Budget Committee PUBLIC HEARING

Town of Gorham

Gorham Town Hall

MEDALLION OPERA HOUSE

Minutes of FEBRUARY 12, 2020

Members Present: Douglas Gralenski, Chairman; Diane Bouthot; Robert Demers; Lee Carroll; Abigail Evankow; Dan McCrum; Jessica McCreedy; Judith LeBlanc, Selectmen’s Representative

Absent: Mary White

Town Staff Present: Denise Vallee, Town Manager; Kathleen Frenette, Finance Director; Carol Porter, Town Clerk/Tax Collector; Jeff Stewart, Recreation Director; Buddy Holmes, Public Works Director; Phil Cloutier, Fire Chief; Adam Marsh, Police Chief; Jessica Jacques, Gorham Water and Sewer; Jeff Tennis, Gorham Water and Sewer; Michelle Lutz, Assessing Clerk; Ted Miller, Water and Sewer Commissioner; Shannon Buteau, Library Director; Michael Waddell, Selectman; Adam White, Selectman

Others present: Terry Letarte, Melinda Beaulieu, Raylene Beaulieu, Arthur Perry, Paula Kinney, Mark Belanger, Tara MacKillop, Carol Roy, Michael Roy, Jen Buteau, Reuben Rajala, Edith Tucker, Sue Demers, Jeff Schall, and others.

Minutes Taker: Shelli Fortin

AGENDA ITEMS & DISCUSSION

**1.** Call to order: 6:31 PM

**2.** Public Hearing

Doug Gralenski thanked the public for attending and those that took the time to vote in the Presidential Primary held yesterday. Gralenski stated that the Public Hearing tonight is the culmination of a year’s work on the part of the budget committee, and that the town has made efforts to operate efficiently. If the public wishes to reduce taxes further, services will have to be reduced as well. Gralenski stated that the Committee will be looking for direction from the taxpayers.

Denise Vallee reviewed the budget, which includes a 2 ½% increase for the Police Department per the contract, and 2% for other town employees. IT services are included in department budgets this year, and an 11% increase in health care has been factored in, along with an increase in fuel costs. Welfare is down 27%, along with a 21% decrease in Patriotic Purposes, and a 4% decrease in the Recreation Department. The Conservation Commission is budgeted at $250. Long term Debt is down 1.3%. The total Operating Budget shows an increase of 2.16%. There is a 6.62% decrease in non-operating expenses. The total budget will be an estimated impact of $0.046 on the tax rate.

Doug Gralenski read the Warrant Articles. Article 3 is to raise $3,917,717.00 for the general municipal operations. Gralenski asked what would happen if Article 3 did not pass and Denise Vallee advised there would have to be an amendment on the floor.

Article 4. Gralenski explained that the amount requested by the Gorham Public Library is almost the same as last year.

Article 5. Gralenski stated that the Library Maintenance CRF is $5000.00 less than last year.

Article 6 authorized the appointment, rather than the election, of a town treasurer. Judy LeBlanc advised that this will insure that a qualified individual holds the position.

Article 7 authorizes the Board of Selectman to appoint a capital improvement plan committee. Michael Waddell advised that Gorham has begun the process, with Capital Reserve Funds for the replacement of equipment and buildings. This will continue that work to have a plan going forward.

There were no questions on Article 8.

Article 9 and 10 are to appropriate money for the operation of the Sewer and Water Departments. Michael Waddell stated that the Board of Selectman have concerns with the proposed increases in these budgets, which may result in a 5% increase in rates. Ted Miller advised that the Water Commission has researched wages and benefits for communities of a similar size and layout to Gorham, and have found that wage adjustments are needed for the employees. Extra money budgeted will be used to target the biggest discrepancies. Miller pointed out that the overall budget for sewer is still below a 5% increase. Waddell stated that although he agrees the wage disparity should be addressed, he would like to know which communities are being used for the comparison, as when the town considered wage adjustments, they focused on Coos County.

There were no questions on Article 11.

Article 12. Chief Cloutier explained that the Fire Department is planning to purchase a Tanker this spring, and the next vehicle to be replaced will be Engine 3. The CRF was increased from $39,000 to $50,000 to allow for this.

There were no questions on Article 13.

Article 14. Sue Demers asked how many ambulances the town currently has and Chief Cloutier advised they have two.

There were no questions on Article 15.

Article 16. Edith Tucker asked if the Sanitation and Recycling CRF includes the sticker program that has been discussed. Michael Waddell advised that it would be part of the operating budget.

There were no questions on Article 17 or 18.

Article 19. Chief Marsh advised that they did purchase a new vehicle this year, and need to replace another that was involved in an accident. They do still have the 2013 cruiser, which is used only for transportation as it is not equipped with a radio or lighting.

There were no questions on Articles 20-24.

Article 25. Jesse McCreedy asked what the Information Technology CRF was for and Vallee advised that it was for the software system that was purchased 5 years ago, which is fully integrated between departments.

There were no questions on Articles 26 and 27.

Article 28. Bob Demers asked about the Cates Hill Land Fill Expendable Trust Fund and stated that the thought the town was done paying for this. Michael Waddell advised that this is for the monitoring of the wells, and will always be needed as it is mandated. The same was advised of the East Milan Monitoring in Article 29.

There were no questions on Article 30 or 31.

Article 32. Doug Gralenski advised that the Budget Committee has been trying to get a handle on cost sharing for agencies asking for funds, as compared to other communities. They have modified the application process, but can only recommend or not recommend the articles. The articles can only be amended by the public on the floor. Michael Waddell advised that the Board of Selectman has not voted on these articles yet, and will be doing so after the hearing tonight. AV Home Care is up $500 this year, with a request of $18,000. Tara MacKillop advised that they provide an important service and only bill for services provided to Gorham residents. MacKillop was asked how the services are provided for Berlin residents, when the city only contributes $8,774 and MacKillop advised that they do fundraising and have an annual campaign for donations. MacKillop was asked if services would still be provided to residents if the town was to not contribute as much and she advised they would be. Gralenski stated that the Budget Committee recognizes that the services provided by requesting agencies are critical to the community, but they are trying to gets costs in line with other towns.

Article 33. There were no questions.

Article 34. Judy LeBlanc asked if the amount requested for Tri-County Community Action Program is in proportion to other communities. Jesse McCreedy noted that Berlin has 16% of their clientele and currently pays a similar amount as Gorham, who only has 3% of the clientele. The director, Jeanne Robillard, stated that the amount requested from Berlin this year is $20,000, and although they provide services in three counties, the bulk of the services are in the Berlin-Gorham area. Robillard stated that although they request funds in good faith, they have no control over the outcome. The agency is working as a whole to be sure services are equitable and requests are proportional.

Article 35. A representative from Tri-County CAP advised that the request of $1,400 is based on a per capita amount of $0.50 per resident. The Homeless Intervention Program will provide rental assistance, along with eviction prevention, and case management.

Article 36. Diane Bouthot asked about the difference in tuition from last year to this year and Melinda Beaulieu advised that they added a new infant program and raised rates. Bouthot also asked about the difference in the occupancy cost and Beaulieu advised that they have rented additional office space due to the new program. Beaulieu advised that even though 14 of their clients are from Berlin, she has not asked Berlin for money since she heard it is more difficult to make a request from a city than a town. Beaulieu advised she will look into this for next year. Judy LeBlanc asked why the request was up this year to $6,000 and Beaulieu advised it is due to the new program, since infants require a low ratio of teachers to children. Jesse McCreedy pointed out that Gorham has the minority of clients in the new infant care program, as three are from Berlin, and 1 from Shelburne. A member of the public pointed out that parents may choose to bring their children to GCLC because they are employed in Gorham, and that this program is helping the workforce in town. Reuben Rajala stated that there is value in a preschool education and that it should be important on a community level.

Article 37. Judy LeBlanc noted that the $4,000 requested for the Gorham Historical Society is minimal and stays strictly in Gorham. Reuben Rajala explained that they are in the process of applying for a NH Heritage Preservation Grant for $10,o00 to do work at the museum.

Article 38. Sue Demers stated that she felt money requested for the EFS After School Program should be included in the school budget. Phil Cloutier spoke in favor of the program, stating it fills an important void for those children too young to stay at home alone. Jen Buteau advised that they typically ask for money for a more general purpose, but after 5 years of federal funding for the program, they no longer qualify. The program provides enrichment activities, homework help, and family activities. Buteau advised there is a fee of $7.00 per day, but they do not refuse anyone who is unable to pay. Last year they collected approximately $3,000 in fees. Jeff Schall asked if there were students from other towns and was advised that they are all EFS students, so some may be from Randolph or Shelburne. A member of the public thanked the program for providing childcare, which is critical to workforce development and the economy. Judy LeBlanc noted that they are also requesting $15,000 from the SAU.

There were no questions on Article 39 or 40.

Article 41. The request from North Country Home Health and Hospice is $5,000 this year. In response to a question from the Committee, Carol Roy advised that they do request funds from other area communities.

Doug Gralenski closed the Public Hearing at 8:07 pm.

**3.** Work Session on Budget Recommendations

Jesse McCreedy asked about the trust funds for Cates Hill and East Milan and Denise Vallee advised that money was transferred into the trust fund last year on the advice of the auditor. Payments are made to either the City of Berlin or AVRRDD for monitoring. Cates Hill is unlined and the lining on East Milan failed. Bills are sent periodically as needed.

Judy LeBlanc advised that she has done research and many other communities do not recommend warrant articles. The committee discussed the issue of recommending or not recommending articles.

On a vote of 4-3 the Committee voted to not recommend Article 32.

The Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 33.

The Committee voted 5-2 to recommend Article 34.

The Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 35.

The Committee voted 4-3 to recommend Article 36.

Article 37. A Committee member asked if the money requested can be restricted and was advised that it cannot be. The Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 37.

The Committee voted 5-2 to recommend Article 38. The Committee would like to see a more detailed description of what the money is being used for in the future.

The Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 39.

The Committee voted 6-1 to recommend Article 40.

The Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 41.

Article 31. Jesse McCreedy questioned why the town is not making money on the 4th of July Celebration. The Celebration brings in people to support local businesses. Doug Gralenski advised that even though the businesses in town provide rooms and meals tax to the state, the town does not receive a significant portion of that. Michael Waddell advised that the 4th of July Committee does carry a balance each year, and Chief Cloutier added that it is approximately $10,000. The fireworks alone cost that each year. McCreedy asked if they could raise more money with fundraising efforts and Waddell advised they already fundraise for the event.

Lee Carroll moved the question, seconded by Diane Bouthot, and the Committee voted 6-1 in favor.

On a vote of 6-1 the Committee voted to recommend Article 31.

**4.** Date of Next Meeting: Town Meeting March 10, 2020 at 7:00 pm at GMHS gym.

**5.** Adjournment – **Lee Carroll made a motion to adjourn at 9:20 PM, seconded by Judy LeBlanc. Voted in the affirmative.**

Respectfully Submitted

Shelli Fortin