

TOWN OF EPSOM
BUDGET COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 7, 2023

Attendees: Marylou Keane, Chairman; Joni Kitson, Vice Chairman; Gary Kitson, Water District Representative; Meadow Wysocki, Selectmen's Representative; Mary Frambach; Joyce Heck; Len Gilman; Linda Hodgdon; Penny Graham; Michael Muise, School Board Representative; Nancy Wheeler

Not in Attendance:

Other Attendees: Rob Topik

Marylou opened the meeting at 7:00 PM. It was noted that Mr. Topik was recording the meeting.

TOWN BUDGET

Meadow noted that Deb Sullivan has returned as Finance Administrator.

Meadow reviewed the budget the Selectmen are presenting. She noted that increases were mainly the contract items. They have added a Technology Line under the Selectmen's lines which will cover all town departments; it will be for cyber security purposes, etc. She noted many of the computers are older and will not handle the new software. Linda asked when they plan to have everything completed, Meadow thought by December. Joni asked if the line also covered the cost of new computers, Meadow indicated only for the IT services, not computers. Further discussion occurred regarding the computer replacements and the IT services. Meadow noted they would like to set up a 5-year plan with computer replacements every 3 to 5 years. Mike verified the \$17,160.00 would be a yearly fee paid monthly. Len asked if there was any guarantee against losses, Meadow will check into it and return with more information.

Meadow noted that various staff wages were increased by \$1.00/hour. She noted that some stipends were also increased. Penny questioned the wages for the Administrative Assistant Wages and the Office Assistant Wages. Meadow noted that when Andrea returned, she came at a higher wage than the previous Assistant was paid. The Office Assistant hours were adjusted to reflect coverage for open hours. The Office Assistant will no longer be doing the Select Board minutes and that line has been decreased.

It was discussed that the \$1.00/hour helped the lower paid employees and the higher paid employees agreed with it. Deb noted that the total increase was approximately \$48,000.00 or 3.8% for all wages.

The Trustee of the Trust Funds wages were increased by \$250.00.

Meadow noted the Town Clerk budget increased due to having 4 elections in 2024. The Supervisors of the Checklist stipend was increased; Meadow noted they looked at all that the Supervisors must do before, during and after an election.

The Revaluation of Property is a contracted amount.

Meadow noted the Town Tax Collector uses a service to fold and mail the tax bills twice a year.

Meadow noted the increases in health insurance. There are 4 employees who take the buyout for health insurance.

Workers Comp had a 10% increase. Linda questioned the 14.5% increase. Deb noted there was not enough budgeted in 2023 so there is an additional increase for 2024.

Meadow noted the Planning Board legal fees were increased. Linda questioned if there would be additional costs in 2024 as there were in 2023. Meadow did not know. The Printing line is for newspaper publishing for public hearings that are required by the State RSAs.

Floyd questioned the wages of the Zoning Compliance Officer. He is budgeted 15 hours a week. The current Officer formerly was the assistant. A legal line has been added for Zoning Compliance. Formerly the legal expenses came out of the Selectmen's line. Gary asked if the Selectmen's line was reduced, it has not been.

Rob Topik asked if there was anything budgeted for training, there is \$100.00 budgeted and also free training he attends.

The Zoning Board Legal fees were increased. Nancy verified that notices, etc. are handled by the Office Staff so there is no longer Secretarial Support funds.

The cost of Custodial Services has increased. Deb noted there is a new cleaner and more spaces to be cleaned. The Town Office is cleaned once a week.

The electric line was increased as the Selectmen are taking over the Old Library as well as having not budgeted enough in 2023. Gary verified the buildings this covered, the Old Meetinghouse, Old Library and Town Office.

Gary verified they had enough to cover the water bills for all the buildings which are Old Meetinghouse, Old Library and Town Office.

It was noted that the heat for the Old Library is also being paid by the Town.

Joni asked what the Old Library was used for. Meadow noted to store historical records and the Historical Association. This space is open to the public by appointment. Joni noted the groundskeeping covers the entire complex. Joni stated that the septic system for the library has trees, etc. growing on it. She noted that there has not been anything done to remove them.

The Insurance did not have enough budgeted in 2023 and will have a 20% increase in 2024. Gary questioned if the Town has spoken with Primex for insurance. No one knew. Virginia asked if the insurance covered Webster Park and it was indicated it does.

Meadow noted the wage increases for the Police Department. There are currently 4 full time officers. There was a review of the Administrative Assistant position and it was modified as she does items that are not included in the former secretarial position.

Police Dispatch has increased with no town control over the cost. Joni asked if they could encumber the 2023 funds for the police vehicle purchase and use the funds to purchase a new vehicle in 2024. It was discussed if the funds could be encumbered. There are not enough funds to purchase the vehicle in the 2023 budget. Deb noted the Chief hoped to use the funds to purchase Tasers. It was noted the existing ones were outdated. Mary asked the number of tasers, there would be 7 purchased.

The purchase of the vehicle was discussed as it was budgeted at \$37,000.00 and next year will be \$47,000.00. It was discussed there was not enough budgeted at \$37,000.00. Mike discussed there is excess funds in the Police Department budget asking if some of that money could be used for the purchase of the vehicle. Virginia noted there are a lot of items the Chief would like to address in the building that need to be corrected. Linda noted that Congress has a bill that has not been passed for funds for small town safety departments to upgrade items. The issues were discussed.

Mr. Topik asked if there was a difference between an out-of-date taser and a more updated one. It was noted up dated tasers would be better. Marylou noted the Police Chief would be coming before the Committee and the questions could be asked at that time.

Gary asked what the Police Department Repairs & Maintenance line was used for. It was discussed that it also includes the mowing, trash and a security system. Gary would like to break out the contracted amount of money in the Repairs & Maintenance Line.

Joni noted the Fire Department line may be the same. Meadow noted the full time Fire Department wages includes the increase and funds for a new Paramedic. Meadow discussed they did a study of the Fire Chief stipend and included an increase as he is being underpaid.

Gary asked the number of positions. Meadow noted 5 positions filled with one vacancy. It was discussed that the budget is for 50 hours a week for the full-time employees. The amount in the line was discussed.

The number of hours the Chief is budgeted for was reviewed. Meadow noted it was 24 hours a week. She noted that he usually works more hours than that. Floyd discussed that he was concerned that the position would become full-time without being voted on by the voters. Meadow noted it is a stipend paid under the regular payroll schedule. The issues were discussed as to if it was voted to change the position from volunteer to a part time fire chief employee. Floyd believed that the chief's position was never changed to a part time employee. Floyd wanted to make sure that the Town did not find itself having issues. Floyd noted that several years ago the stipend for the Chief was increased so he could purchase health insurance outside of the Town. Floyd wants to be sure the terminology is correct.

Meadow noted the equipment line is for 3 sets of tactical gear. Vehicle repairs will include costs for new tires for the ambulance.

The Chief is creating a warrant article for a special detail fund. Floyd asked what they do for this line, it is working at the race track and Deerfield Fair.

It was noted that the Fire Department year to date water amount line is incorrect. The building repairs and maintenance is for bathroom repairs.

An increase in the stipend was given to the new Emergency Management Director. Meadow noted that the training is the table top training. He has not spent funds as there is electrical work that needed to be completed for the new generator and they just found out that additional grant funds were awarded for this. He has items he will be purchasing prior to the end of the year.

There are funds allocated for a part time person for the Highway Department. The snow removal line was over for 2023 with more budgeted for 2024. Deb noted she asked department heads how they thought they were doing with their budgets; the Road Agent said his budget will be close. Gary noted that FEMA did not cover Merrimack County and the Town had approximately \$90,000.00 of damage to repair due to storms this summer. Len noted that in all his years in town the current Road Agent takes care of the small things that keep the roads in better repair.

Hydrant Rental has two hydrants that are nonoperational. Gary discussed that there would be repairs with one to be replaced at a cost of approximately \$9,000.00.

The Welfare Officer wages were not increased as she is at the higher end of wages. Meadow noted the Welfare Vendors lines. She noted that rentals and mortgages are now covered in the housing line. Gas and vehicle repairs will be under transportation.

Penny asked if the food pantry paid any rent or toward the heat or electricity. They do not, but gave \$10,000.00 toward the renovations.

Parks and Recreation did not include the cost of removing a tree that fell on the concession stand with the insurance claim. They are working with the insurance company to obtain funds to cover this.

Meadow noted that they reduced the Town Band to 3 performances a year. Penny noted that she was asked about the budget. She noted she had a statement from the director. She noted attendance is down, but they feel that the town does not support them. One concert is Memorial Day so that would only leave 2 other concerts. Meadow noted they felt there was low attendance with most areas getting budget cuts, the Selectboard felt this was appropriate. Penny noted that it has been suggested they attempt to raise private funds. She asked if they could use Webster Park. Meadow noted if they reserve it, they could use it. Issues were discussed.

The Conservation Funds were cut. They have no plans for purchases or easements in 2024. The parking lot at the Town Forest is being expanded as well as road repairs as part of the timber cut.

The Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) signs cost are for the State permits. The group has lots of things they would like to accomplish.

Penny thanked the Selectmen for informing the departments of the changes.

Linda asked about obtaining a list of items that have the biggest increases.

The library budget was discussed. It was noted the health insurance and retirement costs are included in the Town budget, not the library budget. Deb noted that only two people are full time and take the opt out on health insurance.

Minutes

The minutes of September 21, 2023 were reviewed and amended.

Meadow motioned to approve the minutes of September 21, 2023, as amended; Linda seconded the motion. The motion passed with two abstaining.

Marylou noted next meeting will have presentations from Police, Fire and Conservation. Marylou asked if there were other committees the members would like to have attend. Len felt all committees should come in. This would include Planning, Zoning, Parks and others. Joni noted the smaller departments did not have large changes. Meadow noted if the Budget Committee was cutting, they should attend. Len noted if cuts were made to those departments, they should be aware. Floyd asked if cuts would be made to those departments. No one could say at this time.

The BCEP budget was discussed with the Committee wanting copies of the budget. It was noted that Virginia had a copy of the proposed budget.

Len motioned to adjourn; Linda seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Marylou adjourned the meeting at 9:52 P.M.

Respectfully,

Betsy Bosiak
Recording Secretary