



Budget Committee Meeting

January 9, 2025, 7:00 PM

Open Meeting and Roll Call

Chair Cutting opened the Budget Committee meeting at 7:02 PM.

Budget Committee Members Present: Michael Cutting (Chair), Ray Martin, Harold Blanchette, Rick Bixby, Bill Hanson, Alfred Hanson and Robert Blake.

Select Board: Faith Minton, Harry Seidel, Mike Smith (via Zoom), Kathy Frenette, Judy Newman-Rogers and Clyde Carson.

Approval of Minutes • January 2, 2025

Tabled

Review of YTD 2024 Expenditures

The YTD 2024 Expenditure reports reflects 91-92% of the 2024 Expenditures year to date, some invoices are still coming in. 2024 budget \$4,563,086. YTD expended (per report) \$4,161,309. Balance remaining \$490,000. Mike Cutting asked for an estimate of the remaining balance and how much will be spent. Clyde Carson estimated \$100,000 to \$200,000 the balance will go into the unassigned fund balance. Mike Cutting stated that the budgeting for 2024 was reasonable. Faith Minton stated that a significant portion of the unspent funds is due to vacant positions and benefits. Mike Cutting recapped the departments that over and under spent their budget.

OVER SPENT

General Government by \$17,000

Elections by \$650

Finance by \$7,100

Legal Expense by \$13,000

Health and Human Services by \$24,000

UNDER SPENT

Reval by \$2,500

Personnel (benefits) by \$74,000

General Government buildings by \$17,000

Cemetery by \$1,500

Police Department (vacancies) by \$1,598

Ambulance by \$42,000

Fire Department by \$30,000

Forestry by \$2,000

Faith Minton opened the Select Board meeting at 7:11 PM when Harry Seidel arrived and allowed Mike Smith to participate by Zoom.

Mike Cutting requested a more accurate account of the debt services and the Hopkinton landfill invoice amount. Bill Hanson asked if the wage scale for town employees has been reviewed.

Kathy Frenette stated that it has not. Bill Chandler explained that it was done years ago by a private company and the Town Administrator at the time completely changed it from 12 steps to 24 steps. He stated that he does not rely on the wage scale study. Mike Smith agreed. Mike Cutting stated that the Town has not given step or merit increases in the last few years because the budget could not support it. He stated that 2-3% COLA was given to employees.

Rick Bixby asked if an adjustment needs to be made to the Administrative Assistant wages, it was budgeted at \$57,865 and now we have spent \$71,782. Clyde Carson explained they have been understaffed in 2024. He attributed it to support of meetings and overtime for various meetings. Rick Bixby asked if the full-time highway wages for the truck driver should be adjusted to accurately reflect the split wages. Alfred Hanson spoke about other jobs splitting and accounting of those wages. Robert Blake spoke about the savings in the energy accounts which indicates the budget could be reduced in those areas.

Review of Projected Revenue

Judy Newman-Rogers distributed the updated Projected Revenue report. 2024 Budget revenue \$1,280,250 and received \$2,106,378, \$826,000 more than projected (\$600,000 cell tower \$126,000 rooms and meals tax). Alfred Hanson asked if sale owned properties would occur in 2025 and how much revenue is estimated. Mike Cutting explained that the estimated revenue for 2025 is \$1,346,000. Mike Smith stated that he continues to look for ways to generate revenue to offset the \$600,000. There was a discussion regarding how the \$600,000 impacted the tax rate for 2024 and the increase that will occur in 2025 if revenue is not increased and spending is not managed. Mike Smith spoke about the recent increase to the elderly exemption that shifts the burden to the other taxpayers. Mike Cutting stated the operating budget has substantially increased but the town has not grown. Mike Smith spoke about the importance of being mindful of spending and how the taxpayers will be affected.

Review of Operating Budget

Mike Cutting asked the BC members if they have an interest in developing their own budget to present at Town Meeting. Harry Seidel urged the Budget Committee to discuss any department budget cuts with the department to be informed on the impact of the cut.

Alfred Hanson made a motion seconded by Harold Blanchette to table the operating budget review until next week to allow the Budget Committee more time to evaluate the budget. Motion passed unanimously.

The Budget Committee agreed to develop their own budget and if necessary, call an additional meeting.

Review of Capital Budget

Police Department: Capital Budget for 2025 \$35,000 for vehicle replacement. Chief Chandler stated that he is willing to forgo the replacement of the 2017 vehicle for one year, but he does feel it is necessary to put something into the CRF this year. The balance is \$41,000. He would be comfortable with \$25,000. A reduction of \$10,000. Chief Chandler stated that he is also reducing his wage line by \$10,000 (sign on bonus) because the new hire left.

Highway Department: Equipment capital reserve for 2025 \$175,000. Tim Allen explained that he has two vehicles that must be addressed in 2025. The vehicles are 22 years old; he would like to replace one of them. Tim Allen explained that he understands the need for cuts, but he would like everyone to have an understanding how much a cut will cost the town in the long run. He stressed the need to replace the 10-wheeler this year because it is used every day. He explained that the pickup truck is the other piece of equipment that needs replacing. Tim Allen spoke about the loader/backhoe and the grader. Alfred Hanson stated the grader is the most expensive piece in the fleet and the longer the town holds on to it the equity is lost. He feels the loader and the grader will bring bigger savings to the town if the replacement focus was on those two pieces. Tim Allen stated that he has been focusing on the two pieces (10-wheeler and pick up) that are used every day. He spoke about the hit to the operating if repairs are needed to those two items. James Gaffney urged the budget committee to look at the department priorities. He stated that if the roads are not clear and passable the town is impacted. He asked about the CRF for fire suppression. Tim Allen acknowledged that a better plan needs to be developed to protect the building, not ruin the building. James Gaffney asked if the town should consider redirecting those funds. Mike Smith agreed that a better plan is needed and agreed that consideration should be given to possibly redirecting the funds that are not being used. Mike Smith spoke about the savings of the two employees who have split job titles. Tim Allen cautioned the Budget Committee that equipment is not the only issue, the building needs repairs (overhead doors and the air exchange system) as soon as possible. Mike Smith agreed. He stressed the need to address the doors and air exchange).

Transfer Station: \$50,000 is for repairs. Tim Allen informed the board that the furnace would not run for three days and there are numerous other repairs that are needed. John Leavitt stated that there is \$200,000 in the CRF to address the repairs. Mike Smith stated that they have been working to develop a plan. Mike Smith explained that he and others have been working to come up with a plan that does not waste money.

Transfer Station equipment: \$50,000 Tim Allen explained that he has received a quote of \$25,000 to rebuild the bailer. He explained that he put in \$35,000 to the CIP for the next five years to have some funds set aside to address all of the equipment at the Transfer Station. He would like \$25,000 for 2025 and \$35,000 for the years after. A reduction of \$25,000

Bridge Repair/Replacement: Tim Allen stated that he can live with \$50,000

Total reductions to the Capital Budget is \$70,000.

Kathy Frenette spoke about the ability to make changes at Town Meeting. Alfred Hanson spoke about the anticipated petition warrant article for the Warner Community Center and the possibility of grants. Harry Seidel explained that there are several different grants available to assist the town in securing a grant. Alfred Hanson suggested a CRF in the amount of \$5,000. Ed Mical confirmed that there are matching grants available. James Gaffney spoke about the sidewalk CRF and redirecting those funds.

Meeting Schedule:

Next meeting January 16, 2025, Review of Operating Budget; to develop the Budget Committee's budget.

Adjournment

Faith Minton closed the Select Board meeting.

Rick Bixby made a motion seconded by Ray Martin to adjourn the Budget Committee meeting. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:29 PM

Respectfully submitted by Tracy Doherty

Edited by Darcie Buskey, Assistant Clerk

APPROVED 01/16/2025