

# *Town of Plaistow ♦ Budget Committee*

*145 Main Street ♦ Plaistow ♦ NH ♦ 03865*



## **BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Workshop Meeting: October 1, 2019**

**Call to Order:** 7:10p.m.

### **ROLL CALL:**

Maxann Dobson, *Chair Elect*  
Sam Cafiso, *Vice Chair Elect*  
Dennis Heffernan, *Budget Committee, absent*  
Lisa Lambert, *Budget Committee, resigned*  
Laurie Milette, *Budget Committee*  
Jay DeRoche, *Budget Committee*  
Katie Ingalls, *Budget Committee*  
Peter Bracci, *Budget Committee*  
Bob Hamilton, *Budget Committee*  
Greg Taillon, *Selectmen's Representative*  
Francine Hart, *Selectman's Representative Alternate*

Also present was: M. Pearson, Town Manager

### **Agenda Item 3:**

#### **Review/Approval of Budget Committee Minutes for September 10, 2019:**

- **B. Hamilton motioned, second by J. DeRoche to approve the Budget Committee Meeting Minutes for September 10, 2019. There was no discussion on the motion. The vote was 7-0-1 (L. Milette abstaining).**

### **Agenda Item 4: Department of Public Works (DPW) Discussion:**

M. Dobson initiated a discussion regarding the number of square miles of Class V and Class VI roads in Plaistow and surrounding towns. It was discussed that Class V roads are the roads that the Town has a duty to maintain and Class VI roads are roads that are considered public ways, maintained by the State, that the Town has no duty to maintain.

The towns that were discussed were:

- Plaistow
- Stratham
- Danville
- Kingston
- Sandown
- Atkinson

- Epping
- Hampstead

M. Dobson provided the Committee with a handout for town population comparisons for the years 2010 and 2017. The towns shown on the handout were:

- Plaistow
- Stratham
- Danville
- Kingston
- Sandown
- Atkinson

G. Taillon offered that current figures for Class V and Class VI roads in the state of New Hampshire can be found on the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) website.

G. Taillon offered a review of New Hampshire town populations per the July 1, 2018 census. The towns that were reviewed were:

- Plaistow
- Stratham
- Danville
- Kingston
- Sandown
- Atkinson
- Epping
- Hampstead

M. Dobson provided the Committee with a copy of, and offered a brief review of, the “Actual & Budgeted Expenses & Encumbrance” for the Town of Sandown for the period of January 2018 thru June 2018.

M. Dobson provided the Committee with a copy of the proposed “Plaistow Town Budget” for 2019.

M. Pearson offered that each town’s “Town Budget Form MS-7” is available online.

M. Dobson initiated a brief comparison of line items within Sandown’s budget and Plaistow’s budget.

M. Dobson asked if the Committee had any questions or comments.

L. Milette offered that Plaistow uses a lot of salt and sand.

M. Dobson offered a brief review of the budget regarding salt and sand.

There was a brief discussion regarding overtime, payroll, and manpower.

G. Taillon offered that looking at all individual line items of different town's budgets gets a bit overwhelming and that the Committee should look at what information they specifically want to compare for each town and create a spreadsheet for comparison.

M. Dobson offered that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) website offers an analysis of each state and town and what they should have for a police force.

G. Taillon offered that looking at the number of calls per year that each town has would be a good way of evaluating the number of people needed in a police force. However, a simple question is considered a call in other towns where it is not in Plaistow. Each town may have a different matrix for evaluating the number of calls that come in.

B. Hamilton offered that in last year's Deliberative Session payroll was reviewed and was broken down as a percentage of each department's budget. It might be beneficial to be able to figure out what each Town's percentage of their budget is payroll.

G. Taillon offered that there may be an easier way to compare each town's budget line items by pulling in like accounts per department using the numbers assigned within the Chart of Accounts.

J. DeRoche offered a brief discussion regarding general supplies. He stated that other towns may have different systems in place.

M. Dobson reiterated what G. Taillon stated about isolating similar line items per town and doing a side by side comparison.

S. Cafiso initiated a brief discussion regarding Highway Department salaries.

M. Pearson offered that there is a separate line item in the budget for hours over forty (40) hours per week for certain Highway Department personnel. He offered that smaller towns that don't have street drains to maintain are not subject to MS4 regulations. He stated that Plaistow is subject to MS4 regulations.

B. Hamilton offered that payroll and labor are major areas that need to be compared between towns.

G. Taillon offered that each town has a process of highway management where there is a review of roads that are currently in need of repair and roads that will need repair at a later date.

S. Cafiso initiated a brief discussion regarding the classification of roads that the Highway Department is responsible for salting and sanding.

There was a brief discussion that employees of the Town of Plaistow do not do the paving of roads, as paving is subcontracted out.

M. Dobson asked if there is a list of subcontractors available. Is there a way to determine if it is cheaper to pay subcontractors than it would be to pay town employees.

M. Dobson asked if the Committee had any other suggestions on line items that should be compared per town.

S. Cafiso offered that some towns may not maintain the town as nicely as Plaistow and therefore their expenses may be less.

B. Hamilton offered a brief review of some previous offsets to the Highway Department Budget. If there is a warrant article needed to be able to spend money, and a warrant article is declined, the Town faces the risk of losing the money. Once money is transferred into the General Fund it gives more flexibility to be used for different things.

M. Dobson offered that she will try to look into whether other towns are using offsets.

M. Pearson offered a brief discussion and clarification regarding the Highway Block Grant. He offered that the Highway Department Director could answer any questions that the Committee has regarding the Highway Department.

B. Hamilton asked M. Pearson how the Highway Block Grant gets appropriated.

M. Pearson offered a brief explanation of how the Highway Block Grant is appropriated. He offered that a warrant article was discontinued because it took the chance of being declined, in which case the Town would be required to give the money back.

G. Taillon offered that the money that is given to the Town by the State for the Highway Block Grant is treated as revenue. If revenue can be increased then taxes would be less.

B. Hamilton offered a brief discussion regarding the Safe Routes to Schools Grant.

M. Person offered that there are specific line items within the Town's budget to account for revenue. He stated that he would ask Greg Colby, Finance Director to give the Committee a review of revenue to show how it contributes to the Town's tax rates.

G. Taillon offered his opinion that the Committee is going down a "rabbit hole" by trying to compare each line item of a town's budget to the Plaistow budget. He offered that the Committee may want to look at each department as a whole and compare them side by side. This way it is easier to determine which department heads should come before the Committee so that the Committee can ask questions. There may be specific reasons for the increased budget for a department for example Atkinson's budget may be skewed for the Police Department because of Atkinson's offset given to Plaistow for dispatch. He suggested that the Committee start off by creating a spreadsheet listing the towns and departments.

S. Cafiso initiated a brief discussion regarding Road Agents vs. Highway Superintendent. He mentioned that the job description is completely different.

M. Pearson gave some clarification of a Road Agent. He offered that all towns are supposed to have a Road Agent.

G. Taillon offered that Plaistow May have some services that other towns don't offer. He stated that there may be some areas of discretionary spending. However, there are some things that the towns don't have any control over.

S. Cafiso offered that the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is a document that is planned out quite a few years in advance. However, a few years in, plans may change a bit.

There was a brief discussion regarding what people expect for services. How does the Town know when people's expectations change. It was discussed that a good indication is the passing of warrant articles. If a warrant article passes, it can be reasonably stated that these are things that people want.

G. Taillon offered that 17% of residents showed up at the polls. He stated that a lot of complaints seem to come from people who are not fully informed.

G. Taillon initiated a brief discussion regarding residential and commercial assessments. He stated that assessments need to be within a range of 90% to 110%. He stated that if your property's assessment falls out of the appropriate range that the State may come in and require a reassessment.

L. Millette offered that when assessment values go up the property owner pays more in taxes.

M. Pearson offered an explanation regarding property assessments. He offered that the property owner may have seen increases based upon a full 24%. However, the 24% should have actually been broken up between the years of 2017, 2018, and 2019. He said that the 24% may come as a bigger blow to the taxpayer. However, they did not pay an increase for 2017 and 2018. He offered a review of some economies of scale.

B. Hamilton offered that in the assessment report the assessments redistribute the tax burden, but does not increase revenue to the Town.

L. Millette offered that she received a letter that states reassessments are done every five (5) years.

M. Dobson offered that she will work on creating a spreadsheet for the comparison of each town's budget data.

B. Hamilton offered that a review of Plaistow's 2019 payroll line items showed four million dollars (\$4,000,000) as the total payroll for Plaistow, as compared to two million six hundred thousand (\$2,600,000) for the Town of Epping. He suggested that payroll is a huge factor and something that Plaistow should look into a bit more.

M. Dobson asked what control the Committee has over payroll.

S. Cafiso offered that the Committee would need to compare what services are provided by each town.

B. Hamilton started that the Committee needs to compare tangible items. He asked if it's possible to get a template or guide as to what a budget is supposed to look like. He stated that it looks as though each town looks to have a slightly different format.

S. Cafiso asked the Committee if they felt that they should compare towns or is it a waste of time.

S. Cafiso and M. Dobson offered that the goal is to look at areas that are skewed and can justify a reduction in the budget.

M. Dobson offered that there was a consensus toward a five percent (5%) reduction in the budget. M. Pearson is postponing hiring people and there may be a need to lay some people off.

G. Taillon offered that by having part time police officers there has not been a need to purchase a new vehicle. One (1) police vehicle will be given to the Fire Department. He offered that Plaistow's recreation services are a lot more than other towns with Plaistow offering hiking trails, etc. He stated that some towns don't even have recreation services.

M. Dobson offered that Plaistow needs to find ways to earn more revenue.

S. Cafiso asked what happened to the surplus that was budgeted for the Town's open positions.

There was a brief discussion regarding Police dispatching. It was discussed that the Town lost one (1) dispatcher and if Plaistow doesn't pick up, then the call gets redirected to Rockingham County Dispatch.

B. Hamilton offered that sixty-two (62%) of the budget has been spent for Plaistow and sixty-six point seven percent (66.7%) is the target. He stated that some things don't get paid until the end of the year and some things need to be paid in advance of the new year.

There was a brief discussion that the public doesn't understand the specifics behind warrant articles and that there may be a need to add a section to the warrant article stating the tax impact that it would have.

G. Taillon offered that from his experience, he has not seen people complaining at the polls.

P. Bracci offered that in most cases people are looking at how the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and the Budget Committee (BC) vote to make a decision. If the vote is 5-0-0 (U/A) then they typically vote to pass the warrant article.

G. Taillon offered that the budget for 2019 should not end the year with a five hundred thousand dollar (\$500,000) surplus. The goal should be to be much closer toward zero.

There was brief discussion regarding the prior reduction goal for the 2018 Plaistow budget. There was a motion made by the BOS to reduce it by six percent (6%). It was discussed that the Committee should have the same ability, if not more, to recommend a reduction in the budget.

M. Dobson reiterated that she will work on the Town Data comparison spreadsheet and get a copy out to the Committee for review.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Committee Reports:**

There were no Committee Reports discussed.

#### **Agenda Item 6: New Business:**

There was no New Business discussed.

#### **Agenda Item 7: Old Business:**

There was no Old Business discussed.

There was no additional business presented and the meeting was adjourned at 9:07p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Samantha D. Cote, Recording Secretary