

**Budget Committee
November 10, 2014**

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Dave Mankus; Charlie Edwards (Selectmen's Rep); Lisa Kimball; Priscilla Colbath; Carlene Stewart; Bruce Rich; Nancy Spencer Smith; Asha Kenney; Teresa A. Williams, Town Administrator; and Toni Bodah, Secretary.

Jim Miller was present in the audience; and Donna Martin was videotaping the session. Various committee/board representatives were present as indicated below.

Mr. O'Connor called the posted meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Financial Administration – Angie Casperonis – [This section includes accounts that do not relate directly to Tax Collection.] Ms. Smith asked whether the cost of the audit increases each year. Ms. Williams advised that under the current contract, the rate stayed the same for the first 2 years, with a \$300 increase the 3rd year. Mr. Rich referred to the over-expenditure of the Bank Fees line. Ms. Williams explained that in early May we realized we were being charged high fees for use of the lockbox during tax time. It was ultimately decided to close the lockbox to avoid those fees. The original purpose of the lockbox was to get payments into the bank as quickly as possible, thereby accumulating greater interest. However, the current staff gets everything keyed in the same day as it is received. (And interest rates aren't what they used to be!)

Ms. Williams explained that the Printing/Supplies line (01-41504-610) shows a significant decrease due to the separation of various expenses. Ms. Smith suggested including an explanation in the future when separating lines.

Ms. Stewart asked whether the salary increase for the Tax Collector is based on the wage survey. Mr. Edwards confirmed this, adding that this position would have required a huge jump to get on the scale. Therefore, the Board of Selectmen decided to accomplish that jump in stages. Ms. Kimball asked how the Board decides who is on the scale and who isn't. Mr. Edwards explained that the Board is trying to get everyone on the scale, without burden to the taxpayers.

Mr. Rich noted that only \$2400 has been expended year-to-date from the deputy wage line. Ms. Casperonis noted that more will be expended during the next tax billing and at year end.

Ms. Colbath questioned whether increases are based on longevity. Mr. Edwards stated that longevity is a factor of the wage scale. Ms. Williams indicated that, when comparing wage information, it is difficult to know how long individuals from other towns have been in their positions. Once all employees are on the scale, increases will be in the area of 2-3%. Ms. Smith asked which employees are not yet on the scale. Ms. Williams advised that only Ms. Casperonis and she are currently not on the scale. Ms. Smith was advised that Ms. Williams was given a portion of the difference between her salary and the scale as an increase for 2014, with further review planned for 2015. Ms. Smith noted that the Board could revisit this if any funds are available at year end.

Mr. Mankus moved the section at \$79,345. Mr. Edwards seconded the motion, which passed without objection.

Assessing - Arlene Fogg – Ms. Fogg advised that the Board of Assessors is requesting to increase New Property Assessment (01-41522-312) to \$70,000. This represents \$45,000 for the assessing contract, plus \$25,000 for the statistical update. This increase is a result of the number of abatement applications going to BTLA, as well as on-going litigation. Ms. Williams stated that \$7000 is generally budgeted for anything over the regular pick-up work. Ms. Kimball questioned how the assessor has managed to accomplish all the work at \$45,000. Ms. Fogg stated the Board is preparing for the worst due to on-going litigation, which she is unable to discuss. Mr. Edwards stated that the Assessors would not be asking for the increase were it not for the litigation. Ms. Fogg stated it would also cover additional trips to Concord and more work in the field.

Mr. O'Connor feels this should be connected to the legal line; however, Ms. Williams indicated that is not the case. Mr. Rich asked whether the Board of Selectmen supports this increase. Mr. Edwards advised that the \$52,000 figure was presented to the Selectmen; he is seeing this increase for this first time this evening. Mr. Rich suggested tabling this line until the Selectmen have had an opportunity to review the increased request.

Ms. Kimball referred to the \$6700 paid out year-to-date for abatements [refunds] and noted that it is not worth \$25,000 to support this. Much discussion followed regarding the abatement process, including the appeal process related thereto. Ms. Williams indicated that the \$25,000 relates mostly to keeping the sales ratio in line. Mr. Edwards believes the contracted assessor is providing the Town with a high figure to ensure sufficient funds are available.

Ms. Smith referred to the training line (01-41522-330) having doubled. Ms. Williams explained that there previously were separate training lines for both the Assessing Tech and the Board of Assessors. All training has now been combined in one line. **Mr. Mankus moved to table line 01-41522-312 and to approve the bottom line at \$61,931. Ms. Smith seconded the motion, to which all agreed.**

Town Maintenance – Fred Clough – Ms. Smith referred to the salt line (01-43121-682), which shows a \$7000 increase, although \$10,000 remains unexpended for 2014. Mr. Clough advised he is still hauling in salt. Ms. Smith asked whether there is any effort to decrease the amount of salt used on the roads. Mr. Clough advised that salt and sand are mixed in order to stretch it out. Ms. Smith referred to water protection. Mr. Clough advised that several staff members have attended classes to learn more about this issue.

Ms. Kimball asked why the \$100,000 for construction projects (01-43121-820) was moved from the operating budget to a capital reserve fund. Mr. Clough stated that any unused funds can accumulate in a capital reserve fund, for future use on construction projects. If funds remain unexpended in the operating budget, they are returned to the general fund. Ms. Kimball asked about the increase in the Outside Hire line (01-43121-810). Mr. Clough explained that used material—such as pavement, etc.—is stockpiled at the Highway garage. When the stockpile reaches a certain level, outside hire is used to crush that debris into a material usable by the department. The current stockpile will need to be addressed in 2015. **Mr. Mankus moved the request at \$140,000. Ms. Kimball seconded the motion, to which all agreed.**

Highway Department – Fred Clough – Ms. Smith asked about Road Scholar status. Mr. Clough explained that staff members earn credits when they successfully complete various training courses through UNH T². When enough credits are earned, Road Scholar status is attained.

The increase in the overtime line (01-43122-140) was briefly discussed. **Ms. Smith moved the request at \$369,117. Ms. Stewart seconded the motion, which passed without objection.**

Street Lighting – Ms. Williams keeps hearing that rates will increase for 2015. **Mr. Mankus moved the request at \$29,000. Ms. Kenney seconded the motion, to which all agreed.**

Greater Wakefield Resource Center (building) – Ms. Williams had expected that Liz Olimpio would address this request at the November 1 meeting. The purpose of these funds is to replace/repair clapboards on the outside of the building. Ms. Smith asked whether the GWRC will address an overall plan for the building with the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Williams advised that, according to the management agreement, the Town is responsible for the exterior of the building, while the GWRC is responsible for the interior. At this point there has been no discussion regarding future plans. Ms. Colbath stated that the GWRC board is currently working on a plan to complete the elevator and develop 2 upper rooms. Ms. Williams noted that she did request an overall plan for the exterior in an effort to leverage additional funds; however, that was not forthcoming. **Mr. Mankus moved the request at \$2500. Mr. Rich seconded the motion, which passed with 1 abstention.**

Town Hall – Ms. Williams advised that the Emergency Repair line (01-41941-810) is new. It actually replaces a similar line removed from the General Administration section. Ms. Smith asked who is in charge of the opera house. Ms. Williams advised that the Town is in charge; however, WPI does much work to develop specs, oversee projects, and generate funds. Discussion followed regarding planned repair of the opera house floor. **Mr. Mankus moved the request at \$59,932. Ms. Stewart seconded the motion, to which all agreed.**

Mr. Mankus referred to DRA's disallowance of use of "miscellaneous" lines. Ms. William clarified that the term "unexpected" cannot be used; however, "emergency repair" is acceptable.

Mr. Miller referred to the previous discussion regarding the increase in the request from the Board of Assessors. He advised that those meetings are now being filmed, and the video may be of interest/edification to the Budget Committee members. Additionally, Mr. Miller will be working with the Assessing Tech to film a piece on how the abatement process works, how to apply, etc. He noted that much misinformation is currently being disseminated. Mr. Mankus noted that the video should include how the assessment process works, as well.

The minutes of the November 6 meeting were briefly discussed. Mr. O'Connor will discuss clarification of same with Deb Gauthier. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Secretary