



Budget Committee Meeting
Town of Gorham
Town Hall Public Meeting Room

MINUTES OF JANUARY 24, 2023

Members Present: Patti Stolte, Mary White, Lee Carroll (5:38), Marie Duguay, Greg O'Neil, Judy LeBlanc, Adam White, Abby Evankow, and Paul Bousquet

Absent: None

Town Staff Present: Denise Vallee, Town Manager; Bronson Paradis, Finance Director; Michelle Lutz, Assessing; Jessica Jacques; Jeff Tennis, Water & Sewer Superintendent; Roger Goulet, Water & Sewer Commissioner; Ted Miller, Water & Sewer Commissioner; Paul Bousquet, Superintendent SAU20; Cassandra Micucci, Business Administrator SAU20

Minutes Taker: Shelli Fortin

1. Call to order: 5:32 PM by Patti Stolte

2. Review Minutes of January 19, 2023

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Marie Duguay, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of January 19, 2023 as presented. Stolte-abstain, Adam White-abstain, Mary White- abstain

3. New Business

a. Review Assessing Budget

Michelle Lutz advised there has been an increase in the Permanent Position line for an increase in the duties she has assumed over the last year. The Part-time Position is also up for Victoria Hill, who has been doing Planning, Zoning, and Code Enforcement. The Overtime line is up due to the increase in salary. Property Assessing is up \$94,000 for utility updates. This line may go down, as some BTLA cases have been withdrawn. Tax Mapping is up for updates to CAI Technologies. Revaluation is down to zero as it was completed. The manual has not been approved by the DRA yet, so it is encumbered in the 2022 budget. Benefits lines are tied to the salary. The Software line is up for Microsoft Office 365 and support.

Mary White asked what additional duties Lutz has taken on and was advised she has been doing training to become a certified NH Measurer and Lister. They are hoping to eventually be able to have someone in house do this work instead of KRT. Mary White asked if it was just Victoria Hill handling Planning and Zoning meetings now, and Lutz advised it was unless she is needed for historical knowledge. Mary White asked what overtime was for in Assessing and Lutz advised working on the Town Report or the MS1. Mary White asked Denise Vallee if the Town Report was something that could be given to the new employee in Finance. Vallee advised that the new employee handles HR and payroll. Mary White asked about the Assessing software support and Lutz advised they are still having a hard time getting support with this company, but will not be able to change software for at least two years. The town has withheld the 2022 support payment and Adam White also suggested going after them for breach of contract.

In reviewing the Planning and Zoning budget, Lutz advised supplies are up for Land Use Code books. Conference and Meetings is also up for Victoria Hill to attend the NHMA conference.

Mary White asked about the consulting charges for Tara Bamford and Lutz advised that the \$1,500 budgeted is for the town fees for her to consult with the Board on multiple things. People also pay her to assist with making sure their applications are in line with regulations. Mary White asked if the town always gets reimbursed from the applicant for the fees charged by Bamford and Lutz advised that they do, as they can withhold the permits until the fees are paid.

In reviewing the Building Inspections budget, Lutz advised that the amount budgeted is used as needed for inspections done by John Scarinza. Abby Evankow asked if the Board of Selectmen has considered raising the fees charged for building permits and Lutz advised they did make a few adjustments in May. Lutz advised that the town gets additional revenue from increased values when residents improve their properties. Mary White noted that many people do not get permits, and Lutz advised they have come up with a process for when this is brought to their attention. There is a complaint form to fill out, and a letter is sent to the homeowner. If they still do not obtain a permit at that point, the Board of Selectman could choose to enforce it. Judy LeBlanc noted that many people do not know when they need a permit, and once they are informed they usually get one.

b. Review of Water and Sewer Budgets

Ted Miller advised that the total increase in the Water budget is \$16,166, or 2.8%. The Sewer budget has a decrease of \$28,417, or 4.8%. The total decrease from last year is about \$12,000. Miller advised they were able to reduce the budget, despite an increase in electricity, fuel, and chemical costs, due to the fact that the WTP roof was done last year and there is one less position in the budget due an employee taking early retirement. Miller advised that they did do a competitive wage adjustment after comparing salaries to five other towns, so that they could keep experienced personnel.

Mary White asked what Professional Services is for, and was advised for things such as legal services, water testing, uniforms, and training. Jeff Tennis advised that DES mandates inspection of storage facilities, of which they do as much of the work as possible, but this year they will need to hire a company with divers to do a video inspection and report to DES. This is done every 5-7 years. Tennis also advised that the Overtime budget is for personnel on-call on weekends and holidays.

c. School Budget Review

David Backler advised that they have been meeting since August to review the budget, and it has been a tough budget cycle. Backler advised they have an increase of just over 5%. They are in their second year of contracts with support staff and faculty. They also want to budget to be sure that there is consistent upkeep of the buildings.

Cassandra Micucci advised that the budget is up \$544,966.10 or 5.2%. The big ticket items are a school bus and the underground storage tank at EFS. There are increased costs for fuel and supplies across the board. The money they have budgeted for the CRF, \$150,000, is to be sure they are able to maintain the schools as issues come up. The Special Education budget is up 25% due to student needs and contracted services. David Backler advised that

special education numbers are flat or down a bit, but the needs of every student have increased. Denise Vallee asked if the bus is a large bus and was advised it is. Micucci advised that the cost is split for the bus in the budget between the transportation lines in the EFS, Middle School and High School. Judy LeBlanc asked if they would be able to get delivery of the bus, and Backler advised they will, as it is already worked out. Mary White asked about the age of the buses, and was advised the one they are replacing is 12 years old. The next oldest is 7-8 years old. Judy LeBlanc asked if they come with seatbelts and Backler advised they do not. Micucci advised the storage tank cost is \$145,000 and continues to go up. The cost has doubled since they originally planned the project, and they have ordered the tank. Greg O'Neil asked how many students are currently enrolled, and Micucci advised there are 153 at EFS and 240 at GMHS. Mary White asked what their next big project will be for the school, and Backler advised pointing at GMHS, paving, and the storage tank at the high school. Backler advised that the 20-year plan is on the website. Abby Evankow asked about the solar project and Backler advised it will be done this summer. Backler advised they received the funding they hoped for from USDA, and that 55% of the project is funded. They will receive an additional 30% discount, but they are unsure if this is off of the total cost or their share. Mary White asked about the graduation rate and Backler advised it is close to 100%, with 90% of students going on to postsecondary placements. Judy LeBlanc noted that the trades were a good career choice. Backler advised that they started offering the Junior Welder program 10 years ago, and along with the CTE program in Berlin, and the welding program at WMCC, they are doing very well. Backler advised that they work collaboratively with Berlin and WMCC to make sure every student has a pathway. Many students are able to earn college credits during high school, and one senior will graduate this year with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Mary White also noted that the opportunity for students to job shadow with local businesses is great.

4. Old Business

Patti Stolte read a letter forwarded to the Committee by Shannon Buteau from the Director of the Whitefield Public Library concerning budget and staffing. Stolte noted that the letter suggests that the libraries are not comparable.

A discussion followed with comments concerning backlash from departments when cuts are suggested, what essential services may mean to different people, needs versus wants in budgets, and the role of the budget committee.

Paul Bousquet asked what the tax impact will be with the current proposed budget and Denise Vallee advised about \$1.30 on the tax rate, however the projected increase is just an estimate and they will not know the tax rate until it is set in October.

Mary White noted that the town is proposing a warrant article for a bond for road repairs on Clay Brook. Judy LeBlanc noted that they had originally planned to do Hemlock and Evergreen Drive, but added Clay Brook with funding from the bond, as the money they will save doing all three together will almost cover the interest on the bond which makes financial sense.

5. Other

Denise Vallee noted that a recap of the 2022 revaluation is available on the website, which explains how the tax burden shifted from commercial to residential properties. Vallee advised that they will do a statistical update again in two years, which will hopefully shift the burden back to the commercial side again.

Abby Evankow asked about the elderly exemptions and if the income limits have been adjusted. Michelle Lutz advised that the income limits were raised by \$3,500 each, and the disability limits are now the same as the elderly exemption limits.

It was noted that there will be a warrant article to address Veterans Exemptions as well.

6. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date is scheduled for Tuesday, January 31, 2023 at 5:30 pm in the Public Meeting Room.

The School Board Budget Hearing is scheduled for Thursday, January 26 at 6:30 pm at GMHS.

7. Adjournment

On a motion by Adam White, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the meeting was adjourned at 7:26 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelli Fortin