

**BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES OF
AUGUST 23, 2011**

Members Present: Robert Balon, Robert Demers, Bruce Lary, Jay Holmes, Jeff Schall, Paul Robitaille (filled in for Terry Oliver as representative for the Board of Selectmen).

Members Absent: Tiffany Kenison, Terry Rhoderick, Steve Roy, Terry Oliver

Member Excused: John Losier

Others Present: Robin Frost, Denise Vallee, David Graham, Jeff Stewart, Jennifer Stewart, P.J. Cyr, Austin Holmes, and Don Provencher

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Lary at 6:34 pm.

Prior Meeting Minutes: Chairman Lary stated that he had been informed by the Town Manager that she had received a letter of resignation from Debra Ackerman and that Debra had not submitted minutes for the previous meeting, therefore, there were no minutes to review and accept.

2011 Budget Review: Ms. Frost stated that the budget is in very good shape and on track for this time of the year.

Ms. Vallee then reviewed items of note in the revenue and expense budget reports. She informed the board that the Rooms & Meals Tax is not received from the State until late November/early December. She then stated that the Moose Tour revenue through August 8th totals \$11,937.00. Also noted was that the interest rate for the NH Public Deposit Investment Pool was at .002% this past Monday. Ms. Vallee then pointed out that at the end of the report, it appears that we have collected much more than budgeted for revenues and that this is due to the fact that there is no budgeted amount contained in this report for property taxes. The property tax amount is not posted until after the tax rate is set in October. On the expenditure side of the budget, Ms. Vallee stated that as of the end of July, there should be 42.31% left in the expenditure lines. For the most part, the departmental budgets meet this level. Ms. Vallee also noted that the expense for Property & Liability Insurance and the Workers' Comp insurance has increased by approximately 5% as we lost a portion of our multi-line discount when the Town changed to LGC for health insurance. We will still realize a net savings of over \$13,000. She then pointed out that the Highway Asphalt & Paving line of \$60,000 has been almost entirely expended in August between regular paving jobs and Fieldstone Road. Jeff Schall then inquired as to the budgeted amounts contained in the Capital Outlay portion of the budget. Ms. Vallee explained that the auditor requires us to put these expenditures into the budget report, but that these items are not appropriated as part of the budget. The capital outlay expenditures are covered by transfers in to the General Fund from the various capital reserve funds.

Mr. Demers asked if the Town goes out to bid for heating oil along with the school. Ms. Vallee replied that we had gone out to bid jointly in the past, but that a couple of years ago we stopped that practice as it was difficult for any one office to handle the work required to track all of the entities expenses as the oil company will only invoice one entity. Mr. Demers would like us to revisit going out to bid for oil along with the school.

Mr. Schall then asked about the Streetlight line and whether or not we can make do with a fewer number of street lights. Mr. Robitaille responded that a few years ago every other light was shut off, but that the public requested they be put back on. Ms. Frost then commented that other towns have done surveys to see if anyone would be in favor of shutting some of the lights off.

Mr. Lary asked if timers for the lights might be available. Ms. Frost responded that with PSNH the lights are either off or on.

Mr. Holmes commented that there is a public outcry right now regarding taxes.

Mr. Demers said that he thought we could eliminate every other light up and down the strip and wondered how Chief Cyr felt about that? Chief Cyr stated that safety would be his primary concern.

Mr. Demers added that the lights would have to stay on in neighborhoods where children are playing.

Old Business: Chairman Lary stated again that Debra Ackerman had resigned by submitting a letter to the Town Manager. He asked the committee if they should advertise the vacancy again or rely on word of mouth to fill the clerk position.

Mr. Holmes asked if she had resigned due to the amount of pay? Ms. Frost stated that she resigned for personal reasons.

Mr. Demers asked if anyone on the board would be interested in doing the minutes. Mr. Balon replied that he had "been there, done that."

Chairman Lary then asked the Town Manager to place another ad in the Berlin Daily Sun to be run on a Tues, Wed, and Friday. A cost comparison should also be done on the number of times the ad is run to obtain the best rate.

New Business: Mr. Balon requested Chairman Lary's phone number. Mr. Lary explained that his number was unpublished and that Town Hall office had it in case anyone needed to reach him.

Mr. Holmes mentioned that he was not receiving e-mails and asked that his e-mail be sent to jaysquicklube@yahoo.com.

Ms. Frost then addressed the board and stated that she is concerned about Mr. Balon and his ability to be objective as he has gone on record as being against all the Town departments as well as the department heads. He has made some nasty and inflammatory comments, which he then later removes from his page. She stated that public officials have private lives, but what Mr. Balon has written borders on slander, and that goes to his objectivity. She also stated that advertising the clerk position again will be a waste of money as folks have said that they do not want to deal with the committee's makeup. Mr. Balon said that he has always conducted himself professionally at meetings. Ms. Frost replied that his credibility is zero.

Mr. Lary requested that TM Frost check with the Secretary of State and the Attorney General's office (by phone) to see if a budget committee member should recuse himself from a vote where he has written a letter to the editor containing biased remarks against the Police Department. He also stated that there is a history of legal battles between the Town and Budget Committee. He wants to avoid incurring any legal fees and would like a proper legal opinion.

A discussion was held concerning the attendance of three Budget Committee members at a recent Library Trustees' meeting. The committee members said they were attending as individuals, but there was a comment made at the meeting by one individual that "We are on the budget committee and we are looking for..." which was contrary to being there as an individual.

Mr. Holmes stated that it was "just a feel out" and that he should not have said "we" and that the Trustees were respectful and nice to talk to.

Mr. Lary said that he had no problem with them going to the meeting and that, in fact, they had no quorum that night.

Mr. Balon commented that he had not sent his letter in as a Letter to the Editor, that the paper had chosen to print it that way.

Mr. Balon then said that committee members make personal statements and that it happens all the time on other boards.

Ms. Frost replied that she is asking him to be careful about what he is putting out there.

Mr. Lary stated that there may be a need for a committee member to recuse himself from an actual vote, but not from the discussion.

Mr. Holmes asked if there was any discussion with Berlin regarding combining Dispatch departments. He feels that we should start looking at whether there is a savings now in order to make a more educated decision later.

Mr. Robitaille commented that there would be some difficulty as they do not have the capacity to handle the other towns, unincorporated townships and County, too. He also thought there was a transmission issue.

Mr. Holmes asked that this be revisited.

Mr. Robitaille replied that he would speak with a member of the Berlin Police Commission.

Mr. Lary commented that when this was last looked at, he thought there was some type of issue with the retirement plan being different for Berlin and Gorham employees.

Mr. Demers asked if we can legally combine the services. Mr. Lary responded that we would have to do a contract. Mr. Demers asked if we can contract out police, dispatch, fire, etc. There is about a 15 mile span of area to cover. Mr. Lary responded that some research would have to be done- if there is no benefit, then why do it.

Mr. Lary described situations at AVH where it is difficult to get an officer to respond to the hospital and stated that he has no problem looking at the schools or other departments and checking into all areas. The question is "What are we willing to give up?"

Mr. Robitaille stated that we would ultimately have to give up control and would have to provide the services through the term of the contract. He also felt that Berlin could not provide the services with the current police force.

Mr. Holmes then commented that there are no murders in Gorham and asked if there could be officers on call during certain hours instead of on duty all the time. He wondered if a full time department was required by the State and if there could be limitations on officers driving around with a 50 mile limit on driving per shift.

Mr. Lary stated that checking door lists equals mileage. He also would like to remind the Board of Selectmen/staff to check into these areas.

Chief Cyr stated that he is all for saving tax dollars, but that to shoot from the hip and make decisions without data is not wise. He stated that patrols should still be done but that after 2 AM on Sun thru Thursday there could be an officer on-call and that on Fri and Sat evenings, an officer should be on duty. He also informed the committee that the department is currently dealing with 4 sexual assaults, a case with a 10 mo. Baby with a 3" skull fracture, a \$43,000 theft of cash from one residence and \$6,000 in coins stolen from another residence, 3 domestic violence protective order hearings and added that the Police Department does provide a valuable service.

Mr. Demers is not concerned with the contracts for service to other towns and feels that we need to worry about Gorham first.

Mr. Robitaille said that the contracts with other towns would not be a block and that whether we choose to renew the contracts or not, we would have to meet current commitments. Mr. Demers felt that was a good start.

Ms. Frost commented that we would need to look over the statistics and that one area that is hard to measure is patrolling. If you are patrolling, you don't know what you might be preventing. If you stop patrolling, then crimes are bound to happen.

Mr. Lary stated that in Bethel, Berlin and Glen there were convenience stores that were robbed and in Gorham there were none. Then when the patrols were limited, the bank in Gorham was robbed.

Mr. Holmes then stated that the recreation trailer was old, rundown, and not in a good place. He doesn't like it there or the look of it. He understands that Mr. Stewart "inherited" it.

Mr. Stewart replied that he and Robin had spoken with the Library to move in and share expenses. They have their conference room on the first floor and did not want to give that up. The upstairs is a complete gut job and thousands of dollars would be needed to move in up there.

Mr. Holmes said the trailer makes the whole town look bad and felt the trailer was out of place.

Mr. Lary asked if there was any other new business to discuss and there was none.

Public Comment: Mr. Stewart then asked if he could ask a question as the Recreation Director. He asked whether or not the Budget Committee works for him? Mr. Lary responded that the Budget Committee works for the taxpayers in town. Mr. Stewart asked if the misinformation put out by a committee member was supported by the committee?

Mr. Lary responded that if the committee member represents the committee without authorization, he is out of order.

Mr. Stewart responded that he tried to work with the Library. Moving upstairs does not make any sense. There is not a good entrance in back, there is a dirt path and it is just an emergency exit. Mr. Stewart doesn't want to move his office to Libby Pool. Mr. Stewart then addressed Mr. Balon and said rather than spread rumors or lies, he should call him if he has a question. He added that he expects to see a comment on Facebook gone and that is a demand, he is not making a threat.

Mr. Lary then said that the discussion was getting beyond the scope of the committee.

Mr. Balon stated that he just wrote what he heard from the Library Trustees and that there will be a lot of recusals.

Mr. Cyr then spoke as a resident and told Mr. Holmes that he has good ideas, but that he should be careful who he supports and that his integrity is going down with who you associate with. You should separate yourself from Mr. Balon and then I might support you.

Mr. Holmes responded that he tries to keep open with everyone, from residents in the trailer park to Stoney Brook residents, he wants to get along.

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn was then made by Mr. Schall and seconded by Mr. Demers. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm by Mr. Lary.