

Budget Committee Minutes for Public Town Hearing of 2/12/2024

Meeting brought to order by Budget Committee Chairman, Tom Seymour at approximately 6:30pm

Full Attendance of Budget Committee Members were present, and the Chairman introduced all to the attending public as follows: Charles Estes, Ex-Officio for the School Board, Frank Simeone, Betty Hanks, Joan Machado, Joann Irving, Frank Razzaboni, Ex-Officio for the Selectmen, Wendy Rosa, Secretary, Bruce Blazon, and himself Tom Seymour Chairman of the Budget Committee

There were 10 in attendance from the public: The Town Moderator, the Town Clerk and her husband, Two other Selectmen, a Fire Department official, a School Board member, Head of the Historical Society, former Budget Committee Chair, and a former Police Chief.

Tom began by explaining that the Budget Committee has worked long and hard to prepare what you are looking at in front of you tonight. We began in April of 2023 to begin organizing this group. In September we began in earnest with the Budget Committee hearings. Since then, we've had 14 total meetings across the last few months to accomplish what we needed to get done. We have spoken with all of the department heads, School Board multiple and the Board of Selectman multiple times so that we could understand how they derived the numbers that they did so that we could make a determination as to the validity of the numbers that were represented.

He then turned our attention to the three documents that were handed out. The first in review was the Draft Copy of the Budget Committee recommendations. The second to follow was the copy of the Estimated Revenues that is expected for the town this year and lastly, a copy draft of the town warrants that will be seen in March.

GL 4130: Executive Line was agreed on by both Selectmen and Budget Committee. Changes occurring within that department were new equipment (new copier), professional services from the financial audit group that the town employs to check its books every single year. Their contract price went up causing the bulk of the increase to the executive line.

There was also an increase assessed by the Board of Selectmen for an increase in the Administrative Assistant's wages of which Tom Seymour recused himself from any input, motions or voting due to conflict of interest.

GL 4140: Election regulations and vital statistics which went up due to the number of elections that will be held this year (4). This was agreed upon between the two groups. (Selectmen and Budget)

GL 4150: Financial Administration. That line went up to include wage increase for the tax collector. Both groups again falling in line with those recommendations.

GL 4152: Revaluation of Properties went up substantially due to the two contractors increase in charges. Amount agreed upon by both groups.

GL 4153: Legal Expenses. The Budget Committee recommends increasing this line from the Selectmen's proposed \$5500 to \$15,000. In review of the expenses incurred last year, it seemed prudent to increase the allowance to cover upcoming expenses. The discussions that were had at the multiple meetings along with some consensus from the Select Board brought us to the proposed Budget Committee recommendation for the Legal expense line.

GL 4155: Personnel Administration increased due to workman's comp. claims and the needs were agreed upon by both groups.

GL 4194: General Government Building decreased, no contentions here. The Chairman continued with review of the Budget Committee/Selectman Proposals noting that there was agreement between the two groups.

****Special notations:**

GL 4210: The Police Department increases come from this being the first year funding a full-time Police Chief along with his full-time retirement package regulated by the state. There was a decrease however, in the health insurance line for the Chief as he opted to pair up on his wife's policy, a significant savings for the town.

GL 4220: The Fire Department decreased this year, a good sign of progress with the responsible and positive changes made to the building, equipment, and heating system. There has also been a decrease in their administration line.

GL 4520: The Parks and Rec. Committee has asked for an increase in their budget to allow for improvements as well as contracted effort with The Tapply-Thompson Community Center (TTCC) of Bristol. The Budget Committee supports this enthusiastically as it provides so many services for our kids and adults that this town cannot afford. Chairman Seymour notes that in breaking down the amounts paid for each kid would come out to approximately \$200 per child/per year. This seems more than fair for the amount of services and needs supplied to our residents by the Center. The TTCC can be reviewed online at: ttccrec.org

GL 4440: The welfare line decreased as we do not, as a town, anticipate the unique situation that drove the increase previously to occur again. We are happy to support the Local Food Pantry as a number of Hill residents do benefit from it.

GL 4312: Contractor's fees were up this year driving an increase to the Waste and Sanitation line.

GL 4312: Highways and Streets saw an increase in budget proposals due to much needed work to be done as well as urgent building repair needs. They also saw an increase in insurance coverage for an employee going from single person health insurance to two person for as well as wage increases for all. This department is working hard to be frugal while getting the building and town work done properly and efficiently. The Budget Committee and Select Board fully support their efforts.

The total General Government Budget proposals are as follows:

Select Board: 1,378,596.74

Budget Committee: 1,388,096.74

Reflecting the \$9500 increase recommended by the Budget Committee in the Legal Expense line to handle Town litigation costs.

The second order of business was the Source of Revenue Report and Estimate

Chairman Seymour reviewed the source of revenues by category with comment.

****He notes that the Water Revenue number is the same as what was reviewed on the Expense sheet. It is the "other side of the coin", the offsetting revenue. The subscribers are the only contributors to the Water expense and revenue, it is not funded through taxation.**

The total of anticipated and estimated revenues is 687,461.28 agreed upon by both the Select Board and the Budget Committee.

Next review was the Town Warrant Articles with no questions from the public.

The Public Hearing was then closed, and Budget Committee continued with deliberations.

In regard to Revenues reporting Charlie Estes brought up discussions online GL 3914. His concern is how is it to be reported, what is best way to report it and how do we reconcile. Bruce Blazon notes that it is an erroneous number that in business books would be reported as a footnote, the footnote being the explanation for it. While he agrees with Charlie, we don't want erroneous numbers, it will need to be corrected in procedures going forward. The question of how to report it at this point to the DRA was also a concern Mr. Estes brought forth and Chairman Seymour stated that he would call DRA to get advisement on that. The Budget Committee then voted unanimously to continue with acceptance of the Estimated Revenues.

The Warrant Articles were then deliberated, and the results are as follows:

Article 1. Stating voting day will be March 12, 2024 at the Hill Public Library beginning at 11am

Article 2. Was just reviewed and The Budget Committee recommends the amount of 1,388,097 for general municipal operations exclusive of individual and special warrant articles. Selectmen proposal is 1, 378,597 as written.

Article 3: The Original statement was different than what is presented here. After discussion and input from public attending Selectman, Shaun Bresnahan, the article was accepted and recommended as written by both Select Board and Budget Committee.

Articles 4-12 were reviewed and recommended by both Select Board and Budget Committee.

The meeting was then adjourned by appropriate motions and vote.