

**TOWN OF EPSOM  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES  
October 28, 2019 AT 6:00 PM**

Hugh Curley  
Virginia Drew  
Cheryl Gilpatrick

Approved: **Cheryl / Hugh**  
**Vote: 3 – 0 in favor.**

Staff Present: Nancy Wheeler, Dawn Calley-Murdough

Other Attendees: Joni Kitson, Meadow Wysocki, Norm Yeaton, Deb Sargent, Linda Hodgdon, Dick Frambach, Mary Frambach, Len Gilman

Virginia called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and asked Norm to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Virginia reviewed the agenda and changes to the agenda included removing the discussion of Gauthier Drive.

**Motion by:** Cheryl to accept the agenda as amended. **Second by:** Hugh. **Vote:** 3 – 0 in favor.

**Signature/Approval Items:** Virginia noted the town portion of the tax rate did not change from 2018, the school rate increased by \$0.97 and the county rate increased \$0.15.

**Motion by:** Hugh to approve the 2019 property tax warrant and tax levy in the total amount of \$6,034,962.22 with an effective tax rate of \$27.09 per thousand for the town, county, local and state school taxes. **Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

**Assessing Signature/Approval:** The board reviewed the Town Clerk/Tax Collector job posting and discussed the starting salary amount, as well as the change in pay rate once the person becomes the full time Town Clerk/Tax Collector. Nancy stated she would need to determine if the salary amount can be adjusted for the new Town Clerk/Tax Collector. The board asked to include additional information about the change in salary amount when the person becomes Town Clerk/Tax Collector.

**Motion by:** Hugh to approve the Unitil 2019 abatement credit of \$8,304.60 recognizing the previous settlement agreement. **Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

**Discussion:**

**Review/Planning of 2020 Operating Budget:** The board determined they would review the budget line by line, with a discussion and decision about salaries later in the meeting.

Hugh asked the amount of the Detail Fund to determine if there are enough funds that could be used to offset the Police Cruiser purchase in 2020. Nancy stated she would need to determine that answer.

Virginia stated General Town Office accounts increased with the office building lease, which is contracted to increase 3% each year. Dawn stated the office staff agreed to eliminate the copier maintenance contract, as the proposed increase is significant and only covers labor and not parts.

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It was stated Secretarial salaries, like all salaries increased because of the extra pay period. The Administrative Assistant requested a 3% salary increase. Dawn stated she included a cost of living increase per social security, but was going to leave the decision up to the Selectmen.

Virginia stated she asked Nancy to provide the board with salary increases of 2% and \$0.50, to give the board an opportunity to see how the salary amounts could affect the budget. The board will make any final decisions on the amount or percentage to be used. Nancy stated there was some difficulty in establishing the salary for the stipend positions, such as Welfare Director.

After discussion the Secretarial training and conference account would be reduced by \$110.00 to a total of \$550.00.

It was stated the Executive account retained a small amount for Board Secretary, just in case an alternate was needed. The Property Liability Insurance increased with changes in the policy for auto coverage.

Nancy stated the Executive Equipment account could be lowered if the board wanted and the account includes file cabinets, office furniture, and any other potential needs. Nancy answered the office typically orders what is needed toward the end of the year, to make sure funds are available. Dawn answered the office needs to order a couple of file cabinets, as more file storage space is needed. The town does not currently need any computers, but the town will be in a situation early next year with two additional employees for training periods.

The Town Clerk Tax Collector (TCTC) salary includes her retirement payout and the extra pay period. The position is split between the Town Clerk account and the Tax Collector account because of state reporting requirements. Additional account increases throughout the TCTC and Election budgets are because of the four elections in 2020 and her retirement.

Virginia stated it appears the Supervisors of the Checklist have requested an increase because of the additional elections and asked if it would be reduced the next year when there are only two elections. Nancy stated she didn't believe so, as they have remained at a stipend of \$275.00 for many years. It was stated the Supervisors are also required to serve approximately 12+ hours for each election, as well as additional hours during other times of the year for voter registrations. The board agreed to the increase in salary. The board agreed to the \$55.00 stipend per election for the Ballot Clerks, as they are required to be there for the entire day and possibly for ballot counting.

The Financial Administrator salary account includes the additional amounts for retirement payout, as well as the extra pay period. It also includes funds for the Nancy's replacement for 5 to 5 ½ weeks; with the goal to hire someone with some town and BMSI software experience. Hugh asked to verify that payouts can be included in the salary accounts, especially with a possible default budget, and to also consider if the amount can be encumbered from the 2019 budget.

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It was stated the actual assessing software support amount hasn't yet been received. Avitar typically recommends a 3% increase for software support, and includes both periodic program updates and personal assistance whenever it is needed.

**Appointments:**

**Matt Moore Meetinghouse Septic Redesign:** Mr. Moore stated the previously proposed septic plan needs to be adjusted with the installation of the water lines, which are now too close to the septic and will need sleeving, and the drainage may also need to be adjusted. It might be necessary to move the leach field because the water lines go through the septic area. Mr. Moore stated he should resurvey the area because of the water lines for setback changes, possible changes because of the fill elevations for the parking lot, and he received information about septic system equipment changes from the manufacturer that may adjust the length of the pipes.

Virginia asked if the cost for the redesign was \$600.00 and Mr. Moore felt that amount would be enough to cover what he needs to do. Virginia asked for confirmation about recovering the parking lot and Hugh asked about covering for the parking area. Mr. Moore stated the parking area can be returned to the same area, gravel coverage is better than pavement, but pavement could be used.

Norm asked if removing the downstairs bathrooms would change anything for the needed system. Mr. Moore stated it doesn't necessarily and he doesn't recommend eliminating the lower level bathroom as no one knows how things will change in the future.

**Motion by:** Hugh to engage Mr. Matthew Moore to update and redesign the septic system for the Old Meetinghouse and to file the state application for the estimate of \$900.00. **Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

**Review/Planning of 2020 Operating Budget, continued:** Nancy stated there is a three year contract for the town Auditor, with a slight increase for the 2019 audit that takes place in 2020.

The Assessing account amount was decreased based on an average of actual expenditures in the past three years, and reminded the board the town will go through their Update of values in 2020, with no real options to remove it from the budget.

The Deputy Tax Collector salary increased only because of the extra pay period. The amount for the tax collect software increased the proposed 3%, as recommended by the software company.

Expenses for legal expenses remained level funded.

Nancy stated personnel administration is the actual proposed increase amount at 4.4%. However, the staffing changes in personnel, across all town departments, may mean the town will have higher health insurance premiums. These new staff members are always budgeted at the family plan, because no one knows what the new people may need for coverage.

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Nancy answered the town pays a fixed amount on the premium based on the single/lowest mid-range health insurance plan, while the employee makes up the remaining 10% amount of whatever plan they choose. Epsom falls within the mid-range of benefits, compared to what other towns offer for insurance coverage and should not be considered the most generous town. Virginia stated all employees will see an increase in the amount they pay for health insurance and dental insurance, regardless of what happens with any salary changes.

Nancy reported the Planning Board has requested an additional increase for the recording secretary, after their budget presentation to the board. The Planning Board Chair was reminded that all salary increases proposed for 2019 did not take place because of the default. It was stated the Planning Board Secretary budget requested an increase from \$110.00 per meeting to \$115.00 per meeting. It was stated the Planning Board holds approximately 24 meetings a year.

Virginia stated she is disappointed with the late submission, and is concerned that if the selectmen considered changing the amount for one secretary it could possibly change the amount paid to every board/committee secretary. It was stated the Budget Committee secretary salary was slightly more because of the number of meetings and the quick turnaround for minutes. Cheryl stated she agrees and does not recommend the change.

Discussion took place regarding planning needs for the Planning Board with the Capital Improvement Plan, the Master Plan, and the additional services. Nancy reviewed the 2019 expenses, which included half of the new Audit review, and the CIP review for 2020. The 2020 amount includes the second half payment for those items.

Zoning Compliance salary includes both a slight salary increase, as well as the extra pay period. Hugh stated he believes the requested Part-time Assistant should be more than the proposed \$10.00 per hours with \$500.00 per year. However, the board should look into finding someone with more qualifications and code enforcement knowledge to step in when the current compliance officer decides to retire. Virginia stated she did not feel comfortable with making changes to what Jay suggested, but agreed to have an amount in the account. Cheryl agreed with Hugh that the suggested \$10.00 or \$12.00 will not be enough to hire someone with the needed experience, and it should be closer to \$15.00 per hour. Nancy stated the former assistant also completed inspection of town office buildings to make sure they were secure.

**Motion by:** Hugh to increase the Zoning Compliance Assistant to \$1000.00 for the year.

**Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 2 in favor and Virginia against.

All other accounts for the Zoning Compliance Officer remained level funded. Discussion took place about the Zoning Compliance Officer salary amount and hours.

It was stated the Zoning Board of Adjustment Chair felt he would have fewer cases and caused the reduction in the salary amount. It was stated the Zoning Board, Planning Board, and Zoning Compliance had application revenues to help offset some of the expenses.

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General Government Buildings had an increase in custodial services, the same as in 2019, to try and have the Old Town Hall and Old Library building cleaned, as they should be maintained. There was a decrease in electric expenses, but an increase in heat/oil, both based on actual. Nancy stated some of the utility expenses should probably increase if the Old Meetinghouse starts to be used in 2020. Water is increased with a minimum of \$75.00 per quarter, even if water isn't used.

Virginia stated the Old Meetinghouse committee has requested funds for 2020, for cleaning supplies and supplies to help in the fundraising process. It was stated the town owns the building and some supplies are needed for operations.

Cemeteries remained unchanged from the default.

Nancy stated the town has maintenance support for printers and needed supplies, supplies for the copiers. There are also funds for town computer support and technical support.

Police salaries will be discussed by the board separately and while there are decreases in some accounts, there are others with increases that offset each other, with the other larger increase being the cruiser purchase in 2020.

Discussion took place about the cost of and what funds are being used for the 2019 cruiser, and what if any would come from operating fund and Detail fund. Hugh wanted to know how much the Detail Fund held, as it could be used to decrease the amount needed in the 2020 operating budget for a cruiser.

It was stated the authority to spend Detail Fund is up to the Police Chief and Hugh wanted to ask the Chief to utilize money from the fund to offset the cost of a vehicle. Nancy stated the cost of the cruiser should remain at the proposed \$42,000.00 and include the funds from the Detail Fund as offsetting revenue, if that is the plan, which is what is being done for one of the highway road projects.

Virginia explained the Detail Fund is money the town receives when officers complete detail duties, for example coverage for road work or even the Deerfield Fair, and some is set aside and used by the town for revenue. The spending of those funds is approved by the Police Chief and the board

Len expressed concern to the board about overall potential increases in vehicles of 17% to 19%. Nancy stated the Chief received a quote for a 2020 cruiser, along with the cost to outfit that new vehicle.

Fire Department salaries had a minimal increase, as well as the part-time salary and stipends to try and compete with surrounding towns. The department would now pay for oxygen tank refills, as their equipment is no longer usable. The board agreed that most Fire Department

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accounts remained level funded with the effort to try and increase the part-time wages and stipends amounts.

The overall Emergency Management (EM) budget was reduced, specifically with the equipment account. Cheryl recommended reducing the mileage account, as the EM Director stated the full amount wasn't typically used. There was agreement to reduce the EM Mileage amount.

**Motion by:** Cheryl to reduce the mileage for 01-4290.1-810 to \$300.00. **Second by:** Virginia.

**Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

Virginia stated the Road Agent asked to give a raise to his full time assistant due to the increase in duties, which would be offset with the reduction of the part time position with the use of Department of Correction prisoners. Virginia stated there are decreases in some accounts with increases in others.

Cheryl reviewed the proposed culvert repairs proposed by the Road Agent, which included preventative replacements and four as spares. Virginia stated there was an increase for engineering services with the repairs to the bridge on Center Hill Road.

Virginia stated he did include pavement striping in 2020, which was not done in 2019. There is an increase in Road Reconstruction, but the estimated cost will be offset with the use of \$150,000.00 of funds from the road capital reserve fund. However, he is keeping Road Paving level funded.

There were reductions with Salt and Sand with a change in materials being used, Phones which is closer to average, Training with classes being taken through the UNH T2 program. Equipment Maintenance continues to increase with the hopes of an approved truck purchase.

There is a shift of funds between the Gasoline and Diesel accounts with a change in vehicle type.

There is a shift in what was being spent for sub-contractors with additional equipment purchases.

Electric decreased, but Heat/Oil increased and is based on actual expenditures. There is also a decrease planned for building maintenance.

Virginia reminded everyone that the overall amount increased for Highway, but that increase will be offset by the \$150,000.00 from the capital reserve fund.

Cheryl stated the Bridge Repair amount is an estimate, but they won't know the full cost until work starts. It is hard to consider adjustments to the highway accounts because of the road and bridge work the Road Agent is looking to complete, which is needed.

Cheryl stated the budget is large, but includes some larger projects. The Road Agent made an effort to reduce where he could, but there are increases in others to try and get the projects done. Virginia agreed that reducing the budget by a project could help overall, but there are many people who want the roads and bridges repaired.

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There is an estimate with a 5% increase in the waste disposal accounts.

Hugh updated the board on the BCEP budget, which was both good and bad. The good news is that the proposed operating budget is slightly lower than anticipated. However, the BCEP has worked hard over the last year to solve the compost issues with NH Department of Environmental Services. As work took place with the compost, it was also determined work is needed to finalize the closing of the old landfill. The BCEP reviewed capital reserve funds and considered their capital improvement projects for a better total of what will be needed financially over the next few years.

The BCEP determined the baler will need to be replaced, parking lots resurfaced, and to cap the old landfill that will cost \$1 million dollars. The BCEP considered the different ways they could request the additional funding amounts needed to help cover the capital improvements, many of which are needed. Hugh reviewed the different methods, a one time fee for each item, a balanced budget amount over the next few years, or a gradual increase over the next few years.

Cheryl asked if the BCEP budget was available to the public, and is the budgeting process transparent. Nancy stated the BCEP is a political subdivision, just like the town and water district. Each participating town has a representative on the BCEP board and information is available to the public on their website. Payment to BCEP is based on the number of residents.

Hugh stated BCEP expects to finalize their budget in November before the December public hearings. Concern was expressed about increases needed for the BCEP and how it works with a default budget; is it a contractual obligation that allows increases. Nancy stated she would have to contact the NHDRA to determine if any increases in the BCEP payment would become part of the default budget.

**Motion by:** Hugh to increase the BCEP budget to \$251,160.00. **Second by:** Virginia. **Vote:** 2 in favor and Cheryl opposed.

The board asked for verification about the NHDES landfill requirements and estimates on the costs for all capital improvement projects.

Cheryl asked about the Northwood water increase. Nancy stated the town pays a hydrant rental fee to the Water Village District so that the Fire Department can connect to the hydrants to fight fires.

It was stated there is an expectation for an increase in the town office rent with the hookup to the Village Water District public water supply.

Cheryl asked if there are expenses for the Dog Officer account. Nancy stated there can be with the boarding of a dog.

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It was stated the Welfare Director has a 2% salary increase, as well as the extra pay period. Virginia stated there is movement between accounts, with only a slight overall increase. The board agreed to an increase in the Welfare Rent account, per the request of the director.

**Motion by:** Cheryl to increase Welfare Rents to \$16,700.00. **Second by:** Hugh.

**Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

Virginia asked to decrease the Welfare Electricity account by \$500.00.

**Motion by:** Virginia to decrease the electricity account by \$500.00. **Second by:** Cheryl.

**Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

Cheryl asked about Forest Restoration in Parks and Recreation. Nancy stated the current expenses are to prepare the area for the new trees and there is an expectation to encumber the funds to purchase new mature trees versus saplings for faster growth. There is also the hope to install irrigation to the more mature trees, and this will require a new high pressure well pump as the current one has been there for many years.

Virginia stated the Park Director did provide a level funded budget with moves from one account to another, and the director does complete a lot of the work on his own time.

It was stated Swimming Lessons is level funded, even with the additional costs needed for background checks.

Virginia stated the Library budget will remain as presented.

Conservation Commission includes an increase in Land Acquisition and Virginia stated while she supports conservation, it is hard to justify the expense, with other items in the budget. Hugh stated this is to help accomplish the plan to add to the Town Forest.

Cheryl asked general questions about the Conservation budget. Nancy answered there is trail maintenance for the Town Forest, dues/subscriptions to state conservation commissions, Land Management is to help the Commission take care of town owned easements; there is a lot the commission does on their own with volunteers.

Nancy reminded the board that the Conservation Fund does not lapse back to the General Fund; any unspent funds remain in the Conservation Fund.

General discussion took place about the funds needed for possible future purchases and whether or not the Land Acquisition should be reduced from what was requested.

**Motion by:** Virginia to reduce Land Acquisitions and Easements by \$4,200.00 to \$15,000.00.

**Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

Cheryl stated there were no changes to the Economic Development budget.



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**2020 Wage Increase Decision:** The board discussed wage increases for staff members and the differing amounts that could be offered to the Police Department, Fire Department, and general office staff. The board also considered the proposed 2% increase and \$0.50 increase scenarios.

Virginia stated she would love to increase all Police Department employee salaries by \$2.00, and would love to give the \$3.00, as requested, but does not think it would be approved by the voters. She used the Thornton Salary Survey as a guide to help in selecting the variations of department salary amounts.

Cheryl stated she completed her own wage calculations, utilizing a variety of percentages and flat dollar amount, to try and determine how it would work with the provided Thornton salary scale.

Nancy told the board the current increase in the 2020 operating budget was \$30,343.00, which included the adjustments the board made during the current meeting; this doesn't include their salary recommendations.

Discussion took place about the Thornton Wage Study and the adjustments Nancy made to the survey with the most recent COLA amounts.

Virginia asked if Cheryl and Hugh would consider a specific overall increase for the Police Department, following the Police Chief recommendation for an across the board increase at the same amount for all officers.

Discussion took place about the duties required for each of the different officers, as well as what duties are completed by the Chief and Lieutenant.

Cheryl stated the Fire Department included only a minor increase to salary amounts. Virginia stated the Fire Chief expressed that he increased the part time and stipend amounts more with the goal to increase part time participation.

Hugh asked if recent performance should be considered in raising salary amounts. The board expressed concern that Epsom has base salary amounts lower than surrounding communities. Hugh asked what the percentage rate of the wage increases would be and Nancy stated it include an additional estimated amount of \$56,000.00 for the 27<sup>th</sup> pay period wages and all applicable taxes.

**Motion by:** Virginia to entertain a \$2.00 across the board increase for each of the Police Department employees, including the Administrative Assistant. **Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 2 in favor and Hugh opposed.

Hugh stated he is concerned about overall increases to the budget and not considering performance with the increases. Virginia stated the department salaries, as a whole, need to be

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increased and asked Hugh to stop discussing specific staff members. Cheryl agreed with Virginia.

Cheryl asked to entertain an increase for the Highway Laborer, and discussion took place whether the amount should be \$1.00, \$1.50, or the \$2.00 as requested. The board agreed that the Highway Laborer should be adjusted to a higher grade because of the different and additional duties he is completing. Virginia noted the position should be reclassified as a Laborer/Mechanic.

**Motion by:** Cheryl to increase the Highway Laborer to \$21.50 per hour. **Second by:** Hugh.  
**Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

Discussion took place about the Fire Department salary increases and how they compared to the current wage matrix. Virginia felt the Stipend amount offset what the Fire Chief didn't include in the Full time salary account changes. Discussion also took place about what type of increase should be given to the other employees in town, both hourly and stipend staff. After discussion the board decided on a \$0.50 increase for all other staff.

**Motion by:** Hugh to increase all other staff members not identified in prior motions by \$0.50.  
**Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 3 - 0 in favor.

Linda Hodgdon expressed concern about the amount of increase for the Police versus the increases for everyone else and if the disparity for the PD is that great. Linda asked if the board thought that amount would be supported by the voters, how the other mandatory increases might impact the budget, and the worry about the town getting a default budget again in 2020. There is agreement that the Police Department and Fire Department employees deserve the increase, but is worried a large increase will scare away the voters; should the board consider a smaller increase over several years to get the operating budget approved.

Virginia stated the town has consistently been behind on salary amounts for Police and Fire employees, to the point where the town may not be able to replace staff when they leave. There is concern about increasing staff at different levels, but also concern about keeping employees who have been faithful to our town.

Cheryl stated she would hope the other staff in town understands the need to increase the salary for the Police and Fire Departments.

General discussion took place about salary and wages, and how moving slowly or quickly can affect the possibility of getting a budget approved or losing personnel.

The positions affected by the \$0.50 would be identified on the wage list as provided by Nancy.

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**Motion by:** Virginia to change the original proposal of \$2.00 per hour for the Police Department salary increase to \$1.50 for all Police employees. **Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 2 in favor. Hugh opposed.

Hugh expressed concern that an overall town budget increase of 10% would not get passed by the voters. Virginia and Cheryl agreed. However, all board members also agreed some increases were needed and they would have to work hard to get the voters to understand.

The board decided they would continue discussing the budget on November 4th. Nancy would update the proposed operating budget as discussed tonight and provide emails and hard copies to the board members when it was ready.

**Gauthier Drive:** Will be addressed at the November 4, 2019 board meeting, if the bond is ready.

**Approval of Minutes:** The board agreed to postpone approval of minutes to the next meeting.

**Selectmen Reports:** None

**Public Comments:** None

**Other Business:** None

**Adjourn the Meeting**

**10:19 PM Motion by:** Hugh to adjourn the meeting. **Second by:** Cheryl. **Vote:** 3 – 0 in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dawn Calley-Murdough