

Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
March 3, 2022

The Budget Committee met at 6PM in the Merrill Room at Wescustogo Hall and Community Center. Members in attendance were Bill Young, Jim Knight, Sandra Falsey, Steve Palmer, Jay Fulton, Chair Andy Walsh, and Secretary Linc Merrill. Also, in attendance were Town Manager Diane Barnes, Fire Chief Greg Payson, Deputy Fire Chief Justin Deri, Lt. Nick Thibeault, and Public Works Director Clark Baston. Draven Walker, Assistant to the Town Manager, ran the sound and video equipment to broadcast and record the meeting.

New budget pages were given to the members and they filed them before the meeting got under way at 6:11 P. M. Chair Walsh announced that a notice was being sent soon for a Public Meeting to be held on the remote/Zoom policy.

Town Manager Barnes gave an update of the newest draft of the budget for the 2023 Fiscal Year. She said it maintains the current level of services for the Town. No revenues have been provided so the impact on the mill rate can't be determined. She said that she anticipates Municipal Revenue Sharing from the State of Maine may go up higher than the current year. She said the town valuation has decreased because of the TIF so we will receive more state support.

The budget adds a fulltime employee to the Wescustogo Hall and Community Center staff, increases salaries by 5.9% overall for the existing staff due to the difficult labor market, and with changes throughout the budget lines, increases the total budget by 4%.

Barnes said she does not expect automobile excise tax receipts to increase due to the limited automobile inventory available for purchase. The Cumberland County Tax will be decreasing slightly this year. She also stated she is moving all expenditures from Capital Improvement and TIF expenditures into the appropriate department so everyone will see the entire spending by that department in one place.

Chief Payson went through each line of his Public Safety budget for Fire/Rescue. He is working with Casco, Cumberland, Raymond, New Gloucester, Gray, and Windham to set a common rate for per diem rescue personnel. The intent is to get a large enough pool of personnel to draw from without fighting over limited resources to fill open shifts. \$22.68 is the suggested hourly rate.

Payson also surveyed the departments in Topsham, Brunswick, Freeport, Cumberland, Yarmouth, Gray, New Gloucester, Raymond, Casco, Naples, and Windham to learn what the chiefs are being paid. He said he is the second lowest paid and above only Casco. Barnes has put in an 11% increase for Payson this year. She was questioned by Palmer as to whether this was enough. Barnes said she felt it was all we could and should do this year and could be revisited next year along with all town department heads and personnel.

Merrill asked whether Payson paid market rent for the home he rents from the Town. Payson responded that he did not pay market rent, he pays less than market rent. Merrill suggested that this needed to be looked at to determine compensability of this benefit for workers compensation purposes. The

members suggested they needed to understand all compensation to recommend any additional changes in his compensation.

Payson also serves at Health Office and EMA for the town and this does take up a respectable percentage of his time. This is included in his pay raise.

Payson said they responded to 431 calls last year. This is about the same as Casco. New Gloucester had about 200 more. The Chief tries to respond to as many calls as possible and he said he is always on call. He works about 70 hours a week.

Payson noted he had dropped the number of physicals in his budget this year as the number of personnel is down slightly. Merrill asked if he could provide demographics of the personnel he has along with how much they respond to we can assess staffing needs that may be coming. Payson said he can. He also said it is easier to get Basic Firefighters trained and active in the department as it takes less time commitment. The high level of training has been a retention issue. His budget reflects that.

Other budget highlights:

- Our contract for paramedic services with Yarmouth will not be revisited this year. It is working well.
- There all small inflation increases in almost every line.
- The budgeted fuel numbers are 3 months old and with the recent sharp price increases they may need to go up.
- We collect \$60,000 a year from billing for ambulance transport calls. The billing is done by a service in Windham. They started in 2016 and their fee is 9%.
- We must buy new turnout gear every 10 years per NFPA. We try to do it on a 7-year average as it changes so much during that time.
- 8 new hydrants were added on Sweetser Road this year due to the new water line. The price is down a little as Yarmouth Water District overestimated what they were doing to be able to charge. These are fixed prices. Pownal FD fills their trucks at our station as they do not have water at theirs and this does not impact our cost.

Payson said he supports life safety sprinklers being installed in homes in response to that question due to our reliance on tank trucks as we have limited public water.

Public Works Director Clark Baston presented next. His budget highlights are:

- He hires a parttime employee for the summer to work in the cemeteries.
- The overtime account is always overspent so this increase is more realistic of actual expenses.
- Uniform rental costs are being cut in half.
- They need a new small compactor. The current one is over 20 years old and can't do the work. We are doing small paving like for culverts to save money but need the proper tools.
- The sidewalk plow needs a new radio. It is second hand and does not work well.
- We get municipal pricing when we buy at NAPA.

- We need to be able to weld stainless steel with all the stainless-steel equipment we have.
- We are buying 4 aluminum rims, not 8. That is an error in the way it displays.
- It is recommended we do away with the flashing signs at the one cross walk in the Village. It is constantly breaking or being damaged and it very expensive to repair. As there are other crosswalks, having only one with the flashing lights does not seem necessary.
- The Sweetser Road culvert has become a more complicated project. Instead of just flowing water through a culvert, it is intended to flow a brook so there is much more to the planning and construction. The engineer is helping with the design.
- We will hire a crusher to stock up on material.
- It is being recommended that we NOT spray any roadways for brown tail moth. There was a class put on that Bob Abbott of our Parks & Recreation Committee attended and they said it was a waste of time. Barnes said the administration of the process to notify landowners, mark land, etc. made it not worthwhile and she had advised the Select Board of that. Baston said the “chemist” at MDOT also said that they don’t spray anything. There is a spike you can put in a tree. It is likely only some town land will be sprayed.
- Milliken Road will be repaired this year with skim and chip seal from North Road to the railroad tracks.
- North Road will be done next year. Baston Road may be crack sealed this year. We buy the crack seal rubber in large blocks and the seller lets us use the machine to heat and apply it.
- The fuel budget is probably not enough given price increases.
- It takes \$25,000 to crush 4,000 yards of gravel unless diesel prices go up.
- Baston wants to purchase a portable traffic light system like we see on road projects that replaces the flaggers. They automatically direct when traffic can go in each direction. Flaggers are hard to get and if our employees do it, it is hard to accomplish much work. He said 4 weeks of hiring flaggers pays for the equipment purchase and we can also use it for road closures or fire calls if a road needs to be restricted to one lane for a period.
- Baston has a new radio system in the budget. There is a cost and a safety factor reason for requesting it. It is a combination head set and hearing protection and has a 1600’ range. The PWD and Fire/ Rescue will be on the same system and there are benefits to that, also. The employees will be more productive and able to better communicate with each other or jobs, especially when they can’t see each other.

The meeting ended at 8 P. M. upon a motion, a second, and a unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lincoln J. Merrill, Jr.
Secretary