

Town of North Yarmouth, Maine
Budget Committee Minutes
March 17, 2022

The Budget Committee meeting was held at 5:30 p. m. this evening in the Merrill Room at Wescustogo Hall and Community Center. Chair Andy Walsh called the meeting to order at 5:35. Members Jim Knight, Steve Palmer, Bill Young, Sandra Falsey, and Linc Merrill were present. Also, in attendance were Town Manager Diane Barnes, Assistant to the Town Manager Draven Walker who ran the video and sound system, Assistant Town Manager Deb Grover, Code Enforcement Officer Ryan Keith, and residents Judy Potter, Mike Mallory, Paul Whitmarsh, and Peter Godsoe.

Jim Knight moved, and Sandra Falsey seconded that the minutes of the March 10, 2022 meeting be approved. All members voted in the affirmative except Sec. Merrill who abstained as he did not attend the meeting.

Town Manager Diane Barnes was called upon to review a new budget summary.

Member Jay Fulton arrived at 5:37.

Barnes said that the municipal budget increase is 3%. She referred to a recent newspaper article. She said that when the Portland Press Herald called her and asked about new the mill rate, she said 30 cents. She did not have the newest municipal revenue sharing number. Now that number has come in and it is higher than she projected, and some expenses have been revised, so the mill rate for municipal services only (not the school budget) will go up 5 cents instead of 30 cents.

MSAD#51 will present their budget to the Select Board next week. Once their budget is finalized, we will know the new mill rate.

Barnes said that there is \$60,000 in the budget to be paid to the bondholders of Wescustogo Hall & Community Center. There will be an offsetting revenue line. The contingency line has been increased \$18,000 and that should be adequate to cover rising diesel and gasoline prices. She did not put that cost back into the individual departments.

She also said they are working to understand the electricity account. An extensive discussion brought up many items that need further investigation. The bottom line seems to be that electricity costs are high overall, and we need to understand our costs, our solar power generation, and our usage much better than we do. The town staff will work with other experts and Revision Energy who sold and installed the system on WHCC to see if they can assist.

Barnes was asked by Sec. Merrill about the reason it takes so long to know the tax revenue while the committee currently works solely on the expenses. She replied that it is because the tax assessor must determine the values of properties being built or renovated as close to the April 1st property valuation date as possible for the next tax year. They want to capture as much taxable valuation as possible. The assessor is working more that one day a week as we approach April 1st. Ryan Keith stated that he and

the assessor go out together to view the properties. Barnes stated that a June Town Meeting would make the mill rate easier to anticipate as the school budget would be done at that time.

The Administration budget in Tab 4 was reviewed. A lot of the increases in the department were attributed to higher salaries for the Town Manager all the staff. Over \$50,000 is being transferred from the TIF revenue. Bill Young asked if the TIF would be reviewed tonight. It was stated that we would have a separate meeting to learn more about the TIF. Steve Palmer asked if the overtime could be eliminated or reduced. Barnes gave an explanation and said it could not. Deb Grover said it is mostly for closing out the accounts each evening during the quarterly tax time and then for running elections.

TextMyGov is a software that shows on the town website. Deb Grover explained that usage keeps increasing as residents ask questions. There are automatic answers to some questions, but more answers need to be set up. They find it a useful tool.

MyRec is the software used by the WHCC for booking events, registrations, credit cards, and setting up schedules. Lisa Thompson uses it extensively. She handed out a document that shows the capabilities of the product.

Bill Young said the members of the Select Board are working long hours and deserve a higher stipend. That was discussed but no recommendation was made.

In account 5210, Barnes said that they may be able to drop this amount and will investigate it in more detail.

Draven Walker addressed the issue of remote access in response to a question from Steve Palmer. He said Microsoft Teams did not work well so we are still using Zoom.

Palmer asked if legal costs could be reduced this year as he hoped many of the legal expenses will not occur this year. Barnes said she preferred not to reduce it since we have already spent \$30,000 on a \$20,000 budget legal budget this year.

At 6:15 p. m. Chair Walsh opened the Public Hearing on a Remote Participation Policy for the Budget Committee. Resident Judy Potter spoke under public comments and asked that people participating remotely do not rustle papers, eat their supper, and let cats walk onto their laptops as has been happening at other remote meetings of town committees. Chair Walsh suggested that could be controlled by muting everyone but the speaker.

Jay Fulton moved, and Sandra Falsey seconded the adoption of the Remote Participation Policy as presented. All members voted in the affirmative except Sec. Merrill. As no opposition or abstention votes were asked for, Merrill did not cast a vote.

The Public Hearing concluded at 6:20 p. m.

Barnes reported the assessor charge from Cumberland County to provide this service to North Yarmouth this year is up 4%.

5610 Ryan Keith explained the role of the planning resources the town hires and what they each do. Planning Technician Ben Smith works with the Planning Board and the applicants to prepare for the meetings. The other resources budgeted are if the town needs to hire for reviewing items like the LUO definitions. It was stated that \$20,000 is enough to cover that.

The Parks and Recreation budget was discussed in detail. Steve Palmer spoke about the budget as he is a committee member. They want \$3,000 to excavate the channel between the river and the dead water at Baston's Park. They are not requesting funds for the disabled boat launch at Baston's Park due to DEP issues that are not resolved.

There is a Parks and Recreation Committee reserve account that has \$53,000 in it. That has come from logging on town owned land. None of that money will be used in this year's budget request. All funds will come from the TIF account.

Bill Young brought up his discussions with Program Director Tina Mullins at the State of Maine DECD. He questioned whether the use of taxes collected from residential developments in TIF's in North Yarmouth can be used for expenses outside the TIF district and for items not supportive of commercial businesses. Barnes said she would contact Mullins and speak with her about it. Young said he is in favor of spending as much TIF money as possible on general government expenditures but wants to make sure it is done correctly.

Chair Walsh said the TIF has been rushed in the past and we need to understand it better. Steve Palmer returned to the budget itself and said that the signs at the parks needed to be replaced. Deb Grover thought that they were last redone by Rob Dransfield in 2014. Palmer said they cost \$3,500 each to replace.

Grover said we have very little use of our social services budget. She does refer residents who need more services to Opportunity Alliance as they are structured to help get the correct assistance.

Chair Walsh said he does not want to fund Maine Public Radio and that people should do that on their own. Jay Fulton urged support due to the emergency broadcast feature. Bill Young pointed out that cell phones also push that notice out.

Turning to Tab 14, Diane Barnes talked about Capital Reserves. The additional funding this year is smaller than in previous years. There is over \$37,000 to fund the eventual solar panels purchase, and \$10,000 for the Future Land Fund to replace what was taken out to purchase the property at Knights Pond this year. Barnes also said there will be no reduction in the Undesignated Funds Balance this year.

Deb Grover addressed the funding for ongoing records preservation. This is to keep our old records in good condition. She particularly mentioned the property valuation books that go back into the 1800s and the Vital Records. They are restored by a company located in Vermont.

Barnes said that next week we will talk about the TIF and the American Rescue Plan. Our next meetings will be March 24th at 6 p. m. and March 30th at 5:30 p. m. with the Select Board.

Steve Palmer made a motion to adjourn and Sandra Falsey seconded it. The vote to adjourn was unanimous. The meeting closed at 7:07 p. m.

Lincoln J. Merrill, Jr., Secretary