

# *Town of Plaistow ♦ Budget Committee*

*145 Main Street ♦ Plaistow ♦ NH ♦ 03865*



## **BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Workshop Meeting: October 8, 2019**

**Call to Order: 7:04p.m.**

### **ROLL CALL:**

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

Also present was:

### **Agenda Item 3:**

#### **Review/Approval of Budget Committee Minutes for September 17, 2019:**

S. Cafiso noted that on Page 4 of the September 17, 2019 Meeting Minutes it was stated that " S. Cafiso offered that if there is a question regarding assessments, that the BOS can ask the Assessor directly." He stated that it was not he who said that statement, but rather J. DeRoche.

- **K. Ingalls motioned, second by S. Cafiso to approve the Budget Committee Meeting Minutes for September 17, 2019, with the change noted by S. Cafiso. There was no discussion on the motion. The vote was 5-0-2 (L. Milette and F. Hart abstaining).**

#### **Review/Approval of Budget Committee Minutes for October 1, 2019:**

**S. Cafiso motioned, second by K. Ingalls to approve the Budget Committee Meeting Minutes for October 1, 2019. There was no discussion on the motion. The vote was 6-0-1 (F. Hart abstaining).**

There was a brief discussion as to whether or not payroll was discussed at last year's Deliberative Session.

B. Hamilton offered that payroll was discussed at the Deliberative Session.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Committee Reports:**

There was a brief discussion regarding the members of the Town Report Committee. K. Ingalls is the Budget Committee Representative and M. Dobson is available as a Budget Committee Alternate.

S. Cafiso addressed the Committee and asked the members to please try to stay on track during discussions and to not talk over each other, as it has been increasingly difficult for Samantha Cote, Recording Secretary, to complete the Meeting Minutes with so much back and forth discussion and multiple person speaking at one time.

M. Dobson thanked the Committee members for their attendance at the Committee Meetings and offered that everybody's input is helpful and appreciated.

B. Hamilton offered that residents have expressed that they are concerned about their property tax bill due to reassessments.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Filling Vacancies Discussion:**

There was a discussion regarding the filling of vacancies for the Committee. It was discussed that the Committee has adopted a policy and procedure for filling vacancies. However, it is up to the will of the Board on whether or not they want to fill the vacancies. The adopted "Plaistow Budget Committee Vacancy Policy and Procedure" was established as a guideline and is available on the Town's Website. If the Committee decides to fill vacancies NH RSA 32:15 must be followed.

M. Dobson offered that she spoke with Steve Buckley, New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) to see what the process is per NH RSA.

There was a brief discussion regarding the procedures followed by other Boards and Committees for filling vacancies in the past.

There was a discussion that the typical procedure is:

- The Budget Committee Chair directs that the vacancy shall be posted on the Town's website as well as on the Town Bulletin Board for a predetermined amount of time. The posting shall state information regarding the appointment process, the information requested of the candidate, and deadline for submission of applications.
- Once applications have been collected, the Committee reviews and votes on the candidates. If the Committee feels that it is necessary, interviews may be conducted.

S. Cafiso offered that the NHMA procedure for filling vacancies seems to change a little each year unless the Town itself adopts a policy.

P. Bracci asked what happens if only one (1) person submits an application.

S. Cafiso offered that if there is only one (1) applicant, the person can technically be declined if the Committee does not feel that the person is a good fit.

B. Hamilton offered that typically the candidate provides an explanation of why they would like to be a member of the Committee in their application letter.

S. Cafiso suggested that it might be a good idea for the Committee to provide, in the vacancy posting, the time commitment that the meetings will require. This needs to be communicated because of the fact that not all meetings run the same length of time. For example, some meetings could be one (1) hour long, while others could be three (3) hours long.

**Agenda Item 6: Town Comparison Discussion (continued from October 1, 2019):**

The Committee was provided with a copy of a Town Comparison spreadsheet created by M. Dobson. The spreadsheet included Population, Square Miles, Median Age, Median Income, Unemployment Rate, Road Miles, and budget figures for Department of Public Works (DPW), Police Department, Fire Department, and Recreation Department for the following towns:

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

The Committee was also provided with a copy of the “2020 Town of Plaistow, Town Manager’s Budget”.

F. Hart offered that she spoke with G. Taillon to help gather some information to help with the creation of the Town Comparison spreadsheet.

It was discussed that much of the information gathered for the Town Comparison spreadsheet came from the State of New Hampshire website.

S. Cafiso offered that if the data for the seven (7) compared towns are similar there are no issues. However, if Plaistow’s data is a lot different, then there is a need to figure out why that is.

It was discussed that Plaistow’s population has stayed approximately the same since 2010.

F. Hart offered that the Committee needs to decide exactly what questions they are trying to answer and collect data accordingly. She offered that the Committee may want to look at how many accidents Plaistow had in the Winter and if there were any fatalities. She stated that it is

understood that there is a goal to decrease the budget for 2020. However, the Town needs to make sure that they are not cutting critical services.

L. Milette offered that the median age for Plaistow is forty (40) years old in comparison to Atkinson where the median age is fifty (50).

B. Hamilton offered that twenty (20) years ago Plaistow had their own ambulance that was dispatched from the Safety Complex. Now the Town outsources to Trinity EMS.

S. Cafiso offered that by utilizing the services of Trinity EMS, it freed up Town employees who were previously getting held up at the hospital.

S. Cafiso offered that there is a significant difference in figures relating to Recreation due to the fact that some towns don't offer Recreation services. He offered that Plaistow's total figures are close to one million dollars (\$1,000,000) more than that of other towns.

F. Hart asked what the Committee is ultimately trying to accomplish by comparing Town data.

M. Dobson offered that by comparing the data from other towns to that of Plaistow, it will help isolate areas where the budget can be reduced.

S. Cafiso offered that every year there are areas of spending that need to be justified.

F. Hart asked the Committee if they should be comparing figures for next year's budget rather than figures from the past.

S. Cafiso and M. Dobson offered that other town's current budgets are not available online. It is only possible to gather data from previous years.

L. Milette asked if the Committee could use MS7 figures.

M. Dobson offered that town comparisons are important and that the information gathered from neighboring towns helps with figuring certain things out.

B. Hamilton offered that he agrees that gathering comparison information is important. However, in the past the comparing of other towns has been frowned upon. He offered that Plaistow and Stratham have considerably higher figures relating to the Police Department. He offered that Summer Recreation Fees are used to offset the Recreation Department budget.

L. Milette asked why some of the revenue collected for the Recreation Department is not going into a Revolving Fund which would help with programs.

F. Hart offered that the Recreation Department has been completely restructured and that Revolving Funds are no longer included in the budget. She offered that she will ask G. Taillon how much money is currently available for Recreation and what it is currently held in. She offered that there are specific parameters established by fund creation language and that the

creation language is reviewed to make sure that money is being used correctly. She offered that Mark Pearson, Town Manager is starting to take a critical look at spending to see exactly what is needed. One area that he has looked into is the fact that there is no recreation services offered in the Winter. Therefore, there is not a need for a full time Recreation Director.

M. Dobson offered that Epping's recreation services are completely funded from a Revolving Fund and Danville is volunteer based. Therefore, they have a much smaller budget.

B. Hamilton offered that Christina Cruz, Recreation Director, is still working on a limited basis and may be available to answer some questions that the Committee has regarding the Recreation Department.

There was a brief discussion regarding the lawn mowing at PARC and the funds that were appropriated for the maintenance of the ball field to bring it up to par so that it can be used.

It was also discussed that some Impact Fees have been earmarked to be used toward the new ball field.

F. Hart offers that the Town may want to look into the possibility of the Recreation Commission taking over running the programs for the Recreation Department.

P. Bracci offered that when the Highway Department cuts the grass that it should come from the Recreation Department funds, not the Highway Department.

L. Milette initiated a discussion regarding the stream that goes through PARC and the swales that get plugged up and need to be maintained.

F. Hart offered that the problems with water on the ball field has been addressed and it now comes down to proper maintenance of the field.

B. Hamilton offered that there was thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) used toward the maintenance of rain gutters, putting in berms, and cleaning out swales.

P. Bracci asked when the last time was that there were any games played on the ball field.

L. Milette offered that the perception has been that every time the Recreation Department has requested money that it has been given to them.

F. Hart offered that no matter what decision is made, there is always going to be people who disagree with the decision. M. Pearson is looking into restructuring and is actively reviewing where reductions can be made.

M. Dobson offered that it is her understanding that the Library was asked to reduce their budget by two and a half percent (2-1/2%). She asked if other departments are being asked to do the same.

F. Hart offered that there are some services that are required by law and that there has been focus on reducing some personnel. There is no sense in having someone sit at a desk full time if there is no justification for it.

S. Cafiso offered that it is not fair to ask the Library to cut their budget if the same is not being asked of other departments.

There was a brief discussion that the Board of Selectmen (BOS) directed M. Pearson to request the reduction in the Library's budget. The Library's budget has been very healthy and that they have money available already. The Library budget is approaching six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000).

M. Dobson offered that there needs to be a review of the formatting of the budgets.

S. Cafiso offered that doing a comparison of town data has always been frowned upon and that he was concerned with the fact that when G. Taillon presented at the last BOS meeting that the Budget Committee was looking into doing town comparisons that a member or members of the BOS laughed on public television. It is understood that the Committee needs to ask the right questions to get the appropriate information needed. An example would be to ask the Police Department how many accidents did the Town have last year, and what were response times?

B. Hamilton offered his opinion that doing comparisons is a good thing. A town's growth offers more opportunities to bring in additional revenue. Over the past twenty (20) years, Plaistow has added full time personnel where they shouldn't have.

F. Hart offered that based upon the information provided on the Town Comparison spreadsheet, Stratham has the closest population to Plaistow. She offered that Stratham is higher in their budget for DPW and Recreation Department. However, they have half the budget of Plaistow for the Fire Department and the Police Department.

M. Dobson offered that Stratham has farmer's markets and Stratham Hill Park.

S. Cafiso offered that when it comes to looking at daytime population, Plaistow's population tripled during the day. For example, there are three thousand (3,000) people just at the school alone.

M. Dobson agreed with S. Cafiso that there is a need to take a look at the number of people crossing over the Plaistow town border.

F. Hart offered that Timberlane School is the largest employer in the town of Plaistow.

There was a discussion regarding the next steps to take to work toward the ultimate goal of reducing the 2020 budget by a total of five percent (5%). It was discussed that there are many areas that can be looked at in an attempt to reduce the budget including reducing warrant articles.

F. Hart offered some examples of creative suggestions that can be discussed with the BOS in an attempt to reduce the budget.

There was a brief discussion that the Fire Chief has to live in Town.

There was a brief discussion regarding the commitment of the Fire Department's on-call employees. It was discussed that on-call employees need to live in Plaistow. However, there can possibly be some exceptions made if the person lives directly over the town border.

S. Cafiso offered that he has spoken to employees regarding the process for changing the structure of a department, and he was told that it has always been included in a warrant article. F. Hart offers that there has been a decision made to only add a few solar panels on the salt shed.

M. Dobson asked if the Committee had any other questions other than the ones discussed regarding the Recreation Department and the Police Department.

M. Dobson asked the Committee, looking at the safety of the Town of Plaistow, if the Town's main problems are traffic accidents or thefts, does the Town really need as many full time police officers as it currently has?

F. Hart offered that the primary focus needs to be placed on reducing warrant articles before the reduction of people.

S. Cafiso offered that in his experience, warrant articles that don't pass one year, just get added back in the following year.

F. Hart offered that M. Pearson has been looking into the refurbishing of Police vehicles and asset forfeiture. The Town needs the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Since 2013, the prior Police Chief was not paying attention and looking into these types of things and it ultimately cost the Town a substantial amount of money.

M. Dobson asked to Committee to send any questions that they may have to her via e-mail.

#### **Agenda Item 7: New Business:**

There was a discussion that at the September 17, 2019 Budget Committee Workshop Meeting there was a question asked as to why the assessment for Walmart decreased.

F. Hart offered an explanation that Walmart's assessed value decreased because the original purchase price was six million dollars (\$6,000,000), which was more than the assessed value. Walmart took the Town to court, and an agreement was made that the assessed value would be reduced by one million eight hundred thousand (\$1,800,000) in lieu of having to give two hundred and forty thousand (\$240,000) worth of revenue back.

F. Hart offered that the Town pays by the hour to utilize the services of an Assessor at the Board of Taxes and Land Assessment (BTLA). The Town will be looking at sending out a

Request for Proposal (RFP) and hiring an Assessor in 2021.

F. Hart offered that the reassessment of commercial properties would not necessarily open the Town up to new lawsuits because the reassessments allow for the bridging of assessment gaps proportionately.

F. Hart offered that she would get a copy of the budget to the Committee once it is available.

**Agenda Item 8: Old Business:**

There was no Old Business discussed.

There was no additional business presented and the meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Samantha D. Cote  
Recording Secretary