Budget Committee Meeting

Town of Gorham

Gorham Town Hall

Public Meeting Room

Minutes of FEBRUARY 13, 2024

Members Present: Mary White, Adam White, Marie Duguay, Judy LeBlanc, Paul Bousquet, and Stephanie Russell

Absent: Greg O’Neil, Dio Thagouras, and Kathy Corrigan

Town Staff Present: Peter Gagnon, Town Manager; Bronson Paradis, Finance Director; Christina Zornio, Town Clerk

Minutes Taker: Shelli Fortin

AGENDA ITEMS & DISCUSSION

**1.** Call to order: 5:00 PM by Mary White

**2.** Review of Elections and Town Clerk Budget

Judy LeBlanc advised that the Selectboard met and voted to recommend the Town Clerk budget with the 3.5% raise.

Mary White asked why the bottom line was still the same, and Bronson Paradis advised it is because health insurance will not start until March. It was noted that the hourly rate should be $22.77, not $22.75.

Christina Zornio advised that although the position is budgeted at 32 hours, her intention is to work 30 hours per week, with some additional hours budgeted for elections or any extra time needed. Ms. Zornio noted that her budget is not a constant, but different every year. Ms. Zornio noted that there is always a workload, and she is dedicated to her job and to doing a good job.

Judy LeBlanc advised that they were able to find a work-around for the health insurance issue, as the Town Clerk is also the Deputy Tax Collector, and those hours are as a town employee. The Selectboard was able to make a special exception to the personnel policy due to this. Mary White asked if there were a certain number of hours required, and LeBlanc advised that although the personnel policy lists 30 hours for benefits, this is a unique combined position.

Bronson Paradis advised that the $0.02 difference in the hourly wage comes to $34.00 per year. Ms. Zornio advised that the budget will not need to be changed, as there are extra hours budgeted to cover it.

**On a motion by Stephanie Russell, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the Board voted to approve the Election/Town Clerk budgets as presented. Mary White – abstain, Adam White - abstain**

**3.** Review of Minutes of February 1, 2024

**On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Adam White, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of February 1, 2024, as written.**

**4.** Resignations

Mary White read a letter to the Budget Committee:

On June 30, 2023 I unanimously was elected as the Chairperson for the Gorham Budget Committee.

When I am given a leadership role like that, I prepare for it so I can do the best job I possibly can. To that end, I reviewed various publications from the New Hampshire Municipal Association. I consulted numerous times with the Association’s legal team whenever I had questions about procedures, protocol, and rules. I reviewed New Hampshire laws related to Budget Committees.

I also worked very hard to run meetings using a standard process that encouraged everyone, whether they were seasoned veterans or newly elected members of the Budget Committee, to ask questions, share information, offer ideas, and discuss details related to the budget. After all, that is what the Democratic process is all about.

In short, I’m very proud of the extensive and time-consuming work I have done while serving as a volunteer on the Gorham Budget Committee.

However, not everyone has appreciated my efforts.

On multiple occasions during the budget season, I personally have been subjected to verbal abuse, aggressive attitudes, and blatant disrespect from various individuals.

For me, the final straw happened at our last work session. I don’t need to get into all the details of what occurred that night. Everything that was said at the February 1, 2024 Gorham Budget Committee Meeting is recorded on the Town Hall Live Stream video for anyone who wants to see and hear what actually took place.

I have spent a lot of time since that work session reflecting on how to best respond to the most recent round of negative behaviors towards me.

I ultimately realized that I have too much self-respect to allow verbally aggressive and angry people to continue using me as their verbal punching bag.

No one, but especially a volunteer, should have to tolerate the negative behaviors to which I repeatedly have been subjected while serving on the Gorham Budget Committee this year.

Therefore, in light of the repeated and targeted verbal abuse, aggressive attitudes, and blatant disrespect to which I have been subjected over the past several months from various individuals while exercising my role as Chairperson, I have made the decision to officially resign from the Gorham Budget Committee, effective on February 13, 2024 at 6:00 P.M.

I’m sure there will be plenty of people in Town Government positions who will be doing a happy dance because of my decision.

In reality, it’s a very sad day for Gorham taxpayers when a dedicated and highly qualified volunteer Gorham Budget Committee Chairperson repeatedly is bullied with verbal abuse, aggressive attitudes, and blatant disrespect by a handful of angry Department Heads and others, to the point where she feels the need to withdraw from her publicly-elected position on the Gorham Budget Committee…all because she had the audacity to ask questions, present alternative information, and make proposals for viable ways of doing things differently in Gorham in order to reduce property taxes for our residents and property owners.

Sincerely,

Mary C. White

Mary White left the meeting.

Adam White advised that he was also resigning from the Board and left the meeting.

**5.** Next Meeting Date

Tuesday, February 13, 2024, 6:30 pm Public Hearing

**6.** Adjournment

**On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Marie Duguay, the meeting was adjourned at 5:20 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelli Fortin