

Town of Plaistow ♦ Budget Committee

145 Main Street ♦ Plaistow ♦ NH ♦ 03865



BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting: October 19, 2021

Call to Order: 6:30pm

ROLL CALL:

Robert Zukas, *Chair*
Doug Thompson, *Vice Chair*
Richard Anthony, *Budget Committee*
Peter Bracci, *Budget Committee*
Christina Cruz, *Budget Committee*
Bob Hamilton, *Budget Committee*
Katie Knutsen, *Budget Committee*
Phil Spitalere, *Budget Committee*
Brian Stack, *Budget Committee*
Greg Taillon, *Selectmen's Representative*
Darrell Britton, *Selectmen's Alt.*

Also Present: Greg Colby, *Interim Town Manager* – remote
Rich Kane, *Interim Police Chief*
Lucia Cusimano, *Communications Supervisor*
Sgt. Jason Mazza
Dan Garlington, *Highway Supervisor*
Fire Chief Chris Knutsen

Agenda Item 4: Review/Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the October 5, 2021 meeting had been distributed in advance. K. Knutsen noted that she was not the abstaining vote on the Welfare budget but C. Cruz was. Ch. Zukas noted that the last line of the discussion before the vote on that budget should read corrected.

B. Stack moved, second by D. Thompson to approve the minutes of the October 5, 2021 meeting as corrected.

The motion was approved 9-0-1(P. Spitalere)

Agenda Item 5: Public Comment

Ch. Zukas invited public comment but there was none.

Agenda Item 6: Budget Review/Presentations:

Police Department: Interim Police Chief Rich Kane, Communications Supervisor Lucia Cusimano and Sgt. Jason Mazza introduced themselves. Chief Kane said currently there is no one at the Police Dept. who had worked on preparing a budget before, so they built it from the ground up and are asking just for what they need to operate professionally and efficiently. He said there are three major issues: the public safety communications infrastructure which has been a work in progress since approved in 2018 and they have made strides working with the Fire Dept. and the vendor on the project. They have been working to finish the phone system upgrade which has caused the dispatch center to operate with two different phone systems which is difficult and time consuming. And the most significant project to be completed is the installation of the computer aided dispatch and record keeping system. He said it is a major task requiring significant work and training to get it operating and was purchased in the last year by the department.

Chief Kane questioned whether the Victim Witness Advocate position should be kept or if it has run its course. He said a sixth dispatcher is long overdue and he recommends hiring one. He noted the school crossing guards are in the Police budget; they are hired, trained and paid by the department which is reimbursed by the school. He reported he feels they are the school's employees and the school has agreed to take them into their budget. He noted he's added \$30,000 to the administrative section to offset the cost of hiring a much needed ranking police officer. He said the chain of command goes from chief to sergeant and it needs to be corrected. He added money to develop mobile data terminals so officer's vehicles would be equipped to serve as their office which is a national standard now and is part of the new computer aided dispatch software being worked on this year. He added \$7,500 to the fuel account to reflect actual costs, and suggested looking into a contract with a local supplier so the money can be budget properly.

P. Bracci asked if the Chief's position will be full or part time and was told that he had budgeted for part time at 32 hours/week. B. Hamilton asked about Covid's effect on the budget and federal relief offsetting some of the costs. Chief Kane said the dispatch center has been monetarily affected with a substantial amount of overtime due to people being sick with Covid. Sgt. Mazza said masks and such items were obtained through grant money from the State. He said they use wipes on the vehicles and go to the Fire Dept. for decontamination of prisoner transport. B. Hamilton referenced the Covid grant to the Town to help pay for the extra expenses Covid has created and suggested scrutinizing the various budgets to take advantage of this money. He offered the list of eligible uses of Covid money to Chief Kane said he was willing to look at the eligible uses. D. Britton said there are 4 years to spend the money and the BOS will spend the money within the guidelines. G. Taillon suggested the \$800,000 is for infrastructure and there are many places it could be used.

Ch. Zukas asked if the crossing guard agreement with the school will take place for the 2022 budget and was told yes it can be removed and the budget lowered correspondingly. Ch. Zukas

asked if adding another dispatcher will reduce the overtime expense some; Chief Kane said it should but this wouldn't be in effect until the budget is approved by the townspeople. L. Cusimano said that until a new dispatcher is hired and trained some overtime could be expected for the first half on 2022. Ch. Zukas asked for clarification on the two phone systems; Chief Kane explained that like the rest of the Town the department went to a new phone system but it did not integrate well with the existing system so much so that a call into the department to ask for him could not be directly transferred and the caller would be given another number to reach him. They are concerned about Comcast making changes that might affect their ability to call Atkinson police and fire departments as they are not properly integrated.

B. Stack noted that the Court has been gone from the Town for two years and asked if there has been a financial impact due to more overtime and other increases. Chief Kane said that prior to and during Covid they have not been spending as much time at court as previously. Sgt. Mazza said a lot of court work had been accomplished remotely and suggested it may return closer to normal in 2022.

B, Stack asked if there was anything missing from the budget that Chief Kane might have wanted to include but didn't to keep the budget down. Chief Kane said vehicles are missing from the budget as it's a constant struggle for police departments to come up with the right number of cars. He said they have enough to get by but need to be on a system of rotating new cars into use. He said that next year they might need to remove 4-5 vehicles and get two new ones. He said the building and equipment are in good shape. G. Taillon asked if there is a plan or schedule in the CIP for replacing vehicles; Chief Kane said it would be easy to create one; they would put two in right away and come up with a cost figure.

B. Hamilton asked about the Detail Fund, noting that over the last years there has been an increasing number of part-time officers hired for the details due to the water project, gas line expansion, etc. and he thought the fund was going to pay for some cruisers as well. He suggested looking into whether there are funds there that can be used for a cruiser. G. Colby said that the outside detail fund being referred to is restricted to outside detail purchases and a regular cruiser cannot be paid for from it per Town Meeting vote. B. Hamilton asked if Town police cruisers are used for outside details; Chief Kane said they use Town cruisers but there are two vehicles set aside that were purchased for that purpose.

P. Bracci asked if the \$10,000 hiring incentive for experienced officers is still in effect; Chief Kane said it was used in the last two hires but he hasn't had to hire anyone. He noted it is difficult to hire police officers and it might have to be considered again. P. Bracci asked if the budget is for a full staff and was told yes there are 17 officers, a part-time chief, 5 full-time dispatchers, 1 part-time dispatcher and they are fully staffed.

Chief Kane said the Victim Witness Advocate issue is in the budget and should be dealt with. G. Taillon said that the BOS had voted to leave it in the budget though it is not currently manned and is not costing the Town any money and that when the police chief position is resolved a decision can be made whether to hire for that position or use the funds elsewhere. C. Cruz asked if this is a grant-funded position; Chief Kane said it is partly funded. C. Cruz said it should be clear that it is grant funded but the Town pays all roll up costs and houses the advocate, and that

perhaps it should not be in the budget if other Towns don't want or use it and aren't paying in to it. She believes the advocate serves eight communities and none pay towards it; G. Taillon said there are five towns including Plaistow, that it was originally a Plaistow position and that in 2018 expanded into the other towns Plaistow was paying the full cost of the position minus the grant money. The BOS looked at the use number for four years and the chief has contacted the other towns; the Atkinson chief was not interested in continuing, Danville liked the position but wanted to finance it based on usage rather than equal share of costs, and the other two towns have not answered and probably are not interested. It was noted Plaistow accounted for about 60% of the usage.

There was discussion of whether the funds in the budget for the Advocate position would cover the addition of new police hires. Chief Kane said he had added \$30,000 for one position either captain or lieutenant and assumes to promote from within so at least one position is covered; if the Advocate position is not filled the funds are in the administrative salaries line item and could be used. He said he wanted this to be an option for the next chief. C. Cruz asked if the police officers want the Advocate, if it alleviates their work load, or would they rather have a lieutenant and a captain. Sgt. Mazza said the Advocate's work is sometimes done by the police anyway and it would be accomplished either way. B. Stack reported that a text just received from Kingston expressed interest in the Advocate position, but it was questioned if this means they want to pay. Ch. Zukas summed up that for now the money will stay in the budget and need will dictate what course to take. B. Hamilton again suggested use of the Covid money to help filling positions.

G. Taillon moved, second by D. Thompson, to approve the revised Police Department budget for a total of \$2,123,225.00

The motion was approved 10-0-0

Highway: Dan Garlington, Highway Supervisor, introduced himself. P. Bracci asked how much money would be coming from the highway block grant; D. Garlington said that information does not come to him. G. Colby said he doesn't know exactly but doesn't expect any significant changes around the \$150,000 mark.

G. Taillon asked for information on the plan to hire a landscaping contractor to cut the Town's grass. D. Garlington said he plans to reduce the in-house landscaping responsibilities. He said it takes a lot of time away from the department's other responsibilities such as cutting brush, installing signs, patching and general maintenance that have to be done on Class 5 roads. He said it doesn't hinder snow plowing but one of the large areas of preparing for snow plowing is cutting brush. He also noted that the department would be the contingency backup for the landscaper so if they are unable to do a specific job, his staff will cover. For example Old Home Day is a Saturday but if the agreement with the contractor is to mow on Monday and Tuesday, the department might mow the Town Hall green on a Thursday.

It was noted that the Town's contract with the State says it will mow the islands on Route 125. G. Taillon asked if that responsibility could be given back to the State. D. Garlington said it could happen; he said the contract is renewed automatically every five years unless the Town sends a registered letter to the State saying it is no longer interested, and that would probably be his intention when the contract expires in 2023. He said in terms of responsibilities and risk management it would be the best thing for the Town to do this, but that aesthetically it would add to the complaints of how Route 125 looks. He said he would not put a hired landscaper to mowing Route 125.

R. Anthony cited the aesthetically pleasing islands on Rte. 111 in Windham and why couldn't Plaistow do that. D. Garlington said he believes they have an adopt an island program and a landscaper takes care of them. He said safety issues kept Plaistow from doing something like this.

B. Hamilton asked whether the larger salt shed was allowing the Town to save money through bulk buying. D. Garlington said there has not been a full salt buying cycle yet as the shed was not complete. He tried to buy salt this Spring before the prices went up but was not able to do it so there has not yet been a full shed of salt. He said salt prices have gone through the roof since then. He noted that the salt doesn't normally come from the US and you have to pay extra to bring from Chile or other places. He said if he could fill the salt shed ahead of the season it would be a good start in getting through the whole winter; and that the price being paid for salt now will be the same as next April. He said the issue with the old shed was lack of capacity and held only one to two storms of salt in the shed and vendors will not deliver when the roads are covered in snow. Greater capacity allows minimalizes the chance of running out of salt. He estimated the capacity of the new shed at 800-1,100 tons and that the Town averages 1,100 tons of salt usage per winter. He said he has about 500 tons of salt now and plans to order 200 tons before the snow starts. He said they want to bring the inventory down so equipment can be used to properly pack salt into the back areas of the shed. He said that since 1988 the price of salt has gone up and down but has increased almost \$19/ton and he expects an increase of \$17-18/ton this season. He said if he could have purchased salt back in April they would have save about \$5,000 which is approximately three loads of salt.

G. Taillon moved, second by C. Cruz, to approve the Highway Department budget for a total of \$848,959.00

The motion was approved 10-0-0

Fire Department: Chief Chris Knutsen said he has level funded the budget for 2022 and has moved some lines around to be conservative and use funds already been allocated to the department to keep moving forward and making needed improvements.

P. Bracci referred to a \$134,000 2021 warrant article for per diem salary firefighters and said the part-time fire fighters budget went down \$30,000 yet this budget is the same as last year and asked where the \$30,000 cut went. Chief Knutsen said the project cost was about \$180,000 and

they used the warrant money and some money from this year's budget to make up the difference and for 2022 the line will be adjusted again. He said it would take a few years of data to figure the on-call firefighters line. He noted the bottom line is level funded and adjustments have been made.

G. Taillon asked if there was money in the budget for vehicle repair and Chief Knutsen said it is in line 20-661.

B. Hamilton asked about Covid costs. Chief Knutsen said they are still working off a two year grant received last year to cover these. B. Hamilton said some of the money from the new grant should apply to new costs also. P. Spitalere asked about the effect of increasing fuel costs would have on the budget; Chief Knutsen said he didn't expect it to go up too much and it was suggested an estimate be made.

B, Stark asked what didn't make it into the budget. Chief Knutsen said it would be irresponsible to ask for more as he doesn't have the means to push with the staff he has. Then he suggested more fulltime staff might make it easier in the future as they are filling approximately 1,100 shifts per year with part time help. He said it would be irresponsible to ask for anything more than another ladder truck, another engine and ambulance. M

Ch, Zukas asked about the budget for uniforms is the same as last year but that the budgets have shown to be \$10,000 less than what has been used. Chief Knutsen said they are replacing several sets of gear every year.

G. Colby said that some of the needs that didn't make the cut were the items denied out of the grant such as the defibrillator, heart monitor, and replacement of aging hose at the cost of \$100-125,000. Chief Knutsen says these have been in the CIP and he wasn't sure it should be in the budget. He said a heart monitor is about \$38,000 and there may be a \$50,000 threshold. G. Taillon said that other towns are at \$50,000 or \$100,000 in a five or six year plan for CIP and for a long time the Plaistow CIP was at \$10,000 and those should have been put in budgets.

B. Stack moved, second by D. Thompson, to approve the Fire Department budget for a total of \$918,285.00

The motion was approved 9-0-1 (K. Knutsen)

Emergency Management: Chief Knutsen said the budget went up \$2,500. He said money was found in the budget to purchase a system called Code Red which is an industry standard nationally recognized emergency alerting system that uses text, voice, land, etc. to alert for emergencies or missing children, as well as non-emergency communication. He said different users can be set up such as the Rec Dept. might want to alert summer camp is closed for a day.

G. Tallion asked about the decrease in the telephone line and whether more money was needed. Chief Taillon said a variety of phone use will be covered by the Code Red system.

B. Hamilton said that when grant money to offset costs is granted it does not show up in the budget as an actual but a lot of Covid related things that came from grant money show up in this budget as an actual for miscellaneous and asked if this is a mistake since it wasn't budget money. Chief Knutsen said that on the Fire and Emergency Management budgets grant money cannot offset the budget, which is considered supplanting the budget and is illegal. G. Colby said grant money that is received is normally unanticipated money and received by a public hearing and the like by the BOS. Most grant money is shown through General Fund 2, however the Covid money was different as the State said here is money to spend on Covid expenses. He said in the beginning quite a bit was spent on Covid related items such as the plexiglass, the air system, buying supplies that were not being given by the State. He said there were reimbursement request periods and when it looked like there Towns had run out of money to be spent and it looked like a lot of money would be going back to the State the GOEFRR committee came out with guidance that for police, fire and health department salaries, you could presumptively assume they were spending 100% of their time on Covid related expenses. It therefore became easier to submit all the payroll to get the money and not track every individual \$5, \$10 or \$20 item and that was done.

B. Stack returned back to the Fire Dept. budget and CIP and asked if it doesn't fit the CIP requirement because it is not over \$50,000 and if that is the case should money be added to purchase it to their budget. Chief Knutsen said he has submitted items but has not had feedback yet. G. Taillon asked for a comment on how Plaistow is set in terms of safety. Chief Knutsen said the Town is moving in a very positive direction to provide a higher level of service than ever before but things take time.

C. Cruz asked G. Colby to explain the CIP cost levels again and whether things like the heart monitor should go into the budget. G. Colby said the CIP had gone up to a \$50,000 threshold so none of the items in the chief's list would meet the threshold. C. Cruz asked if the Fire Dept. budget can be revisited.

C. Cruz moved, second by G. Taillon, to revisit the Fire Department budget.

The motion was approved 9-0-1 (K. Knutsen)

Chief Knutsen said the line item would be 20-741 and that the hose and heart monitor was in the grant; the cost of the hose is about \$21,000, the thermal imaging camera \$23,000, and the heart monitor is \$38,000.

P. Bracci said the chief came up with a reasonable budget and it's not the Committee's job to add to it. Ch. Zukas said the job of the Budget Committee is to oversee the budget, cut or increase where needed as recommended by the BOS. There was a discussion of the budget process and the role the Committee plays and of budgeting for expense vs using a warrant article. R. Anthony said that looking at Schedule 1 in the auditor report you can see the town over budgets every year and if this equipment is necessary why not put the \$100,000 in the budget and reduce all the other budgets by 10% pro rata. B. Hamilton said we are looking at the largest budget increase in Town history with the exception of the budget that included the \$600,000 bond for

the safety complex five years ago. He said if we ask the voters to approve a warrant article for a ladder truck it will be a very difficult road.

G. Colby said that picking and choosing numbers for what goes into surplus is very misleading. He said \$600,000 from last year was on schedule 3 some of that was appropriations and some revenue and the budget is not \$600,000 over stated. If not for Covid moneys and employee position vacancies last year's budget would have been overspent. Also the surpluses do not accumulate as if in a bank account, it is one pot of money that is utilized. R. Anthony noted that it is not unreasonable to say that a certain amount of over budgeting is happening and why not spread the \$100,000 across all the budgets. G. Colby said when other budgets have been level funded where exactly do these cuts come from for the other departments. He said they had to do that last year and said he is not willing to do that again this year and would ask the Budget Committee to specify line items to be cut out of respect for this budget and what the heads have put into it to come up with what he considers a very reasonable and responsible budget. Ch. Zukas agreed that what happened last year cannot happen this year and the Committee will have to detail the cuts.

D. Britton said if these additions are really needed put them in a warrant article and let the Town decide. Ch. Zukas suggested putting the heart monitor into a warrant article and the other items into the budget. B. Hamilton said he agreed with D. Britton to put these items in a warrant article as he has never seen a warrant article for equipment for the Fire Department turned down by the voters. P. Bracci said this is a 0 based budget and money will be gotten from somewhere else if the hoses should fail. R. Hamilton said that the Town has been in a proactive progressive mode for six years but he still thinks the voters should be the ones to approve.

G. Taillon moved, second by C. Cruz, to increase the operating budget for the Fire Department to \$1,000,285.00 which will increase the equipment line item to \$106,400 which includes the three pieces of equipment which the Fire Chief suggested they needed.

The motion failed 3(G. Taillon, C. Cruz, B. Stack) - 6 (R. Zukas, D. Thompson, P. Bracci, H. Hamilton, R. Anthony, P. Spitalere) -1 (K. Knutsen)

G. Taillon moved, second by D. Thompson, to remove the heart monitor from the Fire Department budget and approve \$952,285.00 to include the thermal imaging camera and the hoses

The motion passed 5(G. Taillon, C. Cruz, B. Stack, R. Zukas, D. Thompson) - 4 (P. Bracci, H. Hamilton, R. Anthony, P. Spitalere) -1 (K. Knutsen)

G. Taillon moved, second by B. Stack, to approve the Emergency Management Budget for \$20,100.00

The motion was approved 9-0-1 (K. Knutsen)

Insurance: G. Taillon said the new premium amount from Primex is \$164,237.00 a 13% increase. G. Colby said that the reinsurance market has become very expensive and that Primex did offer a CAT program but that has run out at the end of 2020 and they are looking at possibly doing away with it or bringing it back out in 2023 or 2024 so we have experienced a large increase this year. It was noted they are the only provider available.

G. Taillon moved, second by K. Knutsen, to approve the Insurance Budget for \$164,237.00

The motion was approved 10-0-0

Solid Waste Collection: G. Taillon said the Solid Waste Budget was raised \$500.00 by the BOS to include money for the Trash Committee to provide training to the resident about the use of the new carts. The new number is \$944,728.00

B, Stack moved, second by G. Taillon, to increase the Solid Waste Collection budget to \$944,728.00

B. Hamilton asked about the training. G. Taillon said it will include how to use the carts and how to properly recycle to get the contamination level down so more of the recycling can actually be recycled. D. Britton said \$500 for 6,000 barrels is a bargain. B. Hamilton asked this be included in the Town Report.

The motion was approved 9-0-1 (R. Anthony)

Water Department: The budget is level funded with last year at \$431,300.00. G. Colby said he worked with the engineers on this and they felt that because of the delay in turning on the water until late spring or early summer and there is not history they were comfortable with the same amount as this year. B. Hamilton asked for a breakdown of payroll. G. Colby said manager, finance director, clerk, an employee working before the outside contractor comes in to oversee the fire suppression system as well as sometimes other members of the Highway Dept. are covered and it is an estimate. He noted the manager is retiring at the end of June. He added this is being paid from the Enterprise Fund as well as user fees and none of this is coming from taxation.

P. Bracci asked at \$431,000 a year how long it would be before the Enterprise Fund is depleted. G. Colby said he wasn't sure as there will be revenue from the sale of water. He said there is \$5-600,000 in the Enterprise Fund now. He also noted that revenue is generated every year and once the water is turned on it will increase. P. Bracci asked how many people have signed up so far and was told approximately 70, but the BOS are looking for policies and to set procedures before starting to officially sign people up. He said Underwood is currently working on those policies and will be coming back with them and that before the end of the year sign up will begin.

B. Hamilton asked how much revenue comes in each year from Fire Suppression; G. Colby said roughly \$125,000 this year. He did not expect the Fire Suppression would increase but when the water users come onboard in 2022 revenue will increase. As it is a self-supporting fund so rates will match or exceed expense.

G. Taillon moved, second by K. Knutsen, to approve the Water Department Budget for \$431,300.00

The motion was approved 10-0-0

Ch. Zukas asked about the bond issue to help people connect to the water system. G. Taillon said it in draft now.

Welfare Administration & Assistance: G. Colby said the carried over distribution of the \$7,000.00 from miscellaneous has been made with \$5,000 going into the Shelter/Rent line and \$2,000 into Electric Assistance.

G. Taillon moved, second by K. Knutsen, to approve the Welfare Administration & Assistance Budget for \$40,612.00.

B. Hamilton said assistance to residents has increased due to Covid and money from the \$800,000 can be utilized to offset some of these costs. D. Britton said the problem is how much will be used in this budget isn't know and the budget needs to be protected because of that. K. Knutsen said the difference between pre-Covid 2018 budget and the proposed 2022 budget is only a \$641.10 increase. R. Anthony said the 2020 Schedule 2 of the audit of the \$32,780 only \$8,071 was expended so \$24,709 was remitted to the Unassigned Fund. B. Stack said there were other programs in place and people weren't asking the Town for money. K. Knutsen noted that many of those programs are going away now. R. Anthony said in 2019 \$ 43,385 was appropriated, \$20,000 was spent and \$23,361 was remitted to the Unassigned Fund. D. Britton said like the snow fund you don't know how much will be spent year to year. P. Spitalere said that history is showing we spend half of what we need and at a time of cost increases everywhere is it time to increase this budget.

The motion was approved 9-1(P. Spitalere)-0

General Government Buildings: G. Colby said this was not approved at the last meeting because C. Cruz had a question regarding the maintenance workers and if it was accounted for in the Recreation budget. He said according to the Recreation Director it is not in her budget.

G. Taillon moved, second by P. Spitalere, to approve the General Government Buildings Budget for \$338,126.00.

The motion was approved 10-0-0

Agenda Item 7: New Business/Old Business

G. Taillon said the BOS has a draft of the motions submitted by the CIP, the Conservation Commission, and other normal motions and they are working to make sure the language is correct before bringing it to the Board. He said the reference date for the BOS receiving these is November 1 and the Budget Committee would get the warrants on December 1 but it may be earlier. D. Britton said he thought they would move along.

B. Hamilton said he understood the Planning Board Chair sent an email to the BOS Chair that the \$5,000 for the Master Plan Update is not needed because it was done in 2019 and asked for verification. D. Britton said he hadn't seen it; G. Taillon said the Planning Board was discussing this at their October 20th meeting.

It was agreed that once the BOS gets warrant articles and reviews them they will be distributed to the Budget Committee via email as soon as received. G. Taillon will get the documents with edits in PDF format to Ch. Zukas and C. Glorieux.

Agenda Item 8: Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for November 30, 2021.

Agenda Item 9: Adjournment

There was no additional business presented. G. Taillon moved, second by K. Knutsen, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Charlene Glorieux
Recording Secretary