



Town of Plaistow ♦ Budget Committee

145 Main Street ♦ Plaistow ♦ NH ♦ 03865

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting: November 10, 2020

Call to Order: 6:30pm

ROLL CALL:

Maxann Dobson, *Chair*
Sam Cafiso, *Vice Chair*
Peter Bracci, *Budget Committee*
Darrell Britton, *Budget Committee*
Bob Hamilton, *Budget Committee*
Dennis Heffernan, *Budget Committee*
Laurie Milette, *Budget Committee*
Robert Zukas, *Budget Committee*
Julian Kiszka, *Selectmen's Representative*
Jay DeRoche, *Alt. Selectmen's Representative*

Also present was: John Sherman, Resident

Agenda Item 4: Review/Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the December 3, 2019 meeting had been distributed in advance.

- **D. Heffernan moved, second by B. Hamilton to approve the minutes of the December 3, 2019 meeting**

Discussion: S. Cafiso noted he was present at the meeting and needed to be added to the Roll Call, and that J. DeRoche was on it twice. He also noted that J. Blinn had not been present at the meeting, but J. Sherman had been.

- **D. Heffernan moved, second by S. Cafiso to approve the minutes of the December 3, 2019 meeting as amended**

VOTE: 5 - (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, B. Hamilton, L. Milette), 0- , 3 (P. Bracci, D. Britton, J. Kiszka, R. Zukas) The motion was approved.

The minutes of the December 10, 2019 meeting had been distributed in advance.

- **D. Heffernan moved, second by B. Hamilton to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2019 meeting**

There was no discussion.

VOTE: 6 - (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, P. Bracci, D. Heffernan, B. Hamilton, L. Milette), 0- , 3 (D. Britton, J. Kiszka, R. Zukas) The motion was approved.

The minutes of the January 7, 2020 meeting had been distributed in advance. It was noted there was no date on the January 7, 2020 minutes and it will be added.

- **D. Heffernan moved, second by B. Hamilton to approve the amended minutes of the January 7, 2020 meeting**

There was no additional discussion.

VOTE: 6 - (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, P. Bracci, D. Heffernan, B. Hamilton, L. Milette), 0- , 3 (D. Britton, J. Kiszka, R. Zukas). The motion was approved.

Agenda Item 5: Budget Related Public Comment

Ch. Dobson invited John Sherman, 3 Kimball Avenue, Plaistow to comment. J. Sherman noted he had heard there were some questions about the Deliberative Session which he might be able to help clarify. He noted he had not attending the Deliberative Session in any capacity other than as a citizen.

As background, J. Sherman said the Deliberative Session was held on a Saturday and on the prior Thursday afternoon Recreation Commission Ch. Bill Coye met with Town Manager Mark Pearson and worked out the details of what they wanted to propose ending with a warrant article, and change to the budget. J. Sherman reported M. Pearson had gotten that Thursday the final estimate of what costs would be, resulting in the warrant article that had just been drafted, and asked him to review the article from a historical perspective.

J. Sherman reported that it was decided B. Coye would present the request at the Deliberative Session. He said the Commission members wanted to make sure some money would be included to improve the recreation field. He said they were eager to launch a campaign to support this as it has been requested for several years, though it had not been included last year. He noted that the presentation was rather long but there were many different parts to the request, which became three requests.

R. Zukas stated he was at the Deliberative Session and what struck him the most was that with only two days' notice a long parade of people appeared in its support. He felt it was a well-orchestrated effort with no notice given and only people in the Recreation Commission were in the know; he suggested that anyone against it would not have known it was coming and would not have been able to get to the session in time to speak. J. Sherman replied that orchestration could not have been begun earlier, though many people were already familiar with the ongoing desire to fix the field. He noted that outside vendors are relied upon to give information on a schedule, but it is not always delivered on time. He said that if you look through the history of

the project there is a large body of information that had been gathered to support grant requests. He noted that while “well-orchestrated” is being used as a pejorative, it also indicates interest from the citizens and participation in Town Meeting.

S. Cafiso asked if it is common place for Town Hall to prepare such a presentation for the Deliberative Session. He noted that the paperwork for the presentation had the Town Seal on the corner and suggested someone at Town Hall had prepared it for the Recreation Committee. J. Sherman said it was not prepared for the Commission since they did not see it themselves until the Deliberative Session. He reported it came from Town Hall because it was directed by the Town Manager working with the Recreation Director. He said that to say it was supported or executed by Town Hall is misleading, it was the Town Manager. He noted that in a perfect world the presentation could have been created eight or nine months earlier but it wasn't for various reasons including the change in leadership of the Commission. He said M. Pearson asked Dee Voss to help him because she had just learned how to create PowerPoint presentations which neither he, B. Coye or M. Pearson could. He noted D. Voss didn't decide what went into it, just transcribed ideas and pieces of other documents that had been previously created as the project went along. He also noted that if the request hadn't been processed in those two days it would have been two more years before the fields could be available.

B. Hamilton stated as a clarification that what was being discussed as a warrant was instead an amendment to the budget. J. Sherman agreed he was misspeaking, naming it as he would have preferred it be done - as several warrant articles. B. Hamilton noted that in previous years in the budgeting process the Recreation Commission would come before the Budget Committee and explain the program details. He said all of this was completely new to the Budget Committee which didn't even know an RFP was out for bids on the job. He noted this was one of five amendments to the budget and expressed concerned it could happen again this year, and issues never discussed would be added to the budget.

D. Heffernan noted this is the second year when surprises came up at the Deliberative Session. He said that there should be better communications, and the Budget Committee, working with the Board of Selectmen, Town Manager and Finance Director, should know what is happening going into the Session.

S. Cafiso noted that J. Sherman presented two of the other amendments to the budget, for the Highway Department, one for the salt line and the other to the paving line, and asked him if those were something that he felt needed to be done. J. Sherman replied that the Town Manager asked him to do it.

J. Kiszka noted that all the parts of the Town - Committees, Selectmen, Directors and Manager – are there to serve the residents and should have good communication and cooperation. He noted that not all of the BOS knew this would be happening.

Ch. Dobson thanked J. Sherman for coming in and being open to the Committee's questions. She noted the Committee is not as concerned with warrant articles and citizen's petitions as with what happened to the Committee's work to make prudent cuts to the budget that would help reduce the burden on the taxpayers. She stated she felt the Town Manager undermined that

effort by asking a private citizen to present an amendment to a budget that the Committee had cut. She noted that if he had made the request on his own it would be his prerogative that would have been fine. J. Sherman said he made an assumption the Town Manager had been given instruction from the BOS to get these out there.

It was noted this is not a question of legality but of appropriateness, as the Budget Committee prepares the budget but it may be amended at Town Meeting.

The Committee members thanked J. Sherman for coming in.

Agenda Items 6 & 7: Review Budget Comparative & 2020 Budget Discussion

Ch. Dobson asked if anyone had any questions or concerns regarding the material compared with the previous year's budget. She noted the Fire Department increase of \$200,000 and said she was hoping for a level budget due to the difficult times all are experiencing.

D. Britton noted that outside of things that shouldn't be cut or level funded such as insurance, and workman's compensation, there are many items that should be looked at carefully such as recreation which might be minimal due to COVID, and building offices that have been moved to the old court house that should be closed. J. Kiszka noted that the inspectors had been moved there temporarily due to COVID restrictions. He said it would be good to ask about the plans moving forward after COVID.

D. Heffernan wanted more information on the increase to the Fire Department and Personnel since some people have left.

R. Zukas was also concerned about the move into the old court house and whether a move out of it is likely. He suggested the Safety Complex would be a better fit; and this might explain the \$50,000 increase in general buildings; and that this would be a good question for the Town Manager when the time comes.

S. Cafiso questioned the Fire Department increase and noted that several years ago the Fire Chief had proposed a similar increase to restructure the department which was met with resistance all around and in the end it was felt this type of change should be addressed by warrant. He suggested that it should be a warrant item and given to the Town to decide if two more overnight firefighters should be hired. Ch. Dobson said she had an email from Chief Knutsen who is willing to come in and discuss the budget; she also has the PDF of his presentation. S. Cafiso noted that the Chief spoke for over an hour, and that a list of questions should be prepared in advance. D. Heffernan requested sending the PDF to the Committee in advance.

J. Kiszka suggested that if the Committee would like this as a warrant article it be decided early. He noted that it has been the tradition of the Town for large expenditures and key employees to be handled under warrant articles. L. Milette suggested the BC submit key questions to the chief in advance so to be sure of covering them. B. Hamilton suggested the Committee view the Chief's video in advance.

J. Kiszka said that this year the funding for police and fire is coming from different areas due to COVID funding grants and that current expenditure are not necessarily taxpayer expenditures this year. D. Britton noted that the Town may have less money coming in from the State and Federal government this year which may cause some funding difficulty.

B. Hamilton reported that during the 9/28/20 BOS meeting the Town Manager stated he anticipated \$180,000 in reimbursement from the CARES Act, and he anticipated a \$200,000 drop in revenues and these mostly wash out. He referred to a survey done by the NH Municipal Association where 80% of the respondents expressed great concern over revenue loss from property taxes starting in December. He mentioned other revenue losses from taxes and the Court House. Ch. Dobson said she had asked Finance Director Colby about lost revenues and he said building inspections are down and Exeter Medical is switching to non-profit. Also the Highway Block Grant comes from tolls, gasoline, hotels and such.

R. Zukas questioned items such as Legal that were requested, the Town Manager recommended, and the BOS increased them. It was noted the same thing had happened last year.

Ch. Dobson said that, as was the process last year, she will ask for questions from the committee members and send them to the Town Manager to get answers from the departments. As the Committee determines which budgets will be closely looked at she will ask the Committee members to prepare their questions for the departments. Presentations will be requested only from departments selected by the Committee. She noted there are many smaller budgets that do not require a presentation. R. Zukas suggested there would be no need to bring in departments that have level or decreased requests.

B. Hamilton noted that the budgets are mostly presented by the Town Manager and Finance Director, and that the Committee is late in receiving the budget, which used to arrive in September, and there is not enough time to hear from everyone. D. Britton suggested the BOS is responsible for the lateness of the budget, and it should be delivered earlier to avoid missing critical items when rushed.

Ch. Dobson noted that the Committee had decided to wait for the budget with the BOS approvals so as to avoid going over the same ground repeatedly as the BOS made changes. D. Britton suggested going to the BOS and asking to have the budget delivered earlier next year.

Ch. Dobson said that for the Nov. 17th meeting there would be a presentation from the Fire Department and then a quick review of the neutral or decreased budgets. D. Heffernan said the Ch. Dobson has the idea of which budgets the Committee would like discussed and she should put the schedule together reflecting that.

B. Hamilton noted that anticipated revenue is not being posted on the budget form itself and it is even more important this year to know those figures.

P. Bracci noted the solid waste collection figure is still an estimate and it should be better defined. J. Kiszka noted that often when revenue goes down the expense does too if it's done by a contractor. Ch. Dobson said she would like to receive the revenue report from the Finance

Director. L. Milette suggested it's a Revenue Report and comes out of the MSI. Ch. Dobson will try to get the report. D. Heffernan said the revenue used to be under the explanation column.

Agenda Item 8: Schedule

Ch. Dobson set the following meeting dates: 11/17, 11/24, 12/1, 12/8, 12/15, 12/22, 12/29, 1/5/2021, 1/12 will be the public hearing on the budget.

Ch. Dobson asked the Committee to send her any questions on budgets for Personnel, Executive, and Government Buildings so she can have answers for the next meeting.

J. Kiszka noted that some of the presentations are the only way the public gets to know the details of how their money is being spent, and that is good to be transparent.

L. Milette noted that Ch. Dobson does not have a Town email address and suggested the chairman should so the public could contact him/her directly. The committee asked J. Kiszka to bring this to the BOS.

Agenda Item 9: New Business/Old Business

P. Bracci asked about the Water budget, and was informed it is not finalized yet. L. Milette said the BOS voted on it, but Ch. Dobson does not have it yet. J. Kiszka said it was voted on and Ch. Dobson will ask for it.

Ch. Dobson said she had found an RSA that said the default budget shall be disclosed and presented to questions and discussion at the first budget hearing held in accordance with RSA 32-5 or RSA 197-6. She asked J. Kiszka if the BOS if the Committee will get the default budget in time for the budget hearing since it did not happen last year; he will ask the Finance Director.

B. Hamilton presented an update on the Capital Improvement Committee. The main focus of the last three years has been to extend the life of Town vehicles and equipment, starting with Police, then Fire and this year Highway. The Highway Garage is large enough to house all of the vehicles and equipment for the department, and has washing equipment so that salting vehicles get sprayed down to minimize corrosion. For example a 10 year old truck is having the bed replaced to extend the life of the truck another 10 years. This has a positive effect on the budget.

R. Zukas noted that the way the Town Manager is looking at vehicle use, repair and replacement is very thoughtful and in depth and he is to be commended for making changes in this area. B. Hamilton noted that the Fire Department will need to replace the tower truck and it will be a very large expense coming in the next year or two.

Agenda Item 10: Adjournment

There was no additional business presented and the meeting was adjourned at 8:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Charlene Glorieux
Recording Secretary