

Attendees:

Lori Mix, Chair (LM)
Thomas Cook, Secretary (TC)
Tom Silvia (TS)
Wendy Rannenberg (WR)
Andrew Pataky (AP)
Diane Layton (DL)
Steve Boczenowski, Alternate (SB)
Russ Hodgkins, Alternate (RH)

Ways & Means Meeting Call to Order: 6:20 pm. Felix Hertzka Conference Room

Topics Discussed

1. Reviewed the BOS agenda for the evening.
2. Discussion on voting machine certification and appropriateness of the machines selected for purchase. Consensus that decision was not in the purview of the W&M and if any members had concerns to address them during the citizen forum during the BOS meeting.
3. RH questioned whether DPW vehicle purchases should be in the regular budget or another one since they are durable goods. LM and WR noted that DPW vehicle purchase have long been part of the budget. LM researched whether DPW vehicle purchases qualify under CRF rules and that they are okay for CRF. Both the NHDOJ and the Amherst Town auditors believed the intent of the DPW Vehicle purchase fell within the definition as described in the CRF RSA.

6:29 PM Adjourned to join Board of Selectman (BOS) in Landry Meeting Room, 2nd Floor

4. BOS reviewed warrant articles
5. BOS reviewed budget and discussed reductions

9:44 PM W&M Reconvened in Felix Hertzka Conference Room

6. Motion to accept the 10/24 Meeting Minutes – WR motioned and LM second
7. W&M Members briefed each other on the outcome of the department head meetings
 - a. Police & Communications – Attendees DL and AP
 - i. AP prosecutor addition in budget discussed at BOS but not requested for the upcoming calendar year. There is experience on the current staff to handle the need.
 - ii. AP questioned whether \$5k for ammunition was excessive. Discussion around room suggested that the frequency of certification and high cost of ammunition likely justified the cost.
 - iii. High electricity cost increase but that's due to DPW estimate of cost increase.
 - iv. Vehicle cost increases due, in large part, to vehicle accidents.
 1. Replacement vehicles purchased and waiting to be outfitted since there are supply chain related delays.
 - b. Fire & Rescue AP and LM

- i. AP – concerned that the annual Fire and Rescue CRF Warrant article was not adjusted for inflation. Current ask is \$257K but \$300k may be more appropriate.
 - ii. LM – No specific concerns about their budget.
 - iii. Fire & Rescue requested funding for another ambulance in their strategic plan but that request will be in a future budget.
- c. Department of Public Works – TS, RH, and WR
 - i. TS – DPW represented ~37% of town budget and 46% of the total increase. DPW is unique from other departments insofar as labor costs are a minority of their total cost and cost increase.
 - ii. Major drivers of increase are increases to Souhegan landfill cost which is nonnegotiable, increases in Pennichuck costs, and increase in material costs for roads.
 - iii. WR – Cost increases within department control seemed reasonable. WR noted that there's an additional \$100k added to the budget every year to supplement road construction and maintenance and that BOS didn't flinch at that \$100K addition. BOS prioritizing roads after own's prior experience of high reconstruction costs after neglect.
 - iv. AP questioned department's prior decision to install trex decking at the transfer station since its not a durable solution and now being reviewed for replacement.
 - v. WR – Some questions about the transferability of cemetery funds to other DPW projects and land sales that have been considered by the department to neighbors.
- d. Library – AP & WR
 - i. No budget change due to additions to the budget. Just inflation to existing budget items and COLA for staff.
 - ii. Trusts to fund library. Library has a lot more discretion on how to invest and use their trust funds than other departments in town. Laws surrounding the trust are different.
- e. Recreation – TS, TC and RH
 - i. TS – 511K budget which amounts to 3% of the town budget. 8.9% increase to their budget which is largely driven by increases to labor costs.
- f. General Government – LM and DL
 - i. Major drivers to cost increases are COLA and the addition of a new assistant finance director.
 - ii. TS – What would be the value add for this add to staff?
 - iii. LM – Town has had issues with turnover and bad experience with competence of prior finance director. There's more work to do than one person can do by themselves. New finance director has been much better. Idea is that Debbie (current finance director) could bring in new assistant finance director to train and have as candidate for new finance director. Keep continuity within the department.
 - iv. Major budget item to be purchased to replace existing finance software. Current software is not actually for finance. This purchase is not happening again this year.
 - v. SB & TC– Getting the right software will help attract candidates for the job.
- g. Administration –
 - i. Funding for new voting machines is the major cost driver.
- h. Community Development SB & TS
 - i. 15% increase in budget.
 - ii. 57% of the increase due to COLA related increase.
 - iii. 43% of increase due to cost of consultant fees.

- iv. Significant increase but unavoidable.
 - v. Looking to hire additional staff to manage costs and reduce reliance on consultants.
 - i. TS – When reviewing budgets with the departments felt good about all the increases and justifications but when looking at the total increase at the end felt that the increase was way too high. Bottoms up analysis was helpful but wants to also look at the budget from a top down perspective with a particular dollar or percentage increase in mind. See what reductions might be appropriate through that analysis.
 - j. SB – Multiple line items in the budget where a department requested funding every year for a project that they never implemented. BS felt that those departments should have to request a warrant article to justify the project with voters and get the funding back from the unassigned balance.
 - k. BS – Overtime funding in the budget is generally not spent. Estimate in budget appears to account for worst case scenario but money overwhelmingly is unspent. Should reduce the amount allocated to overtime to align with historical spending.
8. Bike and Ped Committee
- a. RH – Feels like people want things since the funding is ‘on sale’ relatively speaking due to the fact that grant matches are available.
 - b. Wendy – Bike and Ped needs money on hand in order to get major grants to fund project at the high school and middle school.
 - c. TC concerned that the 100K line item in the budget has no associated project plan. Without a detailed plan with projects, grants, and dates for grant responses, the money is at risk for being unspent and lost to the unassigned balance fund.
9. TS – Should we try and target how much taxes should go up? Then use that figure back into how we evaluate the budget?
- a. BS – Agreed. Felt that around 500k was acceptable.
 - b. TS and RH – both felt that 5% seemed justifiable
 - c. RH -Can cut budget by eliminating budget items. May be painful but necessary to keep costs under control.
10. AP move to adjourn. LM second

10:57 PM Meeting adjourned

Respectively Submitted,

Tom Cook
Secretary, Ways & Means