Budget Committee Meeting

Town of Gorham

Gorham Town Hall

Public Meeting Room

Minutes of October 24, 2023

Members Present: Mary White, Adam White, Marie Duguay, Dio Thagouras, Judy LeBlanc, Paul Bousquet, and Stephanie Russell (via Zoom)

Absent: Kathy Lutz-Corrigan, 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: 6:00 PM by Mary White

**2.** Review of Minutes of June 20, 2023

**On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Adam White, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of June 20, 2023 as presented.**

**3.** Budget Review

Bronson Paradis reviewed the budget through September 30, 2023. Overall, expenditures are at 32% remaining, which does not include the capital reserve funds or other appropriations.

Executive Office is in a good place, there was some overlap between Denise Vallee leaving and Peter Gagnon coming in.

Nothing stands out in Elections. There will be a Special Election coming up, with the Primary on December 5 and the general election possibly on January 23, 2024. The Town Clerk has advised this will cost an additional $2000 or less. New voting machines were also approved by the Ballot Law Commission, and these will need to be budgeted for.

In the Finance budget, there were some demographic changes that did affect the budget a little. Some cleaning supplies were charged to Finance that should have been charged to another department. Bronson Paradis and Jessica Paradis attended training, which added to the travel expenses. There are currently three positions in Finance, the Finance Director, HR/Payroll, and Accounts Payable which is shared with Highway.

Under the Tax Collector budget, they are a little low. They are on track for property tax collection, and the second half bill will go out in November.

Assessing looks good, and can fluctuate depending on court cases. The balance will be used for BTLA cases, of which they have about thirteen pending. If the money is not expended this year, it will be encumbered. A committee member asked about the abatement requests, and Judy Leblanc advised they are the same businesses that usually file.

The Legal line looks good, and Peter Gagnon advised the OHRV case is about 99% done.

Personnel has not been used.

Planning and Zoning shows a deficit in the Consultant line, however this is offset by revenues.

Government Building has 41% remaining, but will come down with a couple projects they still have left to do. They are planning to have a few doors replaced, but it is difficult to hire contractors. They are also planning to replace security cameras, for which the quote came in at a competitive price.

Cemetery has a demographic shift at DPW.

Insurance has been paid for the year. Bronson Paradis advised that they will be switching from a fiscal year to a calendar year for these payments, which will line up better with the budget.

Advertising is at 22%, but is pretty much done for this year.

The Police Department budget has a change in demographics which affected payroll items, due to staffing levels. They are still at six officers, but budgeted for seven. A committee member asked if they were planning to budget for eight, and was advised they are not planning for eight for hiring purposes, but they are for budgeting for eight as a safeguard. A committee member noted that the fact that they are running short is not necessarily a staffing issue, but a scheduling issue.

The Ambulance budget is over expended for Overtime, as they do not have many part-time workers available.

The Fire Department budget has 44% remaining. Gas and Diesel needs to be adjusted.

Building Inspection and Emergency Management are at 61% and 57% respectively. Quarterly stipends have not been paid out yet. This also covered John Scarinza, and the budget will need to be adjusted for next year.

Dispatch is at 27% remaining. The part-time line is over as they have been training new part-time staff. Overtime lines are also over. Dio Thagouras asked why there are separate lines for internet and telephone and was advised each department pays their share. Thagouras questioned why the cost was so high, and was advised it is a good system for the safety of sensitive information.

Highway is at almost 31%, and Bronson Paradis advised there is Highway Block Grants in revenues to help offset costs. There were some unanticipated equipment and vehicle repairs which were done in house, however the parts were expensive. Judy LeBlanc advised that the new Highway Director is doing very well.

Street Lighting is at 38%.

Gas is at 80%, however Bronson will check on this, as cross charges may not have been done yet.

Animal Control is where you would expect.

Welfare is at 15% remaining. The biggest request for assistance is for rent and housing. Tri County CAP no longer has the same amount of funding as during Covid to assist. There are more requests for rental assistance than for those that are homeless, which is infrequent. They do try to refer clients to other agencies for assistance. Any money is paid out is paid directly to the landlord or the vendor, not to the client.

Recreation is at 40%, and Parks at 21%. There was a changeover in the senior program coordinator position. Dio Thagouras asked if the SAU contributes to the care of the recreation fields and was advised they do not. Thagouras noted that it does not seem equitable, since he has to contribute to the cost for his son to play hockey.

Patriotic purposes covers Police, Fire, and EMS for the Fourth of July. There is 64% remaining in the budget. Bronson will double check this, as there may be some cross charges needed.

There was nothing for Conservation Commission, Long Term Debt, or TAN.

A member of the committee asked about the travel car, and was advised it is being used by the police department, fire department, and town clerk’s office.

A copy of the revenue report was provided for the committee’s information. This will be updated in a couple weeks with the tax information. Paul Bousquet asked if there will be more revenue than budgeted, and Bronson Paradis advised if he had to guess, it will be higher than budgeted.

**4.** Budget Committee Questions and Request for Department Heads

Paul Bousquet asked about the average calls per week for police, fire, and EMS, and how the full-time and part-time schedules work. Adam White noted that the fire department has one full-time employee, and the rest are on-call. The duty crews for the ambulance are full-time. Bousquet also asked about how dispatch shifts are filled and if this process has been changed in the contract. He was advised that the language in the contract has been changed. Bousquet also suggested that they should look at the capital reserve funds and consider splitting up some, so that some departments get more in a year than others depending on need. Judy LeBlanc noted that all large purchases are scheduled out for the next ten years.

Paul Bousquet had to leave the meeting at 7:10 pm.

Peter Gagnon advised that department heads have not started entering budgets yet for this year due to a glitch in the software system. However, they will be able to come in to the Finance office and work on this with Bronson. Mary White suggested that department heads need to recognize that they are not just advocating for their department, but for the town.

Marie Duguay suggested that department heads be asked to give a budget that they would like to see, and a budget with a flat or reduced amount. The budget process was discussed. It was noted that the residents are paying their taxes, but are going without other things to be able to do that.

Stephanie Russell suggested that the department heads be asked to give a flat or reduced budget, and include a proposal of things they would like to add. Mary White noted that the committee can give a total amount, but cannot dictate how the money is spent for a department. Peter Gagnon noted that the tax rate is not directly tied to the budget, but also to assessed value. Judy LeBlanc advised the committee to remember that they do not decide what services the town provides.

Adam White noted that a flat budget meant no increases, and that any additional expense in one line would have to be offset by a reduction in another line.

**On a motion by Dio Thagouras, seconded by Adam White, the Committee voted to ask department heads for a flat budget proposal this year, with extra items listed that they would like to see added. LeBlanc – abstain**

Stephanie Russell asked about the Recreation Revolving Fund, which Bronson will send to her. Russell also asked about the purchase of office supplies, which Peter Gagnon advised is done through a commercial account with WB Mason.

Dio Thagouras noted that surrounding towns use the services of the Recreation Department and stated that Gorham residents should fill the slots first, and other towns should pay an increased price. Marie Duguay advised the senior program is run this way, and will send a copy of the registration form to committee members. Mary White noted that sports programs do charge more for non-residents.

Adam White shared concerns over the full-time position being advertised for an Assessing Assistant. Adam White stated that now was not the time to add full-time positions, which come with benefits. Mr. White noted that Gorham is the third largest employer in town.

Mary White stated that she did not have time for her questions, and suggested holding another meeting before the budget season begins. Mrs. White noted that she would like to see a police log, and stated she would send the link to the information on employers from NH Employment Security.

**5.** Basic Summary of Budgeting Process

**6.** Next Meeting Date

Suggested dates will be sent to members to check availability.

**7.** Adjournment

**On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Marie Duguay, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelli Fortin