



Town of Plaistow ♦ Budget Committee

145 Main Street ♦ Plaistow ♦ NH ♦ 03865

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting: December 15, 2020

Call to Order: 6:33pm

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 - remotely*
Laurie Milette, *Budget Committee - excused*
Robert Zukas, *Budget Committee*
Julian Kiszka, *Selectmen's Representative*

Also present were:

Mark Pearson, *Town Manager, remotely*
Greg Colby, *Finance Director, remotely*
Francine Hart, *Board of Selectmen*

Ch. Dobson read a statement that the Budget Committee due to the COVID 19 Virus Crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order No. 12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-4 is authorized to meet electronically and these reasons shall be reflected in the minutes and all votes shall be via roll call.

Agenda Item 4: Review/Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the December 8, 2020 meeting had been distributed in advance.

- **R. Zukas moved, second by S. Cafiso to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2020 meeting as amended**

Discussion: D. Heffernan asked if the Committee is voting to take budgets under consideration is that considered a vote. J. Kiszka said it has in the past, that it is a vote and in handled like a vote. S. Cafiso said he understood that any vote would need to be a roll call.

D. Heffernan noted on page 6 under Building Inspector Budget he had asked a question which then Town Manager had clarified and he had thanked the Town Manager for his explanation. He asked that be included in the minutes.

J. Kiszka reiterated that on page 3 under the Point of Order that the BOS have been using roll call votes whenever a member is attending remotely. He wanted it to be clear in the minutes that the assertions referred to were made by other committee members and he had been clear on the law and its use by the BOS from the start.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Agenda Item 5: Budget Related Public Comment

Francine Hart, 298 Main Street, addressed the Committee as Chairman of the Board of Selectmen. She said the Committee had had the operating budget since October 27, 2020 and still no department budgets had been approved. She said the Selectmen's Representative to the Committee indicated to the Committee that it was not having a lawful meeting unless voting was done by roll call and was ignored. She said she was glad to see that was now changed but she was disappointed that neither of the former Selectmen on the Committee spoke in correction and they should have known the law. She also noted the Vice Chair was drinking a beer during the meeting and that the members should be aware of how they are perceived by the people who elected them. F. Hart then left the meeting.

D. Britton said in his 35 years of being on the Town committees he had never encountered a roll call vote when a member was absent, but said there was no technology involved with those meetings. He said that something was brought up and it was corrected. J. Kiszka noted that there had been no remote attendance before when there was no technology that allowed it. Ch. Dobson said it would have been helpful if the Town had distributed the State memo to all committees as it would have helped overcome the confusion. P. Bracci said the Town's governing body should have made sure to pass on the information on how the committees are to vote.

S. Cafiso said he had really wanted to attend the meeting in person, and noted that at a recent Selectman's meeting one of the Selectman had encouraged as many as possible to attend remotely people, to stay home, have a beer and enjoy the meeting and don't put anyone else at risk. He noted he was not swilling but had one beer to drink during a three-hour meeting and it did not affect his judgement.

B. Hamilton noted he attends BOS meetings frequently and had first heard of roll call votes when members are attending remotely about two years ago. D. Heffernan agreed with B. Hamilton it is not nice to be scolded like that and noted that there have been no budgets approved at this point many of the past years. Ch. Dobson noted the first possible Committee meeting date after receiving the budget from the BOS was November 3rd, Election Day which was not possible. She said she does not have the necessary technology to conduct a remote meeting and has not been trained for it so she made the decision to cancel the meetings. She noted that last year the Committee did not take the budgets under consideration and many of the number

changed after they were approved, She sought guidance from past Budget chairs and learned they had taken budgets under consideration and she elected to follow that process for this year.

Agenda Item 6: Discuss Budgets

Ch. Dobson asked if the committee members had a chance to review the emailed questions she had sent to G. Colby and M. Pearson.

Library: Ch. Dobson noted that this was level-funded from last year there were no submitted questions for Finance and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **D. Heffernan moved, second by D. Britton to take the Library Department Budget for \$599,174 under consideration.**

Discussion: Ch. Dobson noted she had heard from the Library Director that even if insurances went up this year they would honor a level funded budget. B. Hamilton noted this is the second year in a row the Library hasn't asked for money for their Capital Growth Fund and that is commendable

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Street Lighting: Ch. Dobson noted a question had been submitted for Street Lighting and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **R. Zukas moved, second by D. Britton to take the Street Lighting Budget for \$117,500 under consideration.**

Discussion: The question of the projected time period for paying off the LED street lights based on the savings in 2020 electric bills was answered as 5-7 years. B. Hamilton asked if the street lights bills coming in were as low as anticipated and whether pay-off would be closer to 5 or 7 years. G. Colby said the bills were higher than last year and he is trying to work out why this is the case. He said there may have been a miscommunication on the contractor's part on the installation, and noted that working with them had not been easy and is dragging on longer than hoped. J. Kiszka discussed the interest-free loan that made it possible to buy the equipment with no upfront money. He said the lights are supposed to have a longer life and when the loan is paid off the costs will go down. He noted the bill is not an actual reading of usage but determined by the number of daylight hours.

B. Hamilton actual year to date as of October paid \$100,000+ and asked if this is the payment to Unitil and G. Colby said yes. B. Hamilton asked how the other company was paid for installing the lights; G. Colby said they were paid up front, that Unitil is paying through their financing a

level rate, and the difference in usage payments is made by the equipment costs. It was noted that hardware costs around \$150,000. S. Cafiso asked if this was a perpetual bill and J. Kiszka said no. J. Kiszka noted that once the bill is paid off we'll only pay for 'actual usage' though we may see a maintenance cost in the coming years because the Town will own the equipment.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Solid Waste Collection: Ch. Dobson noted that the Casella proposal for Solid Waste Collection had been provided to the Committee and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **D. Britton moved, second by B. Hamilton to take the Solid Waste Collection Budget for \$789,437 under consideration.**

Discussion: Ch. Dobson noted the original RFP has a deadline of 12/18 to 12/21 and asked what is different about the new RFP. J. Kiszka said the BOS did not like the response and the new RFP is more specific to what the BOS wants. D. Heffernan asked about recycling and J. Kiszka said an RFP had been put out for recycling. Ch. Dobson asked why Plaistow would be paying so much more than Atkinson. J. Kiszka suggested Atkinson may have had a locked-in contract, and noted the BOS is looking for as many different options as possible. He said the BOS added the purchase cost of the carts to the budget. Ch. Dobson asked for the adjusted amount and J. Kiszka said \$18,437. D. Britton asked for the number of respondents to the RFP and G. Colby said he was unsure but four had replied before. S. Cafiso asked if the barrels/carts are being supplied by the Town and was told they are. R. Zukas asked if we were going from two trash barrels to one and was told yes, but the barrel is 96 gallons, double the current size. D. Heffernan asked if we would have a final budget number in time for the Committee to vote. J. Kiszka said he hoped so.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Solid Waste Disposal/Landfill : Ch. Dobson noted there were no submitted questions for this budget and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **D. Britton moved, second by S. Cafiso to take the Solid Waste Disposal/Landfill Budget for \$46,500 under consideration.**

Discussion: Ch. Dobson asked if this included Hazardous Waste (yes), and asked if the collection was still held. G. Colby said Spring was cancelled but Fall was held in Atkinson. Tow are always scheduled, one in Plaistow and one in another town. R. Zukas asked whether when the Town hosts the Hazardous Waste disposal if it pays the lion's share of the costs. S. Cafiso and G. Colby noted towns pay according to a percentage. It was noted the bill for the Fall collection isn't in and the budget covers two collections.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Welfare: Ch. Dobson noted there were submitted questions for this budget and asked for a motion to open discussion. She stated she did not receive another copy of the welfare budget or the email that was sent to the BOS after the meeting the previous night. She said it was stated last night but she did not receive it. J. Kiszka said it is a warrant article not a budget

- **B. Hamilton moved, second by R. Zukas to take the Welfare Budget for \$32,350 under consideration.**

Discussion: D. Heffernan noted the budget was less than the previous year, and he had expected it to be higher. D. Britton suggested there are two more months and G. Colby said it will still be within budget. R. Zukas asked if the salary increase of approximately \$3,000 is COLA. G. Colby said there had been an allocation error on the 2020 budget and there are no additional people. M. Pearson explained that the person who oversees this worked in Welfare, HR and Assessing. She has since added Accounts Payable and Payroll – working in five areas total. They are trying to detail how many hours are worked in each area looking for an average. The employee has been given a salary increase. D. Britton asked if her salary is allocated across five budgets and was told yes.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Patriotic: Ch. Dobson noted there were no submitted questions for this budget and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **S. Cafiso moved, second by M. Dobson to take the Patriotic Budget for \$600 under consideration.**

Discussion: Ch. Dobson asked what the extra \$100 added by the BOS was for. Neither J. Kiszka nor M. Pearson could recall. J. Kiszka noted the current expense exceeded that number so it was a good number. R. Zukas said he believed it was for replacement of some of the flags and other things put out by the Town.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Cultural: Ch. Dobson noted there were no submitted questions for this budget and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **D. Britton moved, second by J. Kiszka to take the Cultural Budget for \$23,600 under consideration.**

Discussion: B. Hamilton asked if Old Home Day would be held in 2021. J. Kiszka said there was no way to know but it should be budget for and the money would go back into the General Fund if unused. B. Hamilton noted they were taking surplus funds from the 2020 budget to do things such as buy a generator for the Highway Garage that will cost between \$50-60,000 which was not appropriated for in the budget, and asked how can surplus funds be used for it and asked why not encumber the Old Home Day funds not spent this year for next. J. Kiszka said there were no contracts for services so there is nothing to encumber. Ch. Dobson asked if money could be taken from this year and moved to the next and J. Kiszka said it was not legal to do so. G. Colby said it must be done by warrant article.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Conservation Commission: Ch. Dobson noted there were no submitted questions for this budget and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **R. Zukas moved, second by S. Cafiso to take the Conservation Commission Budget for \$6,480 under consideration.**

Discussion: D. Heffernan asked what the BOS reduction of \$3,750 was for and J. Kiszka said it was for water testing and general supplies as explained in the budget's line description, and that COVID reduced the expenses due to reduced activity.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Debt Service: Ch. Dobson noted there were no submitted questions for this budget and asked for a motion to open discussion.

- **S. Cafiso moved, second by B. Hamilton to take the Debt Service Budget for \$516,951 under consideration.**

There was no discussion.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Agenda Item 7: New Business/Old Business

Fire Department: Ch. Dobson referred to the new Fire Department Budget that includes a warrant article for the 24 hour staffing which has now been taken out of the budget reducing the budget from \$918,285 to \$784,285.

- **R. Zukas moved, second by M. Dobson to take the Fire Department Budget for \$784,285 under consideration.**

Discussion: Ch. Dobson noted that the new number is self-explanatory and asked for a vote.

VOTE: 8 (M. Dobson, S. Cafiso, D. Heffernan, R. Zukas, D. Britton, P. Bracci, B. Hamilton, J. Kiszka)-0-0. The motion carried.

Ch. Dobson asked when the Committee would see the warrant articles and J. Kiszka said they should be finalized by the end of the month. Ch. Dobson asked if the warrant articles would be available before the Public Hearing and G. Colby said he imagined so.

Cable: Ch. Dobson noted a follow-up question regarding whether laptops had been purchased for remote meetings and whether they would be available for Committee members who don't have home computers but have the capability to attend remotely. She noted her original concern about the Committee going remote was for those without up to date technology. J. Kiszka said he is in favor of having some old laptops available but also noted you can attend via telephone.

There was also a question about remote attendance at the Deliberative Session and could the Budget Committee members attend remotely. J. Kiszka said there are discussions going on and he believes that will be up to the Town Moderator.

R. Zukas asked if the Budget Committee chair could get a fob or pass card or some way into Town Hall so the members aren't waiting outside in the cold. J. Kiszka noted there was a problem this night and he had to get authorization to unlock the door to get in. M. Pearson said he could give a fob to the Chairman and also ask the Fire Department to arrive by 6:15pm to let people in.

Legal: P. Bracci referenced the discussion of the Legal Budget from the previous meeting. He noted the budget line for Donohue, Tucker and Ciandella as a major contributor to the

expenses. M. Pearson said they specialize in areas the Legal Counsel doesn't such as cable TV franchise agreements, municipal water agreements, employment law matters. He said DTC has people who specialize in multiple areas that could be accessed as needed and there is no longer one size fits all for legal work.

P. Bracci asked about the Right-to-Know requests. M. Pearson noted that the recent large amount of requests overwhelmed the staff and the Town felt it was necessary to get assistance from a law group experienced with RSA 91A requests. He took an average of time needed to respond to these requests and extended it over 12 months. He said the over 60 requests from one individual in a three month period is greater than collectively requested from 10-15 towns in a whole year. Ch. Dobson suggested tabling this discussion until next week and she will send information to the committee members.

Water: Ch, Dobson said the committee will discuss the water budget at the next meeting and asked if the Water Budget is funded by the users and the Enterprise fund, and asked what happens if the budget is overspent. G. Colby replied that would come out of the existing fund balance, that it is a self-supported fund and all expenses are paid by water revenue or surplus that is accumulated, and any over-budget expenditure comes from prior year's revenue that is recorded in the Water Fund balance.

D. Britton and B. Hamilton asked that the surplus funds for this year's budget be discussed at the next meeting.

Agenda Item 8: Adjournment

There was no additional business presented and the meeting was adjourned at 8:09 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Charlene Glorieux
Recording Secretary