr. Seymour promised to look into it.

Mr. Meyerhoefer then proceeded to ask about the nature of the previous School Board presentations and the ability of the Budget Committee to compare the coming budget with previous year's actual expenditures. Rev. Asher replied that two years of previous expenditures were included as columns in the presentation of December 1st, 2021, and December 15th, 2021. Mr. Meyerhoefer seemed satisfied with this response and replied he would look at those spreadsheets further.

Ms. Irving then raised a question about those on the Committee that were up for re-election. The Candidacy Filing Period from 1/19/2022-1/28/2022 was established, as well as those members up for re-election. They are Mrs. McDonough, Ms. Irving, Ms. Rosa and Mr. Pavelka.

Having reached the straight up hour of 9 o'clock sharp, Mrs, Hanks motioned to adjourn, with Ms. Rosa seconding. It was here the Committee departed into the night, not so cold as the last...