Budget Committee Meeting Minutes

November 15th, 2023

Attendees: Frank Webber, Sheila Sturm, Leslie Formby, Joan Cleary, Howard Brown, Sean Mamone, John Arico, Bill McKinney

On Zoom: Kim Roberge

Not in attendance and excused: Tim Berry

Meeting called to order at: called to order at 6:36 pm

Agenda: (items may be moved ahead if a previous item finishes early)

6:30 - 6:40: Opening public comments – No public comments.

6:40 - 6:45: Approval of minutes from October 24th- Motion to accept the minutes: LH Second LF, Minutes are accepted

6:45 - 7:30: Review and discussion of budget- new budget just printed today. Highway department has increased the budget. Bottom line has a percent increase. BW asks for a column to be added to show how much each line has increased by percentage. KR asked that there be descriptions on the budget as well. Selectboard is evaluating whether to give a 5% increase though the COLA is 3.2%. Any parameters put out by the board of selectman regarding department heads, SM and HB. No guidance given. HB asked to hold off until budget committee had a chance to look at it. HB asked Joan to put 3, 4, 5% down. HB pointed out the slight difference between 3.2% and 4%. LH says employees received a 9% raise last year and she could not imagine receiving another 5% raise this year. HB said since there is no merit increase to town employees, the selectboard was considering a 5% raise. JC said the health insurance increase is 7.9% July through December next year. MV Town employees receive fully paid (100% employer paid) health insurance. SM says moot point regarding health insurance and impact of wage increases to health insurance. JC says the town has SchoolCare Green plan. LH says it is the best plan to have right now.

New Budget spreadsheet sent out last night perc. KR wants to be able to highlight the changes via color coded. KR says the largest increase is the ambulance. $17,000-$100,000. JC says for years and years we have been sending $17,000 to Amherst for ambulance service without invoice. Amherst selectboard reached out to our selectboard, to notify the selectboard that the cost was low and “your freeride is over and Amherst will be looking at six figures for ambulance service”. JC says $100,000 in the budget now is not an actual figure. JC will go back to the drawing board and look at all possible scenarios for ambulance service. KR asks if it is the thought process to reach out to an abutting town as well, and who does it. HB Police and Fire were in the meeting. HB says going to other than Amherst or Milford would be to far away. NB is too far and Wilton is already contracted with 2 or 3 other towns. Cost will be comparable to the $100,000. Caution is cost recovery of billing residence says SM. HB says the MV had only 120 calls last year and the ambulance automatically bills health insurance first. There was a question as to why the need to pay $100,000. JC was not aware of the reason. KR do we also make sure we are in line with what other towns pay. $100,000 is a place holder says JC. JC explained that the $17,000 ambulance service payment had been in place since1975 contract. BM asked what is the mutual aid agreement with the fire department? BM explained that in 1975, it was the Amherst rescue squad but it is now the Amherst fire and rescue and there is a mutual aid agreement between Amherst and Mont Vernon. SM says that he just went through this with Hudson and Litchfield. HB says the selectboard would like to increase the percentage over a few years instead of having one large payment in one year.

KR says there is an Increase in the forest fires budget section, it jumps from $170 to $750. JC will have to ask the reason.

KR questions the reason the elections section is increasing. JC says elections are increasing because there are 4 elections. KR wants to know what the amount is to increase for the supplies for a voting machine. KR asks “Did we know in purchasing the voting machine? Is it a $10,000 every time there's elections? Is it every 4 elections? Is it what breaks out that number? And then is the detail for every election, or only for the Presidential, or what's the breakdown of that as well.”

KR says it may be easier for the budget committee if we came up with a list of questions for each department.

Budget committee returned to a wage increase discussion. SS says she supports a 3.2% increase and doesn’t understand the logic to round up the COLA. thrown out SM, 3.2% says SS, KR says the thing that is different is there are many years where stipend positions did not get any increases now those are increased as well. Presume that is a selectman’s move. Some departments have presented wage and benefit studies and the wages have increased for those departments. KR says not all departments have presented wage studies. LH believes the Public Works department also received an increase in wages. It was made clear that this was not true other than for the public works department director. KR says since not departments received an increase, maybe there should be a wage study. LH says the pubic work department head could have come in to request an increase in wages but he did not. KR says selectboard should have ordered if to do so. LH says that we should conduct a wage and benefits study using the Municipal Association. HB says he was just seeking feeling of the room and will go back Monday night and talk about it with Selectboard. HB says he will investigate wage and hour study. KR says we should be looking at recent raises and what they got and have they fallen behind or are not keeping up with what other towns are doing. SM says caution about rounding up or always playing catch up. SM doesn’t want the wages to fall behind again and then we must give a big increase to have the wages stable with other towns. SM says the health insurance is a rich benefit, very rich, and we need to keep and attract employees. $9,000 is the only difference between 3.2% and 4%. KR questions if other towns have 100%. Employer paid health insurance. KR recommends we look at the whole package. JA says to support a 5% wage increase, we will have to look at it by individual departments. LH says, I don't know that it is the committee's responsibility to look at the wages and make the determination as to whether somebody deserves a raise higher than others. I don't know if that's fair. I think that everybody should get the same wage increase the way that we've been doing it across as has been done for many years. If their wages are not keeping with other towns, the selectboard should look at that and make decisions about what they want to propose. I don't think it's our decision to say, well, you deserve a 5% raise, and you deserve 2% raise. I don't see that as a budget committee responsibility at all.

KR questions the Town Clerk’s postage line KR asks that anything over 20% should have a reason next to it in the budget line.

KR questioned the pavement marking line item and asked if it was being done again this year. JC agreed to investigate it.KR questioned a fire department line increase. She asks for explanation on increases above 20%. KR questions the increase in the police cruiser payment. KR questions the increase in police overtime. LH asked that JC provide the hourly wage for each town employee.

7:30 - 7:50: Discussion of scheduling department head interviews

Will invite individuals that have already spoken to selectboard to meeting. JA says the budget committee report is due by the end of February. Next budget committee meeting dates and who should attend. FW said there may not be a need for a meeting if the department heads have not met with the selectboard about their budget submissions. The budget committee agreed. JC says the police budget will most likely not change:

11/29- Anything over 20%+ in budget increase, we need answers. PD Department.

12/15

12/30

KR says I understand that it's only November but let's just say I'm looking at the land view management under the Conservation Commission, and I know that people submit their things later in the year, but their budget is flatlined or it's gone down. They budgeted $7,122, and they spent $2,600. They budgeted $5,100 and spent nothing so far this year. Howard knows that I really thought that the trees along the view lot should be removed. And that'd be part of the land view and management, aspect and scrub trees are still growing up, so we can't view that as we drive down the hill. We need an explanation as to why something hasn't been spent yet, or has the has an invoice just not been submitted?

7:40 - 7:50: New business- none

7:50 - 8:00: Closing public comments- none

8:00: Meeting adjournment 7:45 pm. SS and FW all in favor.