

North Yarmouth Budget Committee
Minutes of April 13, 2023, Meeting

Meeting called to order at 6:05 p. m. by Chair Andy Walsh. Also in attendance were Committee members Jay Fulton, Sandra Falsey, Steve Palmer, Darla Hamlin, and Secretary Linc Merrill. Bill Young was absent as he was working.

Also present were Town Manager Diane Barnes, Code Enforcement Officer Ben Scipione, Fire Chief Greg Payson, Select Board Liaison Brian Sites, Wescustogo Hall Assistant Director Jackson Humphrey and six members of the public.

Town Manager Barnes asked CEO Scipione to present his budget proposal in section 110-05 to the Committee. Scipione explained that part of the NFPA membership is here, and the rest is in the Fire Department budget. There is \$15,000 for GIS mapping, and the entire cost of the assessing contract with Cumberland County which has a 3% to 4% cost increase. Merrill asked if there are other costs in the budget for the assessing and Scipione said it was all in this contract price- site visits, travel, mail, and field work are included.

North Star Planning budget is down \$5,000. Scipione said that the decrease is based on them spending more time this fiscal year than was anticipated but the expectation that it will be less in 2024. Fulton asked what the money in this item is spent on. Barnes answered that it is spent to support the Planning Board for site plan review, new subdivisions, etc. A lot of it went to major projects.

A discussion about the North Star budget followed. There were comments that the number of subdivisions may decline with a weaker economy. Also, that Deacon Hayes Commons project should be over this year and that has cost a lot to handle. Scipione also mentioned the site plan review for Trudy Bird as a cost. Merrill stated that Trudy Bird did not go to site plan review.

A conversation about MainePERS took place. Walsh and Merrill shared their thoughts and concerns about changing to MainePERS for town employee retirement and the cost to the taxpayers. Barnes said there had been a lot of employee turnover this past year and MainePERS could help attract new ones.

Sandra Falsey said she thought the health insurance cost was high. Walsh said the COLA for employees' wages is 6% and a 5% retirement cost increase means an 11% benefit cost increase. Barnes said we can't change the health insurance cost unless the employee pays more.

Palmer said he wanted more time to consider MainePERS. Merrill suggested a compensation study by an independent firm be conducted to look at all the benefits the Town offers and see if we are competitive. Merrill also stated he is not in favor of going on MainePERS. Hamlin said it seems like we are always behind on the compensation as this was an issue when she was on the Select Board.

Walsh suggested an independent firm to look at this issue and whether we should increase the contribution to ICMA to 7% Palmer said he would like to have a workshop on this and make sure we are

all informed and he understands it. Barnes said we need to join MainePERS to be competitive. Barnes said saying North Yarmouth is in MainePERS will make all the difference in hiring new employees. Chief Payson presented the Public Safety budget what was under Tab 7. He said the number of calls for the combined fire and rescue was:

2015	288
2016	355
2017	399
2018	357
2019	346
2020	384
2021	431
2022	490
2023	is 13 calls ahead of 2022 Year to Date

Payson explained that a call for assistance is made either to 911 or directly to the Station.

Fulton referenced an email from Budget Committee member Young (who was absent) that said the calls averaged less than one per day and that he believed it is over one call per day. Fulton asked whether this was “misinformation” and then referred to the North Yarmouth Code of Conduct that he had with him. He stated that he believed Young was in violation of the Code of Conduct. Payson said the numbers he gave the committee are the ones reported to the State of Maine.

Payson said he had three calls today. Of 273 EMS calls, over 190 required transport. The fire calls include a variety of types such as checking smoke detectors and mutual aid. The majority of calls are from 6 a. m. to 11 p. m. There are very few calls between 11 p. m. and 6 a. m. Tuesdays and Fridays have the biggest call volumes, but the other days are not that much different.

Payson stated a number of people call the station directly.

Payson said he wants a fulltime person at the station 24 hours a day. He explained that this is the direction he has been working towards. Seven years ago, the per diem fire/rescue personnel first began to be hired for a day a week. Four years ago, the per diems expanded to working five days a week. Three years ago, the per diems were hired seven days a week. These are all daytime shifts.

Payson said he responds to 95% of the daytime calls. He said fulltime fire departments are costly, so he wants to build slowly to this. He said four fulltime staff can provide 24/7/365 coverage. He said Casco has a fulltime department.

The hourly rate for per diem was discussed. North Yarmouth pays \$22.24. Payson gave figures on a number of local towns and the rates that they pay. The examples were all higher than what North Yarmouth pays. Payson said it is hard to get per diem staff as there is a shortage of people available to work. He is proposing we increase to \$28 per hour to be competitive. Payson said in the last 3 months there have only been 3 days when he could not get a per diem person. He said it was more days without coverage in the months prior to that.

Merrill inquired about the students who live at the station. Payson said we need them. They run 60% of the calls. Two of them have their basic EMS license. They are crucial for fire calls, too. The call members (volunteers) do 20% of the calls. At night, the Chief and the students are generally drivers.

Falsey asked if Deri was still working. Payson said yes. He also will do some per diem work. Palmer asked if there are any benefits for the per diem staff. Payson said no, just the daily rate. Walsh said that benefits for town employees are \$15 an hour. Walsh asked whether we can just raise the rate we pay.

Merrill asked what the call members receive. Payson said the hourly rate is \$13.80 for trainings and meetings. The rate per actual call is \$13.80 plus additional incentives for each license the member holds (EMS, etc.). This generally makes the rate less than \$20 an hour.

In response to a member, Payson said that the fulltime employee would be required to have a Firefighter 1 and 2 certification and be a paramedic. Paramedic school costs \$30,000.

MainePERS was discussed again. Payson said 90% of firefighters are in MainePERS and it would be hard to hire someone fulltime for North Yarmouth if the Town does not join it. Payson said he has 16 years in MainePERS and was led to believe the Town would join it when he came here. He said if he had been in MainePERS he would be able to retire in another year.

Payson said the call members must take an annual physical that is looking for specific things related to this position. The Town pays for them. Merrill asked how many of the department officers live out of Town. Payson said it is two. One lives in Cumberland, and one lives in Freeport. He estimated that five of the over thirty current department members live outside of North Yarmouth. He said that 12-15 will respond to a fire call.

There is a new photocopier in the budget as the current one is 12 years old, and they can't get parts. They have internet in some vehicles including the Chief's vehicle this allows them to access preplanning and hazmat information.

Tank 53 needs new tires for \$5,000. They will go to Public Works for spares. Paramedic intercepts for rescue calls are \$300 each. \$65,000 is income we receive for ambulance response fees. Personal Protection Equipment costs \$3,600 for a firefighter for the pants and jacket. We buy five sets a year. The dispatch cost is a three-year contract that we just signed with the Cumberland County communications center.

Hydrant rental remains the same. There is an item for the electricity to pay for additional lights in Walnut Hill Village. They will be LED. Fulton asked if we could use TIF to pay for the electricity. Barnes said no. She said the poles are already there and we are just adding the lights. They are between Trudy Bird and the Purple House. The speed patrols will continue. Not all the vandalized signs showing the speed a motorist is travelling have been repaired and put back in place.

Capital projects include \$91,900 to replace the fire station metal roof with asphalt. The roof leaks and repairs have been unsuccessful. The ceilings have been damaged from the leaks. The roofer who did the metal roof is no longer in business. The station is 7,180 square feet.

ARPA funds will pay for a Lucas device for doing automatic compressions for patients with heart attacks. It requires less personnel to operate and will go in the ambulance. An exhaust system will be installed in the station for the trucks to expel the diesel fumes outside. This is portable if the station is remodeled.

The purchase of a new fire engine was discussed. It will take two years to be delivered from the time it is ordered and will cost about \$1,000,000. The body is very rusted, it is starting to crush the electrical that runs through that area, and this engine carries all the special tools for extrications and rescue work. The replacement would be the same truck with the same capabilities but would be stainless steel and galvanized to prevent rust. It will fit in the current station.

A committee has been formed within the Fire Department and they are working on the specifications. Payson said that Tank 53 will need to be replaced right after this. Its tank has been repaired several times. It will cost \$750,000 to replace. Payson said the cost of trucks is up substantially with ladder trucks starting at \$2,500,000.

Palmer asked about the realities of regionalization. Payson said it would not happen. He saw combined purchases of items like hose as something that would occur. He also thought per diem rates would be standardized across departments.

Payson said regarding mutual aid that North Yarmouth went out of town 63 times last year and mutual aid came to North Yarmouth 57 times. We have 2 engines and a tank truck. When we go out of town, we take an engine and a tank truck. We can't go down to one engine as there would be nothing left in North Yarmouth to respond to a call. Everyone is trying to add staff as all departments are short on people.

Palmer said he wants North Yarmouth to have everything we need here to take care of our town. Payson said in 2013 we went from 3 engines to 2 so we could get a brush truck instead. Payson said our own ambulance has gone out of town a lot this year because of staffing issues in other towns.

There were some comments made about increasing the per diem rate and Palmer suggested \$30 an hour. An additional comment seemed to suggest we pay a higher rate and see if we can fill the shifts that way.

The members discussed the capital plan. We discussed meeting to see Engine 51 on a lift to see the rust and why it should be replaced. The next truck to be replaced after Engine 51 and Tank 53 will be in 2032. Barnes talked about the financing of the truck with a bond issue and using some TIF funds. Barnes said there is about \$800,000 in appropriated but not spent TIF funds and she will provide that information to the members. She said it is held in a checking account.

The Budget Committee workshop was closed at 8:45 p. m. upon a vote by the members. Chair Walsh opened a Public Hearing. Sites asked if the Committee could go into a Public Hearing. Barnes replied that it was posted so the Public Hearing went forward.

Rich Parenteau referenced his background in retirement planning and investments and spoke about MainePERS, He explained defined benefit versus defined contribution plans. He used the example of a defined benefit being like an insurance plan. He said defined contribution plans had the least risk for the employer, so it was safer for them.

Mike Mallory spoke about his experience with MainePERS as a retired firefighter who is in the plan. He said the City of South Portland offered MainePERS and the ICMA to them, but they only put money into the MainePERS as an employer.

A motion made by Palmer and seconded by Falsey to support the new roof at the fire station. A unanimous vote was in favor 6-0. A motion was made by Hamlin and seconded by Palmer to support the exhaust system for the fire station. It was also passed unanimously 6-0.

On the North Star planning budget item, Hamlin moved, and Palmer seconded that we support \$20,000 rather than \$25,000. That passed unanimously 6-0.

Sunday April 23rd at 1 p.m. at the Public Works garage was chosen for the inspection of Engine 51.

Palmer moved and Falsey seconded that the meeting adjourn. The vote was unanimous 6-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Lincoln J. Merrill, Jr.
Secretary

Approved: May 4, 2023