

Town of North Yarmouth
Budget Committee Minutes
April 25, 2024
Wescustogo Hall & Community Center

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Walsh. All committee members were present. (Candura, Falsey, Hamlin, Palmer, Fulton, Merrill). Also present were Town Manager Barnes, Fire Chief Payson, Select Board Liaison Andrea Berry, and residents Rich Parenteau, Michael Sweatt, Bill Young, and municipal staff member Humphrey.

Walsh asked Barnes to lead the budget presentation. Barnes said she had handed out revised budget sheets that were different than what was in the budget binder. She addressed the changes. They were a reduction to Account 5750 Workers Compensation as it was based on the wrong salary. Also, Account 5900 was reduced as \$18,720 of the expenses will be taken from the TIF account based on the discussion with the Select Board.

Barnes said that the Fire/Rescue salary last year was budgeted for a fulltime person for half the fiscal year and this year it is for all twelve months. She said Chief Payson asked for another fulltime person, but Barnes decided to leave that out. Instead, they are proposing to have 24 hour a day per diem Fire/Rescue coverage starting January 1, 2025. The current fulltime person will switch from four 11 ½ hour days to working 24 hour a day shifts and per diems will cover the rest of the time.

Chief Payson said he wants someone working in the fire station all the time. He asked how many towns have fulltime coverage and how many staff they have. The Chief said it is a struggle to get coverage at night from the volunteers as they won't always respond. Some of this is due to work commitments and they don't want a night call to run into their work hours the next morning. He said the best protection for the Town is to have paid staff on duty all the time.

Palmer asked the Chair when we should ask questions, either now or at the end. The Chief said they should be asked now. Palmer asked what the impact to the 2026 taxes is if the change is for only part of this next fiscal year. The proposed changes to full-time employee shifts and the per diems was reiterated as was stated earlier.

Candura asked how many calls we have each year. Chief Payson said he did not have the numbers with him but gave an estimate.

Hamlin asked Chief Payson to describe a typical call. Payson explained it is everything from a flooded basement to a smoke detector going off. Hamlin asked Payson to describe something other than a fire. Payson said a typical EMS call can take 2-3 hours. He said volunteers can't always come because of the amount of time.

Hamlin asked if a police officer needs to be called before they respond to an automobile accident. Payson said they do not, but they will wait if it is a life safety concern for the first responders.

Palmer asked if having a full-time person has helped. Chief Payson said it has helped. The per diem staff comes and goes and they may be working in other departments, too. They may not be available to provide coverage when it is needed in North Yarmouth.

Walsh asked if 54% of the calls are EMS. Payson said a 60/40 split EMS to Fire is probably the average for department in this area. Walsh asked if we give more mutual aid than we get. Payson said local towns don't have enough volunteers, so they use mutual aid to help cover their calls.

Walsh said there were 43 false alarms in the department call numbers. He asked if we charge for these responses. Chief Payson said we do not charge unless they go over 3 false alarms a month. He said there has not been a problem with false alarms.

Walsh asked whether we could regionalize overnight staff coverage. Payson said he did not know. Walsh said that Payson wanted to go to 4 ½ fulltime people to provide coverage. Payson said that is because he can't tell when calls will occur. Payson said there is a reduced volume between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m.

Merrill talked extensively about Fire/Rescue regionalization and advocated for it. He said each small town cannot afford a full-time department individually and that Fire/Rescue has grown to 20% of our municipal budget.

Hamlin said we talk about Fire/Rescue every year. She suggested a committee be formed to look at regionalization. Walsh agreed that regionalization discussions need to take place.

Chief Payson said we all know we have the same issues. He said he was asked by the Select Board to improve response times and the per diems did that. He said local towns have standardized purchasing to reduce costs.

Walsh said there is an advantage to regionalization because there are a lot of capital costs in Fire/Rescue. Payson said we are the only town in the area with a brush truck. Walsh asked if the local towns talk regularly. Payson said they hold monthly meetings. Merrill said wages are another large cost along with capital costs.

The overtime account was discussed. This is the cost for the full-time employee to work past their end time if they are on a call. It is also twelve months versus six months as they were only here for half the fiscal year.

Account 5140 \$13,775. Training. This is up as the full-time person needs more training. Palmer asked if these are contracted services. Payson said they are not.

Account 5211 \$1,980. Cellphone. There are dedicated, secured lines in the ambulance and fire trucks and the Chief's vehicle. They have hot spots. They are used to access and transmit information.

Account 5214 \$200. Advertising. This is for recruiting for an open position.

Account 5216 \$13,095. Software. The fee went up.

Account 5222 \$1,500. Open House and the Halloween Trunk or Treat.

Account 5226 \$500. Office Equipment. Down because we bought a new copier last year so that expense is not being repeated this year.

Account 5240 \$5,000. Contract Services. The Lucas service contract was purchased for four years last year so the cost is down this year.

Falsey asked why we need hot spots. Chief Payson said it is to transfer data to the hospital. All of the programs are internet based. The ambulance hot spot is a secure hot spot to contact the hospital. The trucks and the Chief's car transmit data on iPads. The Fire/Rescue has been using them for about 5 years.

Fulton asked if we could look up railroad derailments. Payson said yes. Fulton said electricity costs are up, so is it realistic to expect them to hold the same. Walsh and Fulton discussed the rates. Payson said the amount looks good.

Account 5418 \$1,200. Propane. No change. This is for the stove, generator, and hot water.

Account 5512 \$600 Pest Control. There was more need for the services this year.

Barnes stated that she had locked in the standard offer for the electric rate for five years.

Account 55177 \$8,805 Repairs. This is up for paving the area where the UTV trailer is parked which is dirt now. It will allow more parking and be easier to plow.

Account 5527 \$6,900 Heating. More oil was used than last year and the price is up.

Account 5531 \$8,000. Rescue Collections. This is up because rescue call billings are up so the cost for the vendor services to collect the fees is up. The revenue for these collections is \$100,000.

Account 5535 \$1,000 Emergency Management. This is to provide an emergency warmer shelter to residents. It pays for coffee and food. 20 to 30 people came there in each of the last storms where power was out for a period of time.

Account 5710 \$50,756 Health Insurance. This increase is for the full-time staff for a year.

Account 5780 \$1,675 Supplemental Insurance. This is for the volunteer fire/rescue personnel and gives them some medical/disability coverage.

Account 5900 \$59,280 Capital Projects. This account will draw \$18,720 from TIF funds. Chief Payson said the money would buy radios to finish the grant the town received for radios, but it was not enough to do everything. It will also replace the airbags in the engine. Palmer asked how much the grant for the radios was. Payson said we received \$53,000. Payson said that it only covered part of what is needed. He said that Cumberland County is changing the radio system in anticipation of a federal government change and had a \$2,000,000 grant which they split between various town's fire departments. Falsey asked how long the radios will last. Payson said the current ones are 30 to 40 years old.

Account 5324 \$34,700 Dispatch. This is the cost to have Cumberland County dispatch for the department. The cost is up slightly. We have a four-year contract.

Account 5330 \$69,875 Hydrants. The cost is up because the Yarmouth Water District has a 15% rate increase on January 1, 2025. Walsh said they are hoping to do a regular 2% to 3% a year in the future on a regular basis. The Maine PUC is allowing this without doing a filing for approval. They also are now allowed to accumulate capital, so they don't have to do bond issues if they plan well.

Account 5334 \$2,000 Speed Patrol. This is for four speed patrols a year conducted by the Cumberland County Sheriff. Fulton asked where the money for the tickets goes. Payson said it goes to the County.

Palmer asked why the benefits cost is different this year. Barnes said it is because of the fulltime Fire/Rescue employee who was only employed here part of the current fiscal year.

Walsh asked if Barnes has tracked the percentage of pay to wages because it is a surprisingly large number. Barnes said she has not but can.

Merrill asked about the health insurance premium and Barnes said we purchase it on a calendar year which is different than the fiscal year we budget for.

Palmer asked about how MainePers is working by asking if the actual enrollees is what she anticipated. Barnes said more signed up than she expected. Payson said the last few employees we hired came because we had Maine Pers. Palmer asked if it helped us in the Public Works area. Barnes said not necessarily but it makes it less likely they would go to another town. She said MainePers did a good job in their presentation when they came to North Yarmouth to meet with the employees.

Hamlin asked if our software program has the accounting system to manage MainePers. Barnes said it does. It is complex, she said.

Account 110-05 Assessing and Code Enforcement was presented by Barnes. She said it is completely different than what was originally proposed because the Town of Gray is providing the services under contract.

Accounts 5100 Wages, 5710 Health Insurance, 5720 Dental Insurance, 5735 MainePers, 5740 FICA, 5750 Workers Compensation, and 5760 Unemployment are all down due to the staff reduction in our Code Enforcement Office staff and contracting with the Town of Gray.

Account 5313 \$22,000 Planner is being increased as the Planner will come to the Planning Board meetings and do what the CEO did previously as Gray will not be performing that function.

Barnes said the Code Office has slowed down so Gray's staff can handle it. Palmer asked what the hours will be like. Barnes said that Gray will be here in the afternoons and by appointment. Meetings will still be set up by the North Yarmouth office as they have been doing. Barnes said they may be here 20 hours a week. North Yarmouth residents will not go to Gray for service.

Palmer asked how this came about. Barnes said she reached out to Gray for assistance, and this came from their discussions. Barnes said if this works, we will explore other areas.

Palmer asked if the staff could work remotely. Barnes said maybe to some degree in some positions, but they really need to be at the office. Falsy asked how long we have been down one person in the town office. Barnes said it has been since January.

Merrill asked if there is a potential issue between the planner who reviews and recommends changes to the code and interpreting that code with the Planning Board in a meeting with an applicant. Barnes said there is not.

Palmer asked about the legal fees and whether we need more budgeted with an expanded role for the planner. Barnes said there are a lot of warrant changes the attorney needs to look at and she thinks we are close to \$50,000 in legal expenses this year.

Barnes summarized the net expense reductions as a result of all the changes from the original budget proposal as \$143,300.

Walsh said the school budget is tough. He asked Barnes if she had any comments on it. Barnes said the last budget meeting is next week. The warrant needs to be approved by May 9th.

Andrea Berry stated that the school budget meeting is on May 9th. There will then be a public vote at the polls in June.

It was said the Budget Committee will meet with the Select Board on May 7th at 6:30 p.m. to approve the budget.

Palmer moved and Fulton seconded that we adjourn at 7:57 p.m. The motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Lincoln J. Merrill, Jr.

Secretary