



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Thursday, January 5, 2023, at 6:30 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

Call to Order

Chairman Rothhaus called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Rothhaus, Vice Chair Harrington, Councilor Healey, Councilor Hunter, Councilor Murphy, Councilor Woods, and Town Manager Paul Micali. Councilor Koenig arrived at 6:43 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Rothhaus led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Before beginning, Town Manager Paul Micali stated that there is a 21 cent increase in the budget, and all other costs, excluding capital, is about a 1.7% increase throughout the whole budget. Mr. Micali shared that there are a lot of big projects that have been put off that are finally getting done, including the sprinkler project and a few paving projects, and some additional paving to offset the SAFER grant which will go under "nonrecurring items". He shared that another big increase this year in the budget is upgrading the DPW gas station tanks and equipment. He is proposing that they offset the cost of new conduit, wiring, and pumps by using fund balance.

The Town Council then held a public meeting to review the 2023/24 budget, which included the following departments:

- Assessing

Finance Director Tom Boland was present to share the assessing budget, beginning by stating that overall there is an increase of \$19,000 in appropriations for the department, \$10,000 of which are personnel related. He shared that when their field assessor resigned, they hired a more experienced individual and they had to increase wages for that position. He also stated that there was a \$4,000 increase in health insurance, and a newly negotiated contract with their contract assessing company that caused an increase of \$4,000 per year. Mr. Boland then stated that the remaining \$1,000 is made up of a number of different items that reflect the general inflation increases (supplies, fuel, etc.).

- Town Clerk / Tax Collector

Diane Trippett and Brenda DuLong from the town clerk's office were present to share their updates. Ms. Trippett started by saying that overall, their submitted budget is similar to previous years with the exception of last year's requested full time position. She shared that 85% of the budget is personnel related and the other 15% is operating cost. This year's budget is proposed to be lower than last year's due to them not moving forward with filling the full time position requested last year. She stated that the reasoning for this is because the current market for new cars is expected to take years to recover and vehicle purchases are down, and there are also technological changes in the office, such as the ACH reader and the tax kiosk which help cut down the need for a full time position. Ms. Trippett further shared that they have switched to a new vendor for their online presence and the new site is much easier for resident's to use and more intuitive. She also shared that there is an electronic copy of the tax bill available online, so calls to the office have greatly dropped. Additionally, there is an increase in credit card transactions and a decrease in bounced checks due to online payments. She also shared that for car registrations, there is a new scanner that scans licenses and auto generates the information, which helps reduce errors. Additionally, Mr. Micali shared that he has put in wage increases for staff, stating that wages have lagged compared to other communities and they want to reduce disparities between towns. Lastly, Ms. Trippett shared that paper costs have greatly increased, so their printing budget has increased by \$1,000.

1 • Media

2 Nicholas Lavallee and Justin Slez were present to share their proposed budget. Mr. Lavallee stated that they
3 are not proposing any new positions and their budget is slightly down. Notably, there is a decrease in
4 subscriptions due to their MerrimackTV app that is coming online in a few months. This will bring their
5 annual upkeep and software updates down to \$3,000 per year moving forward. Next was office equipment, in
6 which Mr. Lavallee shared that they invested \$40,000 in their public portion of their channels and services,
7 and are looking to continue this for remote/mobile studio production to increase capabilities for events they
8 cover.

9
10 • Community Development

11 Tim Thompson was present to discuss the Community Development budget. He shared that their budget is
12 down \$3,700, less than 1% from last year. They are essentially level funded, and there are no significant
13 changes to any of the line items. He recapped that previously, their land use boards increased by 6 agenda
14 items, with 130 agenda items between the Planning Board and the Zoning Board. He also stated that time
15 spent staffing board meetings decreased from 61 hours to 51 hours, and both boards have decided to move
16 their meeting times to 6:30pm. Lastly, he shared that Colleen Olsen is the new assistant planner.

17
18 • Communications

19 Chief Levesque was present to discuss the Communications budget, kicking off his presentation by stating
20 that there is a significant jump in their equipment budget due to Nixle that was underreported in previous
21 years, as well as the usage. He also shared that the RMS annual fee is going up because they are coming to
22 the end of their year of free service. He explained that there is an interface between Image Trend and RMS,
23 in which Image Trend is used by the Fire Department for their ambulance reporting, so there is an annual fee
24 so RMS can populate into the reporting. Lastly, Chief Levesque shared that the line item maintenance
25 communications equipment is part of the 800mghz system project, and this is the annual fee and preventative
26 maintenance fee- there will be about a 15% increase in yearly charges for this.

27
28 • Police

29 Chief Levesque then shared the following regarding the Police budget:

- 30 ○ Overtime increased by 160 hours to reflect the mandatory changes by police standards and
31 increase the annual hours and required annual training.
- 32 ○ Operating supplies decreased in ammunition in the amount of \$15,000.
- 33 ○ Uniforms and ballistic vests get rotated every 5 years- this is a matching grant through the
34 government where they will pay half. Each vest is about \$500 and there are 23 officers that
35 need replacements and 5 to purchase for new hires.
- 36 ○ Regarding dues and fees: There is a dog license lookup software for officers to log in to
37 access the town clerks database and determine who owns a missing dog, this will cost \$600
38 per year.
- 39 ○ NH special ops unit has a \$5,000 yearly fee.
- 40 ○ Job related training seminars increased by \$5,000 due to outsourcing to other companies.
- 41 ○ Dog pound training school increased to \$600.
- 42 ○ Other operating expenses included: \$2,000 for blood draws at hospitals for DWIs or injuries
43 in DWI crashes. Also, the department needs to purchase 4 patrol vehicles, but they are only
44 purchasing 3 in this budget.

45
46 • Police Detail

47 Chief Levesque shared that this is a fund that pays for the officers to work details, however it's a self-
48 supported fund where the finance department determines what they should be charging hourly per rate per
49 hour for the officer's work. He stated that the billing goes through the town and they recoup the money.

1 • General Government

2 Mr. Micali began by talking about compensated absences, stating that this is a number that is determined by
3 the number of people that will be retiring in the next year, which has gone down a bit this year and was
4 decreased by \$100,000. He then shared that incentives increased by \$30,000 to help with hiring individuals
5 that are highly trained or need to get paid a little more due to experience or coming back from previous roles,
6 and this keeps them competitive with other communities. Mr. Micali also shared that the telephone expense
7 went up \$14,500 due to an increase to the maintenance cost associated with the new phone system.
8

9 Mr. Micali then briefly discussed computer services, stating that a significant amount of money, about
10 \$52,000 is for Microsoft Office 365. A portion of this, \$15,000, will be used to upgrade to a two factor
11 security authentication, and the yearly fee to equip the whole town with Office 365 is \$37,000. He then
12 stated that Civic Plus software support, which will upgrade the current website, is \$18,500, and will be useful
13 for sending out applications and applying online to open positions. Councilor Healey asked about
14 advertising, specifically if the increase is due to running more ads or if this is because the cost of ads has
15 gone up, in which Mr. Micali stated that the price of running ads has increased, and the cost of public hearing
16 notices for telegraphs have gone up as well.
17

18 • Revenues

19 Mr. Micali shared that the New Hampshire Retirement System (NHRS) increased by \$181,000 last year as
20 one-time funding to offset police and fire retirement. Now they have to find savings through appropriations
21 as this is 3 cents on the tax rate. He also shared that the school district lost \$2 million in their revenues. He
22 then stated that building permits reduced by \$65,000, and there are some developments and large buildings
23 going on that will probably be built next year.
24

25 Mr. Boland then shared his budget update, stating the following:

- 26 ○ Increase in solid waste revenue due to tipping fees and an increase in trash volume, totaling an
27 increase of over \$190,000 in this budget
- 28 ○ Interest income in cash balances is the most significant increase at \$261,000. Rates have
29 increased on investable cash as well
- 30 ○ Increase in revenue related to COASAP (Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance
31 Abuse Program) grant for police accepted in the prior fiscal year, offset by increased expenses
- 32 ○ Decrease in building permits by \$64,000
- 33 ○ Reduction in current use taxes
- 34 ○ Budgeting flat on auto registrations, meals and rooms taxes and highway block grant
35

36 After Mr. Boland's presentation, Mr. Micali asked the Council if they wish to meet again next Wednesday,
37 January 11th to discuss single stream tipping fees and overhead, or if they would prefer to hold off. The
38 Council was in agreement with holding off on this for now until there is a new DPW director to discuss with.
39 Mr. Micali agreed with this, and also suggested to leave the current fees at \$150 per ton until a final decision
40 can be made, possibly over the summer.
41

42 **Adjourn**

43 **MOTION made by Councilor Woods and seconded by Councilor Healey to adjourn the meeting.**

44 **MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0**
45
46

47 The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.
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50 Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Steagald