Budget Committee Meeting

Town of Gorham

Gorham Town Hall

Public Meeting Room

Minutes of June 20, 2023

Members Present: Mary White, Adam White, Marie Duguay, Kathy Lutz-Corrigan, Dio Thagouras, Judy LeBlanc, Stephanie Russell, and Paul Bousquet

Absent: Greg O’Neil

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

Minutes Taker: Shelli Fortin

AGENDA ITEMS & DISCUSSION

**1.** Call to order: 6:02 PM by Bronson Paradis

**2.** Elect Chair and Vice-Chair

**On a motion by Dio Thagouras, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the nomination of Mary White as Chair.**

**On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Dio Thagouras, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the nomination of Paul Bousquet as Vice-Chair.**

**3.** Review Minutes of March 14, 2023

**On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Marie Duguay, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of March 14, 2023 as presented.**

**4.** Old Business

Mary White passed out copies of the Oath of Office to new members from the Town Clerk.

**5.** New Business

a. Meeting Limit

**On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Adam White, the Committee voted unanimously to set a two-hour limit on meetings.**

b. Information to be Requested by the Budget Committee from Department Heads

The Committee decided that it would be best to review the budget before making any requests.

c. Introductions

Budget Committee members and staff members introduced themselves, as there were several new members in attendance.

d. Budget Review

Bronson Paradis reviewed the budget as of May 31, 2023, and advised that overall they are in a great place. At this point in the year, they should have about 58% remaining, and they currently have 63%.

In reviewing the Executive Office budget, Paradis advised that the Town Manager Permanent Position line is over as the new Town Manager worked more than contracted some weeks while training. The BOS minutes taker position is also over, as it is taking longer to get done. The Travel line is over due to Peter Gagnon attending the Primex conference for three days, and a meeting at Plymouth State for housing grants.

The Election and Registration budget had nothing out of the ordinary to report.

In the Financial Administration budget, Bank Services was over due to NSF checks, which do get reimbursed and are listed on the revenue side. The Printing line is low, but this was for the Town Report and will not be used again this year. The Travel line was overspent due to the Primex conference, the NHGFOA conference and Primex HR training for employees. Mary White asked if the travel car was used for any of these conferences or if employees were reimbursed for mileage. Bronson Paradis will get this information. Paradis advised that Phone and Internet reflects a refund/rebate that was received. Postage is purchased by the Finance, but gets cross charged to other departments. The Equipment line is low, as a new desk was purchased for Jessica Paradis.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in the Tax Collector budget.

In reviewing the Assessing/Revaluation budget, Paradis advised that the OT line was used early on for the Town Report, but that not much more should be needed.

There is not much in Legal Expenses at this time. Mary White asked about the appeal on the OHRV case and asked if enough was budgeted for this. Peter Gagnon advised that he does not anticipate it being contentious litigation and that they have received an estimate from the attorney and it should be enough.

Under Planning and Zoning, the Other Misc for Planning is up, however this gets reimbursed in revenues. In the Other Misc for Zoning, this was up due to a lot of site plan review meetings early in the year, but it should level out.

General Government Buildings is on track.

The cemetery budget is good, but may have some cross charges due to some full-time staff being paid ½ from the highway budget and ½ from the cemetery budget.

Paradis noted that half of the insurance is paid at the beginning of the year.

The Police budget is over for the Office Supplies, as new chairs were ordered. This also includes the printer contract service fee.

Paradis advised that the EMS OT is a bit lower than they would like due to staffing issues. They have not had part-time employees available to work. Ambulance revenue is at about $51,000, which is money they have received. Peter Gagnon advised that they just increased rates for billing for EMS. Judy LeBlanc advised they have not received payment for the contracts yet this year from Randolph and Shelburne, which are scheduled for July. Bronson Paradis advised that Dues and Subscriptions is over, and he will check with Phil Cloutier on this.

Paradis noted that Building Inspection will be paid quarterly to Phil Cloutier.

In reviewing the Dispatch budget, Paradis noted that the OT budget is low. The Committee asked if shifts were being filled with part-time employees first and was advised they are not. The Committee noted that this should be addressed when re-negotiating the contract this summer. Peter Gagnon noted that for the Police budget, there is a perpetual staffing shortage and not enough part-time officers to cover shifts. Paradis advised that the Uniform line is low, but this is a one-time cost per year.

In reviewing the Highway budget, Paradis noted that the OT was over, however this was used during the winter months for plowing and should not be used much during the summer. Judy LeBlanc advised that she did some research on the Highway OT and noted that it has been consistent over the last three years. Paradis noted that part of the increase in OT was also due to the increase in wages, which was $1.00 per hour, plus 5-7% depending on longevity, merit, and based on a comparison to other towns. Peter Gagnon advised that it is difficult to hire younger workers, as they do not place as high a value on a stable work environment, health benefits, and pension, as they do the salary. Paradis advised that costs for line paint and signs was up this year. The Vehicle Repairs is up due to some expensive unanticipated repairs that were needed.

The Gas and Diesel lines are cross-charged to other departments as used.

Paradis advised that in the Solid Waste budget, one extra person got their certification.

In the Animal Control budget, licenses have already been purchased for the year and the $500 payment was made to the humane society.

The Welfare budget is a little low, but still on track. Paradis advised that he is still handling welfare, as it is very complicated. Mary White commended him on a good job. Paradis advised they were able to receive a reimbursement through a state grant through CAP for a cold weather shelter stay this winter.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in Recreation or Parks budgets, and Patriotic Purposes has not been used yet this year.

Mary White asked about the Recreation Revolving Fund, and Paradis advised that he asked Jeff Stewart who advised it is looking good.

Mary White asked if there were any unexpected expenses coming up and was advised they cannot think of anything at this time. Peter Gagnon advised that the cost of vehicles is up, as is the wait time to receive them. Gagnon advised they are still on target for matching grant funds for the sidewalks and playgrounds and that they have done well putting money in the Capital Reserve Funds for these projects. Mary White asked about the Stony Brook paving project, and Gagnon advised the weather has held this up a bit. The Committee commended the former Town Manager, Denise Vallee, on her grant writing ability.

Dio Thagouras asked about the Water and Sewer budgets and was advised this department is self-funding, and has no impact on the tax rate. The town provides administration for expenditures.

Some Committee members noted frustration with the budget process last year, and asked if there was a way for the Committee to make requests from department heads for their budgets, such as a flat budget, or a percentage reduction. Peter Gagnon noted that even a request for a flat line budget is a reduction due to increased costs.

Committee members asked about warrant articles. A few members noted that a reduction in the amount in Capital Reserve may help to reduce the tax rate. Members questioned the petitioned warrant articles and if amounts could be reduced, and they were advised it could be done on the floor at town meeting, but the Budget Committee can only recommend or not recommend petitioned warrant articles. A few members noted that when times are tight we have to trim our own budgets at home, and the town may need to do the same. Peter Gagnon advised that they want to be fiscally conservative, and ultimately the townspeople have the vote. Judy Leblanc noted that any cuts from the budget would cut services.

Bronson Paradis noted that when the Budget Committee is presented the budget, it has already been reviewed twice. Once by the Town Manager and Finance Director, and once by the Selectboard.

Mary White noted that she did ask NHMA about the budget and was advised that the better practice is to make any changes before the public hearing, where the changes can be explained to the public, rather than waiting until after the public hearing.

Mary White suggested that the petitioned warrant articles be voted on at the beginning of the Town Meeting, rather than the end. They tend to get lumped together at the end, as people are tired and want to be done. Peter Gagnon responded that they like to discuss the big items first.

Mary White stated that she would like to see department heads look at their budget to see where they may be able to cut. Peter Gagnon advised he would like to see taxes reduced through growth. Gagnon noted that there are growing pains while this is happening. It was noted that properties are still selling higher than their assessed values. Kathy Lutz-Corrigan noted that we are a tourist town and businesses are doing well, but asked what the town is getting from those businesses. Paul Bousquet noted that we are getting goods and services.

Mary White reminded the Committee that any questions need to be addressed to department heads from the group, not as individuals, and Committee members are welcome to send any questions to her.

**5.** Other

**6.** Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date will be October 24, 2023 at 6:00 pm in the Public Meeting Room.

**7.** Adjournment

**On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Adam White, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelli Fortin