

**Hill Budget Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
January 5th, 2022**

Approved January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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

**Absent with notification:** Thomas Pavelka

**Public:** Charlie Henry  
Eric Herr  
Shelly Henry (Presenting Town Clerk / Tax Collector)  
[online] Charlie Estes, Michelle Munson (Representatives of School Board)

**Meeting Minutes:**

Called to order at 7:00 PM

Shelly Henry began with her presentation of the Budget for the Town Clerk functions. She led off with a general comment that not much had changed from last year's numbers. There was an increase for paying help during elections. There are to be three this year that need to be staffed instead of the nominal two. Hence a need to budget more. A pay increase of 3% was also budgeted. That being the basic totality of changes, Mrs. Henry opened the floor to questions.

Chair Moyer handed out a Consumer Price Index analysis of inflation over the past 5 years as compared to pay raises received in the office; of which two out of the five years Mrs. Henry did not ask for a raise.

Joann Irving asked if the same number of hours were to be worked next year per week. Mrs. Henry replied that the Office Hours themselves would not change. She also works in the office when closed, but those varied by season. Mrs. Henry offered that at the very least she put in 24 hours in order to feel that the Tax Payer was getting their dollar's worth. Some weeks, as in those of an election, she might work 30. Nominal is 26.

Mrs. Henry next answered Ms. Irving's query if the assistant's position had been filled. The position is still open. She reiterated that it had been posted twice. The current pay rate is set at \$15.00 per hour, but that seems to be too little to attract applicants. One applicant began to train, but resigned before receiving enough to be of any help or actually work office hours. The search continues.

Ms. Irving then asked what was spent for the \$3000.00 on the line delineated Computer Software Support. Mrs. Henry started to talk about the various software packages that are required to operate the Town Clerk's office such as the proprietary software for dog registrations. From there talk drifted into the line earmarked for Equipment (New & Upgrades). The \$900.00 entered there should purchase a new printer for the printing of registrations of vehicles. The State of New Hampshire used to provide them. As with many things the State used to do, they have made it the onus of the Municipality to provide.

Mr. Bennett asked how long the printer was expected to last. Mrs. Henry was unsure, but hoped for at least five.

Mr. Herr pointed out that while the line for wages had increased, there was not a commensurate increase in payroll tax. Mrs. Henry said she would definitely make that adjustment.

Wendy Rosa asked if the full 10k appropriated for the assistant would be spent. Mrs. Henry could not say for sure. If the skies opened tomorrow and a qualified applicant appeared, Mrs. Henry would attempt to get them all the training needed and utilise them as soon as she could. If no one was hired for months, obviously the full amount would not be spent.

Questions seemingly at an end, Mr. Vlitaz revisited the CPI discussion. He felt the Committee should use more than just CPI as data by which decisions on pay raises were to be arrived at. Chair Moyer concurred and offered that his handouts were in aid of that pursuit and that members were able to include others. Mr. Vlitaz offered that everyone is being outpaced by inflation. He felt the Budget Committee needed to consider the reality of asking those least able to tighten their belts, do so in these economic times in order to provide pay raises on both the Town and School side of funding. He did concede that the Fire Department was in woeful need of increased pay rates, and he would support those.

Mrs. Henry rebutted that she does not receive benefits, so her request does not place near the burden that full time benefited employees would. She also relayed that pay raises were how you showed your appreciation for the work being done in a timely and professional fashion. She wondered what kind of message was being sent to employees if they did not receive a pay raise.

Ms. Rosa offered that she supported pay raises, but wondered if the Tax impact could be mitigated by finding ways to lower expenditures elsewhere. Mrs. Henry wondered how you could do the same on less, given that inflation was impacting the cost of goods and services that are necessary for the Town Clerk and Tax Collector to function. She also pointed out that many of her big costs, such as Professional Services, largely spent on Legal expenses, were flat funded.

A question was raised if Traveling expenses were always spent to the penny. Mrs. Henry enumerated the ways in which mileage was charged, it being a function predominately of trips to the bank and out of office training, which she expected to engage in this year. She additionally relayed that if she were to succeed in getting an assistant all the training needed, much of it out of office and therefore eligible for mileage re-reimbursement, the fund would definitely be fully expended.

Betty Hanks then asked how many distinct Tax Bills are sent out. Mrs. Henry was unsure and would get a definitive number for her.

Ms. Irving asked about delinquent tax bills. Mrs. Henry had just given the Select Board a report on such and was expecting she might have need for that information at this meeting. Of the bills due July 1st of 2021, 97% of the gross amount billed had been payed. Some \$40,000.00 remain to be remitted. Of the bills due 12/30/2021, 90% of the total amount billed has been received. \$114,000.00 remains due.

Rev. Asher then asked about the process for Tax Abatements. As that was a process that dealt with

whether an assessment was fair, talk quickly moved to the ability of the elderly to receive a reduction in Tax Billed. It was revealed that only 1 or 2 households total in Hill currently receive such. It was also discussed that the Select Board was in the process of trying to author a Warrant Article that would adjust the fiscal qualifications necessary to meet in order to receive a reduction. The two basic ingredients to the recipe are household income, and value of assets owned by the owner. Only owners that occupy their residence are eligible. There will also be a length of residency requirement included. While there is every hope it will be ready for voters at the March Town Meeting, it is not an absolute certainty just yet.

It was at this point the Committee undertook a non-binding vote on the Town Clerk and Tax Collector's submitted budget. Mr. Vlitaz voted against. Mrs. McDonough abstained. All other members present voted aye.

Business then turned to filling in an exact number for the Budget Committee to recommend as the total appropriation for the School District. As per the December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, meeting minutes, the vote held on December 15<sup>th</sup> to not recommend pay raises required a follow up number to be produced. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Chair Moyer sent an email requesting that number from the School District. The District sent a new 11 page Budget break down that included a new column titled FY23 BC Proposed. The BC stands for Budget Committee. However, before getting to that bottom line budget number, an in depth discussion was had about the layout of the report.

Paul Meyerhoefer asked to have clarified a seeming discrepancy in the Dollar Difference column. It all distilled down to the embedded equation which calculated that number in the Spreadsheet used to produce the budget. Where the Budget Committee was used to seeing the right two most columns of appropriations operated upon to achieve the Dollar Difference, it was actually the second and third from the right that were being compared. That clarified, the final number of \$2,164,330.00 would be the recommendation of the Budget Committee.

Discussion then focused on the Bureaucratic minutia surrounding the Public Hearing on the School District Budget, currently scheduled, Omicron be damned, for Wednesday February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in the Amsden Auditorium.

Mr. Meyerhoefer asked if the 11 page document from the School District represented a YTD spending. Rev Asher replied that it was not. It did have data for total expenditures in previous years that could provide some data for comparative analysis. He then asked about the line that indicated a decrease in retirement appropriations. Indeed it should have, as it was located in the Budget Committee column and would reflect that less retirement would be needed if no pay raises were received.

Discussion then moved to the nature of costs associated with Special Education needs of Middle and High School Students. That precipitated outlining the expenditure of almost all the Unexpected (regular needs) Tuition Fund in pursuit of making up the cost of 8 unforeseen placements in Newfound. It was relayed that a Warrant Article is to be on the School District Meeting Agenda which will seek to bring the fund back to its previous balance of 32K.

Mrs. McDonough then asked if every School District must have a Business Administrator. Rev. Asher affirmed it was required by law. This led to a brief discussion of how much the Business Administrator was paid. That was never answered. Mr. Vlitaz indicated that expenditure was folded into a line with

other contractors, and therefore was less than transparent on the part of the School Board. Mr. Herr was tasked with making copies of another breakout of staff that was proffered as listing all employed. Yet, when produced, a line for Business Manager was not present. Mr. Bennett concurred that even both documents combined did not allow for the granularity that should be present.

Ms. Irving then decided to touch the third rail. She astutely noted that each year the School District winds up not spending all they appropriate. As documented on their revenue page, The School Board votes to take an amount from what is called a Fund Balance and apply it to offset taxation. For the 22-23 school year, 153k was taken from the Fund Balance and applied to reduce taxation. She then went on to opine that the School Board was emphatic that every dime is needed and that the Budget Committee should not recommend a lower appropriation, yet the budget for next year indicates that they should be able to come up with \$106,022.00 to offset taxation, based on a 5 year average. How can the School Board cry poor, if they never spend all they tax the citizenry for?

Rev. Asher outlined how the School Board essentially budgeted for worst case scenarios and needed to keep money on hand for the unforeseen unforeseens.

Ms Irving replied that there was some wisdom in that, especially in light of inflation continuing to rear its ugly head. However, she believed there could be a better balance that was fair to the Tax Payer and gave some cushion for the School District.

Mrs. McDonough then relayed how she had gone through the initial budget, which asked for a 5% pay raise and the second which asked for a 3%. She found that, for what ever reason, the 3% budget had reductions in lines other than pay and benefits. Then she focused on the fact that the person staffing the lunch room was to receive more than a 3% raise. In addition she found the overall amount appropriated to be unjustifiably expensive for the duties.

Carol Asher rebutted that the position was not unduly overpaid.

Betty Hanks relayed that it is a lot of work to be the sole cook at the Jennie D Blake. She did however wonder if the pay scale of a position that was in a school of hundreds could be expected of a school with about 50.

Chair Moyer then corralled the group and asked if they all thought that enough information was made available in order to present at the Public Hearing. All concurred that enough had been plumbed, and that further rooting was not necessary.

Next on the Agenda was to be a presentation by the Water Department. Unfortunately the Chair was ill and could not make it. A paper presentation of their budget with accompanying description was made available. Ms. Irving pointed out that by and large the Water Department presentation is procedural. The Town must allocate money for its operations, however, since those operations are not funded by any Taxation, it is a placeholder required by budgeting laws. The real check and balance of the Water Department rests in each subscriber, as 100% of the operating budget is funded by Water Bills.

That agreed upon, Mr. Herr asked if the Budget Committee had agreed upon the format for the Hearings and Meetings. He wondered if they were going to be absolutely traditional, a hybrid of in person and online participation, or perhaps all online. Since the Town had made no provisions to fund a perennial

Zoom account, Mr. Seymour indicated he was not looking forward to having to find money for a new subscription. It was generally accepted that so many scenarios could be projected, it would be better to wait and let events unfold before entering into considered dialogue as to what should be planned.

The Committee then went on to review and edit the meeting minutes from December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. There were the standard few incorrect spellings. Chair Moyer asked for Mr. Seymour to confirm the veracity of two paragraphs and they stood as written. An addition was made to one paragraph further elucidating the duties of the newly hired Administrative Police Chief. A reference to previous meeting minutes was clarified with addition of date.

That wrapped up, Mr. Moyer turned discussion towards reviewing the schedule of meeting left in the season and how to adequately advertise the Hearings and Meetings proper for both the Town and School District Agendas. The Post Office, Library and Town offices all have posting boards that would definitely be used. Some disagreement was had in opinion as to whether the Village Store had a board that was available for use and / or should be used. Mr. Bennett thought it would be a good idea to do some advertising at the Transfer Station. Many agreed with him.

Chair Moyer then promised to formally list the timeline for filing requirements, advertising deadlines and perhaps the actual notices themselves for the next meeting.

Having only required one hour and thirty five minutes, a veritable record time, to once again ask all that could be asked, Mr. Bennett made the motion to adjourn. Mrs. Hanks seconded the motion.