



BUDGET COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
TOWN OF GORHAM
MEDALLION OPERA HOUSE

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 16, 2023

Members Present: Lee Carroll; Abigail Evankow; Patti Stolte; Greg O'Neil; Mary White; Adam White; Paul Bousquet; Judy Leblanc, Selectmen's Representative

Absent: Marie Duguay (excused)

Town Staff Present: Michael Waddell, Selectman, Yves Zornio, Selectman, Denise Vallee, Town Manager; Peter Gagnon, Town Manager; Bronson Paradis, Finance Director; Jeff Stewart, Recreation Director; Phil Cloutier, Fire Chief; Adam Marsh, Police Chief; Lt. Jimmy Willhoite; Jessica Jacques, Gorham Water and Sewer; Jeff Tennis, Gorham Water Superintendent; Michelle Lutz, Assessing Clerk; Ted Miller, Water and Sewer Commissioner; Roger Goulet, Water and Sewer Commissioner; Shannon Buteau, Library Director; Cindy Cole, Tax Collector; Buddy Holmes, Public Works Director; Christina Zornio, Town Clerk (via Zoom)

Others present: Reuben Rajala, Melinda Fauteux, Paula Kinney, Deidre Blair, Valerie Fauteux, Laura Towle, Jennifer Gilbert, Terry Letarte, Robert Demers, Susan Demers, Daniel McCrum, Marie Demers, Ashley Brown, Victoria Hill, Stephanie Russell, Melissa Elander, Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun, and others.

1. Call to order: 6:35 PM

2. Public Hearing

Denise Vallee reviewed the operating budget, noting changes from 2022 to 2023, and the non-operating budget. The operating budget has increased by \$456,207, and the non-operating budget increased by \$1,139,308 with the Clay Brook Road project and solar project. Both of these projects have revenues to offset the costs completely this year. Vallee noted that the tax rate impact is an increase of \$1.48.

Denise Vallee read Article 5, the bond in the amount of \$900,000 for Clay Brook Road. Vallee advised that the first payment will be due in 2024 in the amount of \$205,000, and each year after for four more years. Susan Demers asked what the interest rate was, and Judy LeBlanc advised it is 4.355%.

Lee Carroll Read Articles 12-18. There were no questions.

Article 19 is to appropriate \$10,000 for fireworks for the 4th of July Celebration. Ted Miller asked what the difference is between this warrant article and Patriotic Purposes in the budget. Denise Vallee advised the warrant article is for the fireworks, and Patriotic Purposes covers the cost of police services for traffic control and patrols for the 4th of July Celebration.

Mr. Carroll read Articles 20 and 21. There were no questions.

Mr. Carroll read Article 22, to establish an SCBA Capital Reserve Fund and appropriate \$7,500 to be placed in such fund. Robert Demers asked if this was going to be a Capital Reserve Fund and was advised it will be.

Mr. Carroll read Articles 23-29. There were no questions.

Mr. Carroll read Article 30, to raise and appropriate \$219,344 for solar panels to be placed on the roof at the public works garage. Denise Vallee explained the cost breakdown, of which \$89,000

will be a Congressional Direct Spending Request Grant, \$41,344 from a USDA grant, \$30,000 from the Renewable Energy Projects CRF, and the remaining \$59,000 in a CDFA loan with a 4% interest rate. There are also additional grants available, including \$10,000 from NH PUC, and 30% tax credit. Vallee advised if the additional grants and credits were received, there is no prepayment penalty on the loan, so any rebate could be applied. Melissa Elander reviewed the proposal from Revision Energy, and noted that the roof at the garage can support the weight of the solar panels. The cost includes permitting and site and utility applications. The annual generation will be more than the public works garage will use, and so additional power can be net metered to other municipal accounts. Ms. Elander noted that the bills will not be reduced by 100%, as there are standard charges on the bill that will still be included. Ms. Elander also noted that the town currently has a contract for a discounted electric rate, and that the accounts that are part of net metering cannot be renewed as part of this contract and would revert back to Eversource. Ms. Elander advised that the Solar Savings Analysis suggests a savings of \$375,000 over 25 years with a 6-year loan at 4% interest. Susan Demers asked what will happen if they do not get the additional grant for the project, and Vallee advised that the warrant article is written to say that the project moving forward is subject to the grant award. Mrs. Demers asked if the school received the grant for their solar project and Vallee advised they did. Robert Demers asked if there will be a battery pack and Elander advised there will not be, as any additional power produced will be net metered to other accounts. Mr. Demers asked if the panels would clean themselves of snow, and was advised that since they are black and the panels heat quickly, the snow slides off similar to a metal roof. Stephanie Russell asked if the cost of maintenance is factored in to the 25 year benefit, and Elander advised that it is; annual maintenance, insurance, and the cost of inverter replacement every 10-14 years.

Lee Carroll read Articles 31-40. There were no questions.

Mr. Carroll read Article 41, a petitioned article to appropriate \$14,000 for Androscoggin Valley Home Care. Stephanie Russell noted that the organization used just over \$5,000 last year when billing for services, and now are now asking for \$14,000. Ms. Russell also noted that Gorham is paying more than Berlin, when the majority of clients are from Berlin. Margo Sullivan, Executive Director of AV Home Care, advised that they have had difficulty finding staff to fill service orders. Sullivan advised that they met with WMCC today, as they are hoping to implement their own training course. Ms. Sullivan also stated that the \$5,000 billed last year was not entirely accurate. Ms. Sullivan stated that the mileage reimbursement for workers from Berlin to travel to Gorham was \$16,000 last year, and the time traveling back and forth from Berlin to Gorham amounted to \$12,000 in hourly wages. These figures do not take into account the actual time spent with clients. Ms. Sullivan also stated that they have submitted an amended request to Berlin for funding.

Mr. Carroll read Articles 42 and 43. There were no questions.

Mr. Carroll read Article 44, to appropriate \$10,000 for the Gorham Community Learning Center. Susan Demers asked what the request was last year and was advised it was \$4,500. Melinda Fauteux advised that they were not at full capacity last year due to Covid, and that they are now able to take more children. Ms. Fauteux advised that 24 of the children are from Gorham, which is 49%. Mrs. Demers asked if they are paying customers and was advised they are. Ms. Beaulieu advised they now have an infant program, and have seven enrolled of which five are from Gorham. Jennifer Gilbert noted that having high quality child care is important to the community. Susan Demers noted that childcare is the parent's responsibility. Mrs. Demers asked how many Gorham residents were in the program last year, and was advised 43%.

Mr. Carroll read Article 45. There were no questions.

Mr. Carroll read Article 46, to appropriate \$10,000 to support the Family Resource Center. Stephanie Russell noted that the FRC uses the building that the town provides in-kind, and asked how much the FRC receives from the SAU and Gorham Community Learning Center for rent. Marie Demers advised that the cost to maintain the building is about \$60,000 per year, of which

they receive \$40,000 in rent from the tenants. Last year, the FRC spent about \$25,000 on the building, and this year it will be about \$30,000. Ms. Demers also noted that they manage the property for free.

Mr. Carroll read Articles 47-49. There were no questions.

Patti Stolte closed the Public Hearing at 7:29 pm.

3. Work Session on Budget Recommendations

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Judy Leblanc, the Committee voted to recommend Article 5 as presented.

Adam White advised he was not in favor of the article, as he does not believe we should be spending money on interest to fix roads. Abby Evankow noted that if this does not go through, the road may possibly be gravel. Paul Bousquet noted that if this bond does not go through, who knows how much it will cost later. Mary White noted that Evergreen and Hemlock will be done regardless, and asked how much will be left in the CRF after this project. Denise Vallee advised that the project will take almost everything in the CRF now, so after the amount appropriated this year is added it will be just over \$250,000. Adam White noted that this bond will have an effect on the tax rate in 2024, as the Selectboard does plan to continue to add the \$250,000 for roads on top of the loan payment of \$205,000. Michael Waddell noted that the road is in such tough shape that it may wash out. Waddell also noted that although they are planning to continue to add to the fund, if something unforeseen happens, they could choose not to. Waddell also noted that by doing Clay Brook Road with Evergreen and Hemlock they will save on mobilization costs, which will cover most of the interest charges on the bond. Yves Zornio noted that the interest rates are up, but are still manageable, and advised that they are hoping the tax burden will shift away from residential properties again over the next couple of years.

The Committee voted and the motion passed. 6 in favor, 2 opposed

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Greg O'Neil, the Committee voted to recommend Article 12 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Greg O'Neil, the Committee voted to recommend Article 13 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Patti Stolte, the Committee voted to recommend Article 14 as presented.

Adam White asked if the Committee was in favor of cutting anything, and noted that if they do not it has been a waste of their time. Paul Bousquet stated that he did not think it was a waste of time or a rubber stamp, as they have had discussions as to why the budget has increased and the committee provides another level of oversight. Adam White stated that he was opposed to adding anything new to the budget this year, and that they should not be adding a full-time position to the Recreation Department. Mary White noted that they should use the Revolving Fund to pay for the additional cost of the position. Denise Vallee advised that they have moved costs every year to the Revolving Fund. Mary White noted that taxpayers are scared at how the tax rate is going up on top of the property values increasing, and that some of the services are non-essential. Patti Stolte noted that there are other voices in the community who want to invest, and that there are differing opinions. Paul Bousquet responded that he did not care for the term "non-essential" in reference to recreation and library services, as there are many in the community who would consider these as essential. Greg O'Neil asked when the time would be to cut the budget, and was advised when the public is present to add their comments. Shannon Buteau spoke concerning the suggestion to reduce hours at the library and advised that there would not be a significant amount of savings, as a lot of the budget is for the building and materials, and providing more hours of availability gives taxpayers more return for their investment. Jeff Stewart noted that when he

started as director in 2009 the cost of the Recreation Department to the taxpayers was about \$260,000, and now it is just under \$240,000. The budget is \$21,659 less than it was fourteen years ago.

The Committee voted and the motion passed. 6 in favor, 2 opposed

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Abby Evankow, the Committee voted to recommend Article 15 as presented.

Mary White shared her ideas for how the Library could reduce their budget.

The Committee voted and the motion passed. 6 in favor, 2 opposed

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Lee Carroll, the Committee voted to recommend Article 16 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Adam White, the Committee voted to recommend Article 17 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Adam White, seconded by Patti Stolte, the Committee voted to recommend Article 18 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Patti Stolte, seconded by Greg O'Neil, the Committee voted to recommend Article 19 with a vote of 7-1.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Greg O'Neil, the Committee voted to recommend Article 20. 6 in favor, 2 abstentions

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the Committee voted to recommend Article 21. 6 in favor, 2 abstentions

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted to recommend Article 22, Article 23, and Article 24. 6 in favor, 2 abstentions

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Greg O'Neil, the Committee voted to recommend Article 25 and Article 26 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Patti Stolte, the Committee voted to recommend Article 27, Article 28, and Article 29 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the Committee voted to recommend Article 30 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Adam White, seconded by Abby Evankow, the Committee voted to recommend Articles 31-40 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted to recommend Article 41.

Paul Bousquet noted that he thought it was a good explanation of the increased cost during the public hearing. It was noted that the warrant article could be modified on the floor, but just the amount, not the wording. Mary White advised that cost of Articles 41-48 was more than \$60,000 and suggested the Committee put a cap on what they would recommend. Abby Evankow stated that each organization serves a different purpose and she would not be in favor of putting a cap on the recommendations. Mary White noted concerns about the number of people served at the Gorham Community Learning Center, with a \$10,000 request for only 49% of clients from Gorham. Judy LeBlanc noted that the director was afraid to ask for more in the past. Abby

Evankow noted that she did not see in their application how the \$10,000 was going to provide livable wages. Paul Bousquet noted that he would rather do each article individually. Adam White noted that some towns do not make a recommendation on petitioned warrant articles. Abby Evankow noted that she believes we owe the taxpayers a recommendation, as we ask for an application from the agencies for review.

The Committee voted and the motion passed. 6 in favor, 2 opposed

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the Committee voted to recommend Article 42 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the Committee voted to recommend Article 43 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Judy LeBlanc, the Committee voted to recommend Article 44 with a vote of 5-3.

On a motion by Patti Stolte, seconded by Abby Evankow, the Committee voted to recommend Article 45 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted to recommend Article 46.

Mary White noted that she still has concerns about the number of Gorham individuals served by the programs. Patti Stolte stated that Marie Demers provided new numbers for just the programs.

The Committee voted and the motion passed. 5 in favor, 2 opposed, 1 abstention

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted to recommend Article 47 with a vote of 8-0.

On a motion by Paul Bousquet, seconded by Patti Stolte, the Committee voted to recommend Article 48.

Mary White noted that there are a variety of other advertising sources available. Abby Evankow noted that the town and school are already members, along with local businesses, and she does not believe it should be funded with taxpayer funds.

The Committee voted. 4 in favor, 4 opposed

On a motion by Abby Evankow, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted to recommend Article 49 with a vote of 6-2.

The Committee members signed the Warrant.

4. Date of Next Meeting: Town Meeting March 14, 2023 at GMHS

5. Adjournment – Abby Evankow made a motion to adjourn at 8:59 PM. Voted in the affirmative.

Respectfully Submitted
Shelli Fortin