

**Hill Budget Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 2nd, 2022**

Accepted February, 9th, 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: Shaun Bresnahan Jr, (Representing Select Board)

Meeting Minutes:

Called to order at 7:00 PM

Initially, this meeting was to be solely devoted to firming up how to go about presenting the Town's budget at the Hearing scheduled for Tuesday, February 8th. The Select Board, however, found time in the last two weeks to pen a whole new Warrant Article, and find need for additional expenditures within the Police Department. Chair Moyer outlined that those two additions needed consideration before discussing the nuts and bolts of the Hearing.

Mr. Bresnahan then relayed that a previously employed police patrol person had reached out and indicated that they would be willing to once again patrol for us, now that their health issues had been surmounted and they had been re-certified for active police duty. The Patrol Person would be a fixture for 36 weeks of this year, and do 8 hours of patrol each week at \$20.00 per hour. Cost to the Taxpayer would be just over 6K in wages and payroll deductions. It was noted that this rate is drastically less than a contract with the State Police to patrol the same number of hours would cost.

Other Towns in our region that have eliminated their Department, and who now contract services with the State Police, were cited paying 4 times as much for the same number of hours. In addition, it was proffered that given the long history this person has in previous employment by Hill, their familiarity with the community was a dividend that could never be realised with a rotating patrol from the State. The reality of State coverage is that patrols would be assigned to whomever was willing to pull overtime that week; not the same officer every week.

Ms. Rosa asked about the nature of hours that would be patrolled. The plan is to let the new Administrative Chief decide. Indeed, the patrol person in consideration had previously only patrolled during hours of daylight. It was relayed that night hours would be asked of them. Questions as to exact hours and patrol areas were answered politely, but not in great detail. It all hearkens back to a general consensus that the Town would rather not publicly document the exact hours to be patrolled, as that would be self defeating. Suffice to say, there would be a renewed impetus to patrol hours that had not been in a long time.

It was at this point that Mr. Vlitas raised an issue, not with the addition of a patrol person where one had not been anticipated this year, but the details of the Administrative Chief's allocation. He outlined that in previous meeting minutes the Select Board had outlined that the position would be funded for a

minimum of 10 hours per week. Given that, his math showed that at 500 hours for the year anticipated, the appropriation of 32K resulted in an effective hourly rate of \$60.00 per hour. It was here the Select Board stated the Contract stipulated a billing rate of \$42.00 per hour. Additionally the 32K was to be a cap in wages and payroll taxes. He entered into the record that was a precedent he was not comfortable with at all. Before moving to alter the line, a bit of discussion was had.

Ms. Rosa asked about the nature of the line and it was explained that the line was an upper limit and that it was hoped that would not be reached. It was also proffered that the actual contract, that has been already signed, did not peg the rate at 60 per hour, but that rate was closer to 40 per hour. Still, Mr. Vlitaz was wary of even that rate being established for any employee of the Town.

Rev. Asher asked about the nature of taxing that income. As it is a contract position, the Town, technically, is not on the hook to pay any payroll deductions nominally charged to an employee. Rather, it was kind of rolled into billing and it was understood the rate reflected a lower overall per hour billing but allowed for what would be levied in personal taxes filed.

Mrs. McDonough voiced a concern about the fact that the Chief also had two other part time jobs at present. She was worried that in all likely hood, Hill would, "Wind up at the bottom of the Totem Pole."

Discussion then moved to a vague, but damning indictment of previous Departmental management. Mr. Bresnahan relayed that already in his archaeological dig into paperwork, the Administrative Chief had found and was on the way to rectifying numerous problematic issues. It was also relayed that this delve into the depths was largely completed and well on its way to rectification. The problems identified seem to be centered on a time period between 2017 and the recent demise of the Police Department.

Mr. Vlitaz then motioned, given the math, a reduction from \$32,400.00 to \$20,000.00 was in order. He failed to get anyone to second the motion. Although there was some discussion of the consideration, on the prompting of Chair Moyer for a second, and having no one to do so, Chair Moyer pronounced the motion official as having failed.

Ms. Rosa continued the discussion with a philosophical probe into the possibility of transposing funds from the Administrative line to the patrol wages allocation. The dissection of the ramifications orbited around the necessity of the Administrative Chief to now have three roles. In all sessions heretofore, the Committee was presented with budgets that outlined an Administrative role being concerned with the unraveling and then correct management of the quotidian. Secondly, but not lesser in importance, would be the facilitation of the public discussion of what to do about Policing going forward. Now, however, the budget at hand included the management of a part time Patrol Person.

Mr. Bresnahan indicated that if monies were taken away from the total available to Administrative pursuits, the ability to completely and effectively administer the newly anticipated return of a patrol person would be jeopardised.

Mr. Vlitaz then pointedly rejected the proposition in terms of time management. If indeed, as proffered the paperwork juggernaut had been basically successfully navigated, how could billed hours add up to 10 per week if all the Administrative Chief was involved in pertained to the servicing of one part time patrol person and the pursuit of public input on what to do about Policing from this point forward? Mr. Vlitaz went on to opine that it was not the purview of the Budget Committee to hold the Select Board accountable to that end. Rather, he needed to double down and attend a Select Board meeting in which

he would ask they do a full accounting for hours spent in the duties of Administrative Police Chief. Mr. Bresnahan replied that should Mr. Vlitas so inquire, the Select Board has already made sure that was done. In fact, the hire for Administrative Chief dutifully submits a report each pay period of how many hours were spent and in what pursuits those hours pursued.

Mrs. McDonough then asked a theoretical question about the ability of the Select Board to be creative with allocations. In the possibility that the Administrative Chief could discharge their duties in less monies allocated, could then the money be put towards paying the newly anticipated patrol person either more dollars per hour, or more hours patrolled at parity pay. This thought had also been echoed previously and in concert by Ms. Rosa.

Ultimately, as pointed out by Mr. Meyerhoefer this was not within the operating norm of Committee. The Budget Committee simply does not have the authority to proscribe spending in that form.

At this point, Chair Moyer asked if any more discussion was to be had, or if a member would motion to vote on accepting the new Police Budget as a whole. Mr. Bennett moved so. Mr. Moyer 2nd the motion. The vote found Mr. Vlitas the only member opposed. All others present, nine in total, voted in favour.

Next on the docket was a brand new spanking Warrant Article that, if recommended and finally approved by plebiscite, would replace our present 10 year old 550 series plow truck with dump body replaced by new equivalent. The truck sought would still be of a 1 and ½ tonne load specification, its engine, however is up for debate.

Diesel engines used to be simple as compared to gasoline Internal Combustion Engines. In addition, diesel engines always out performed gas in the measurement of Torque. That is why Towns have relied upon that fueling option since trucks have had diesel engines as an option. Legislation of emissions has made that calculus much more intricate.

This reality has lead the Town Select Board into the uncharted waters of purchasing a 1.5 tonne truck powered by, easy now, gasoline! Yup. Them gasoline engines do not produce the same amount of torque in the same RPM range as your good old German Compression Ignited Internal Combustion Engine. Yup, going up the hills, it is the Torque which is the gold standard. However, all things considered, it might just be more prudent to rely upon ye olde sheer horsepower that has always been the gasoline advantage in aggregate measurement.

As drifted into the conversation, in the Village this is not a real consideration. If only the Village was a concern, the Town could get by with a 350, as opposed to the 550 that is being sought. Ever seeking the middle, our Select Board is recommending we still opt for the 550 platform, we just add a gasoline engine to the fleet; as opposed to keeping it completely Diesel based.

Mr. Bresnahan and Mr. Bennett, among others, truly, madly and deeply plunged into the gas vs diesel, ford vs chevy vs dodge debate as far as it could go; at almost any level. In the end, your Town is pursuing all avenues. The bottom line is that if we go gas, it might cost us as little as 106K to replace the 550. Or, brand and Diesel in combination might cost us just over 120K. Which, is why the Select Board is floating a Warrant Article that will cap spending at 125k, but will result in the replacement of that piece of equipment.

It should be finally added that we have a savings account for Heavy Equipment purchases in the Road

Department. At present there is 136K in the account. The Select Board is recommending that all 125K come from that fund. Please note, that if all articles are passed, the article that will add to various Capitol funds will add 35k back to the Road Department Heavy Equipment fund. Therefore, at the end of Town Meeting, the balance of that fund will not be 11K for the following year, should we approve of the purchase, it will be 46K.

Mr. Meyerhoefer asked about the possibility of piggy backing onto State Purchases. Indeed, Mr. Bresnahan affirmed, the State was switching to gas, as opposed to Diesel engines at this Truck size because of engineering and maintenance issues. However, he was not certain that contemporaneous contractual endeavours were available to our purchasing cycle. First consideration was a modern compact being active. The second concern surrounded the ever present spectre of purchasing whilst still negotiating with Covid. Production and supply lines being what they are, the milieu does not side with the purchaser.

Mrs McDonough asked a practical question about what could be recouped from the erstwhile 550. Indeed it seems that the jig is up. Despite the back and forth between public, the Road Department, whomever it is that inspects our equipment for road worthiness, and the Select Board Proper, this truck has reached its end. The Select Board has gone out and interviewed those involved with certifying vehicles as roadworthy. It is steadfast that our present 550 is not going to pass muster. End of Debate.

Our basic concern is a reduction between entirely using the piggy bank, or using a majority and supplementing with a one year bump in taxation. The Select Board deliberated on both. They recommend that it be entirely a purchase from the Highway Heavy Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

Mrs. McDonough had a question, in the theoretical, if a quote came in that was 128K. Mr. Bresnahan replied that it would be rejected. To date, the Town had entertained and received approximate quotes, for trucks in stock, any where from 106K to 122K; depending upon package. Up for consideration was the basic quote for package. This would acquire us a truck, a dump package, and a portion of the plowing accouterments.

Our current 550 could provide us with some legacy infrastructure. We might migrate the main plow. However, we would still be on the hook for a frame, hydraulics and a wing blade that add up to 55K or so. The basic Truck is going to be in the 60K region, depending upon fueling. Gas is always cheaper, with a Diesel engine being an at least 10K premium. The Budget Committee will now leave it to the Hearing session to arrive at a convulsive decision.

At this point, the Committee entered into considerations that were involved, yet, so pedestrian and without uniqueness as to be seemingly without need for documentation. They centered on how to present the entirety of proceedings to date, in a form that was digestible to the populace at large.

Among the points made, with no prioritisation nor complete resolution are:

Mrs. McDonough raised the issue of Department Heads being involved. Points discussed included the almost, “No Brainer situation being that the Department Head could answer questions best.”

Talk then moved to the absolute audibility of the sessions. Ms. Irving raised issues with the Disability Act being met in audibility respects.

To address that reality, it was wondered, proffered and then decided that a new orientation be trialed.

Instead of a main alley dividing the attending persons on a N/S axis, the main alley would be E/W. It was hoped this new broader yet not as deep audience would be better able to hear proceedings as amplified over the existing Public Address System.

From here it was recognised that Mrs. McDonough would help in facilitation of a public process by providing at least 200 N95 masks starting at the Hearing level. While masks are not to be required, a wearing of masks was to be encouraged.

Here the Budget Committee entered into the highly speculative regions of Microphone Cleanliness. Not the least of which surrounded the concept of how do you keep a wireless microphone sterile at a public hearing, let alone the deliberative session itself. Here again the dialogue was extensive, involving personal experiences and proclivities of members in the group setting.

The discussion about distribution of microphones touched upon the possible reticence of many members of the audience to break ranks and queue for a microphone, as opposed to be handed a wireless one as in past proceedings.

It was ultimately decided that both be offered. A stationary microphone will be available for those inclined to move from their initial seats. A wireless microphone will be on hand for those who would rather opine from their seat, rather than move into a focused line of people wanting to opine.

Having reached a general consensus of how to present, and how to allow individual members of the Committee to opine separate as a dissenter to, while affirming these assertions to be completely their own convictions, budgeting on particular line items, the Committee resolved to affirm the proceedings and officiating norms of the Budget Hearing.

Having reached the hour of 8:55 PM, Mrs. McDonough Motioned to Adjourn Proceedings. Mr. Moyer Seconded. It was here they departed....