

**BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**September 23, 2014**

**Call to Order:** 6:32 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Martha Sumner, Chair  
Kristin Lewis Savage, Vice Chair (*arrived 6:37 p.m.*)  
Tricia Holt  
David Gerns, *excused*  
Darrell Britton  
Dennis Heffernan  
Jack Paone  
Charles Fowler  
Dean Nifakos  
John Sherman, Selectmen Ex-Officio

Also Present: Sean Fitzgerald, Town Manager

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Darrell Britton

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*T. Holt moved, second by D. Heffernan, to approve the minutes of the April 8, 2014 meeting. There was no discussion on the motion and the vote was 7-0-1 (Nifakos abstaining).*

**BUDGET PRESENTATIONS:**

**Town Clerk Budget – Presented by Plaistow Town Clerk, Maryellen Pelletier**

It was noted that Maryellen Pelletier was not available to attend this meeting. She will present her budget at a future meeting.

**Tax Collector Budget – Presented by Plaistow Tax Collector, Rosemarie Bayek**

R. Bayek explained the Tax Collector's proposed line items for the 2015 budget:

Level Funded Budget Line Items:

- Part-time Position (Deputy) \$ 7,150.00
- Dues \$ 40.00
- Equipment Repairs \$ 400.00

Increased Budget Line Items

- Tax Collector's Salary (+\$687) \$ 28,216.00
- Data Processing (software support) (+\$1) \$ 2,200.00
  
- Fall Invoice
  
- Mailing Services (Tax Bill Preparation) (+\$2,278) \$ 4,850.00
- Training (+\$40) \$ 540.00
- Office Supplies(+\$37) \$ 400.00

- Recording (Registry of Deeds Fees) (+\$200)           \$    600.00

Decreased Budget Line Items

- Mortgage Research (-\$175)                                 \$  2,500.00
- Telephone       (-\$20)   \$    500.00
- Postage (-\$1,400)   \$  1,500.00
- Mileage Reimbursement (-\$349)                           \$    300.00
- Research Unknown TC Deeds (-\$1,999)                   \$       1.00

R. Bayek offered that the bottom line budget request for the Tax Collector 2015 budget is \$49,197.00 (decrease of \$1,619).

*It was noted in the handout that this amount has been approved by the Board of Selectmen (BOS).*

Discussion:

R. Bayek noted the following in support of her budget request:

- COLA increase in the Tax Collector’s Salary Line. This was approved by the voters at Town Meeting. It was noted that if the request was for an increase above COLA it would again have to be presented to the voters
- The mortgage research line was being dropped because people have been able to work out their tax liability so there are less liens

*K. Lewis Savage arrived at 6:37 p.m.*

- The software is billed in the fall, so the number is a reasonable estimation
- The mailing costs associated with preparing and sending out the tax bills have been moved from “postage” to “mailing services” to more accurately depict the costs associated with sending out tax bills
- Changes in the training line is to account for the deputy being able to attend training
- The Office Supplies line was increased due to the predicted need for replacement stampers and other supplies

It was noted that this line was only currently spent to \$86.00. The question was asking if it would be used up before the year end. R. Bayek offered that she did have some pending supply needs.

J. Sherman asked that \$125 to the State of New Hampshire be added to the description in the “Equipment Repairs” line.

- The mileage line was decreased as travel for the Deputy didn’t need to be covered
- Rockingham County Registry of Deeds (RCRD) was increased due to the amount of subdivisions that went to lien
- Research (Unknown Owners) was decreased to a \$1 placeholder as the previous owner unknowns had been resolved.

J. Sherman offered that the owner unknown properties had been reviewed and resolved by the Plaistow First Committee. He added that their research expenses were not charged to the Tax Collector's budget, but were paid from the Assessing budget.

D. Heffernan asked if the COLA raise had been voted on by the Town.

S. Fitzgerald confirmed that it had been, noting the number used to the increase was 2%.

R. Bayek explained the comparison survey that was done two years ago. The survey compiled that salary information from similar towns in New Hampshire. Plaistow was ranked at or near the bottom of the list.

D. Heffernan asked if the Town is locked into the COLA.

R. Bayek explained that she can request the COLA increase with Budget Committee approval. She added that if she wanted to request a raise higher than COLA it would have to go before the voters.

There was discussion on elected vs. appointed employees and the different ways that their pay increases are approved.

D. Britton questioned the need for \$1,500 in non tax bill related postage.

R. Bayek noted that most of the mail that she is required to send out needs to be sent certified, which can be costly.

J. Sherman noted that if you add the postage and mailing services lines together for this year's request and compared them to the same for last year's budget is it a little less than level funded.

***K. Lewis Savage moved, second by T. Holt, to take under consideration the Tax Collector's budget in the amount of \$49,197.00. There was no discussion on the motion and the vote was 9-0-0 U/A.***

**Finance Administration – Presented by Town Manager, Sean Fitzgerald**

S. Fitzgerald explained the Finance Administration proposed line items for the 2015 budget:

Level Funded Budget Line Items

- Office Supplies \$ 1,000.00

Increased Budget Line Items

- Salaries/Accounting (+\$19,021) \$ 84,821.00
- Mileage Reimbursement (+\$17) \$ 350.00

Decreased Budget Line Items

- Data Processing (-\$500.00) \$ 4,500.00
- Fall Invoice
- Training (-\$174.00) \$ 1,000.00

- Professional Audit (-\$77) \$ 20,000.00

S. Fitzgerald offered that the proposed 2015 budget for Finance Administration is \$111,671.00.

*It was noted in the handout that this amount has been approved by the Board of Selectmen (BOS).*

Discussion:

S. Fitzgerald noted that Coppola and Associates had been handling Finance Department responsibilities during the vacancy in the Finance Director's position. He noted that the position would be posted in November in the hopes of filling the job for February 2015.

J. Sherman added that the Board of Selectmen (BOS) had talked about a January 1<sup>st</sup> start for the position, but decided that wasn't a good time to start. Any candidate currently employed would be looking to close out their books at their current job; any new hire would be charged with closing out the year here.

There was a discussion regarding the pros and cons of keeping the status quo, where Coppola would provide the personnel and we would retain an in-house AP/PR (accounts payable and payroll) clerk. It was noted that the salary increase would attract better and more qualified candidates. There was concern over the costs, beyond salary, associated with hiring new staff. It was offered that keeping things as is offered more financial security and was less expensive. It was also suggested that the Town had less of a liability exposure by continuing with Coppola, especially in light on the recent criminal prosecution of the previous Finance Director. It was suggested that there was less of a risk and liability to the Town be keeping with the current operations. It was also noted that there is a benefit to having full-time staff in-house and more readily available.

There was discussion as to how the hiring process would be conducted. It was noted that there would again be a committee that would review resumes and interview candidates.

The Committee asked S. Fitzgerald to prepare an actual costs comparison, included all personnel-related costs such as insurance, between a new hire and the current working situation.

There was a brief discussion on the pending legal action regarding the former Finance Director and the costs associated with prosecution and auditing of the Town's financial records. It was noted that the County was doing the prosecution. It was acknowledged that there were some costs associated with determining the amount of financial loss as well as potential increases in insurance coverage. There were questions about whether or not there was a deductible associated with the loss and if that would be recouped from an order of restitution.

It was questioned if a second person was necessary in the Finance Office. It was noted that with grants and other such necessary tracking there was more than a need for someone to do more than just the AP/PR needs of the Town.

It was noted that the current contract with Coppola was for a certain amount of annual hours. It was also noted that our current assigned person (Greg Colby) was shared with other towns.

Additional notes about the proposed budget were:

- Data Processing is a fall invoice
- Training is in line with what is currently being spent
- The mileage line was decreased and just rounded off
- The professional audit line was decreased after discussion with Greg Colby, for next year's needs, including a GASB audit

There was discussion about the possibility of regional procurement of certain office supplies. It was noted that it was difficult to do regional purchasing as there is little overlap in supply needs. It was also noted that there are issues with storage as well as transportation with regional purchasing.

There was additional discussion regarding the Finance Director position. The additional points that were made were regarding coverage in the event that someone is sick. Coppola would be contractually bound to provide a replacement during any absence.

The request for a comparison analysis was reiterated. It was noted that this was why it was so important the department budgets are reviewed at least three times.

S. Fitzgerald offered that he would like to advertise the position and was asking for the Budget Committee's support of the proposed budget line. He noted that posting the position and interviewing candidates didn't preclude staying with the existing system in the Finance Office.

D. Britton suggested it was hard to support the line item if you're not sure you can support the position.

There was a discussion regarding what happens if the BOS and the Budget Committee do not agree on a particular line item. It was noted that it hasn't happened in a very long time as both boards have been able to work very well together. But should there be a difference it is the numbers approved by the Budget Committee that are presented to the residents on the Town Meeting Warrant.

***D. Britton moved, second by C. Fowler, to take under consideration the proposed Finance Administration budget in the amount of 111,671.00.***

J. Sherman noted that the BOS were asking for the same "post mortem" information on the prosecution of the former Finance Director, but they were waiting until the process was complete.

D. Britton offered that the costs associated with prosecution weren't the same as for funding the position.

J. Sherman added that the BOS was going to be looking at the total costs.

***There was no discussion on the motion and the vote was 9-0-0 U/A.***

**Financial Accounting – Presented by Town Manager, Sean Fitzgerald**

S. Fitzgerald explained all the budget line items for this budget:

Level Funded Line Items:

- Treasurer's Salary \$ 7,244.00

Increased Budget Line Items

- Budget Committee Secretary (+\$480) \$ 1,500.00
- Budget Committee Expenses (+\$300) \$ 500.00
- Trustee's Mileage (+\$385) \$ 500.00

S. Fitzgerald offered the total 2015 proposed budget for Financial Account is \$9,744.00.

*It was noted in the handout that this amount has been approved by the Board of Selectmen (BOS).*

Discussion:

S. Fitzgerald noted that the increase in the secretary's salary was based on the number of meetings each year. He added that the increase in the committee expenses was to pay for events not covered by the Town's LGC (Local Government Center) membership.

There was note of planning at date for regional Budget Committee training. It was noted that there were dates available in three weeks, late October and early November. Concern was expressed that it was too far into the reviews to be of benefit. It was suggested that the Committee decide on a date for next year's training in order to get it scheduled the week before budget reviews commence. The Committee will leave it up to S. Fitzgerald to secure a date for this year.

***K. Lewis Savage moved, second by D. Britton, to take under consideration the proposed Financial Accounting budget in the amount of \$9,744.00. There was no discussion on the motion and the vote was 9-0-0 U/A.***

#### **Debt Service – Presented by Town Manager, Sean Fitzgerald**

S. Fitzgerald noted there was a \$1 place holder in the Debt Services line as the Town has no debt at this time. He noted that all debt owed by the Town had been paid off four (4) years ago. He added that the Town was in a good financial position at this time, with a healthy balance in the Unexpended Fund Balance (UFB) which has help mitigate impact to taxpayers. S. Fitzgerald added that, with the need for a Highway Garage and a new Public Safety Complex for the Police and Fire Department space needs, the Town may need to look at bonding projects in the future.

J. Sherman noted that leaving \$1 in the line would allow the town to spend out of this line if necessary. This is because this is the only line in this department budget.

***K. Lewis Savage moved, second by T. Holt, to take under consideration the proposed Debt Service budget in the amount of \$1.00. There was no discussion on the motion and the vote was 9-0-0 U/A.***

#### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

##### **Public Safety Complex Building Committee – D. Heffernan**

D. Heffernan and J. Sherman updated the Committee on the work being done by the Public Safety Complex Building Committee noting the following:

- The firm of Dore and Whittier out of Newburyport had been selected as the architects for the project
- The location selected is to the right (looking at the building) and adjacent to the existing building, fronting on Elm Street
- The architects have met with the Police and Fire Chiefs to do a needs analysis

S. Fitzgerald noted that in considering the location, such things as the existing septic and needs of Police, Fire and Emergency Management needed to be considered.

J. Sherman offered that there was more room at the site than people would expect. He noted that the driveway would almost create a four-way intersection with Stanwood, providing access to the new Police Station and access to the cemetery. He noted there was a PowerPoint presentation online that outlined the space needs.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

M. Sumner noted that the BOS didn't meet last night and therefore they had not reviewed the department budgets that the Committee would be reviewing at the next meeting. She asked the Committee if they would like to postpone the next meeting or just receive the budgets the morning of the next meeting. The consensus of the Committee was to not postpone the meeting and to receive the budget same day.

M. Sumner asked of the Committee would be amenable to starting meetings at 6:45 p.m. instead of 6:30 p.m. It was noted that members were having difficulty with the 6:30 p.m. start. The consensus was to change the start time of meetings to 6:45 p.m.

D. Heffernan asked if it would be possible to get a presentation on Impact Fees.

J. Sherman suggested that a good place to start would be in the Town Report.

**OLD BUSINESS**

D. Heffernan asked if the Police Contract had been signed.

S. Fitzgerald replied that the eight-year contract was signed.

K. Lewis Savage noted that in recent years she had been abstaining from voting on certain budgets. She stated that she would no longer be abstaining from any budgets as she was not receiving any financial benefits from any of them and there was no reason for her to abstain.

D. Heffernan noted there is an opening for a Plaistow Representative to the School Budget Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Dee Voss  
Recording Secretary