

Selectboard Minutes
December 12, 2023

Present: Jenn Jones, chair
Andy Artimovich, vice chair
Jon Morgan
Russ Kelly
Paul Kleinman

Jones called the meeting to order at 6pm.

The Board signed the payroll and accounts payable summary register.

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Morgan, to accept the consent agenda which consisted of public minutes from 12/5/23, recreation manifest, NH DRA data certificate, PA 42 to approve an ongoing residence in a commercial zone, treasurer's report (found at the end of these minutes), and the following building permits:

- Winder-Kunysz Real Estate, 25 Commercial Drive, Minor Project
- Town of Brentwood, 22 Dalton Road, Electrical
- John Mumford, 32 Mohawk Lane, Electrical
- Alexander L Smith Rev Trust, 16 Wilson Way, Electrical

All were in favor.

Morgan asked for clarification on the information in the consent agenda pertaining to assessments. Karen Clement, Town Administrator, responded that memo from Jim Michaud, the town's contracted assessor, states the equalization ratio is going from 74% to 68% which she explained to mean assessments are 32% below market value. Clement added a revaluation will occur in 2025. Morgan asked if 68% is a good thing. Clement responded it is recommended assessments be within 10% of market value.

Jones opened the meeting to public comment at 6:04pm.

Letty Bedard, Middle Road, speaking as a private citizen, asked why there are maintenance lines for fire in the fire budget and in the government buildings budget. Clement responded the fire maintenance line in the government buildings budget covers routine maintenance of items such as the fire suppression and elevator. She added that Chief Bird would speak to what items are covered in his budget when he presents the fire budget.

Jones closed public comment at 6:05pm.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to reopen the government buildings budget and the police budget. All were in favor.

Morgan stated he was requesting the recreation maintenance line in the government buildings line be increased \$2,500 after a site walk at rec center campus. He explained there are serious safety concerns with the road between Olsen field and the snack shack on the rec campus. Morgan explained that to address the safety concern of the current layout and to create more parking, there is a need to relocate the water tank which serves as the source for the irrigation system. He added that due to the size of the tank, a crane would be required to move it. The estimated cost of that is \$2,500, according to Morgan.

Artimovich asked why Morgan would not put that cost in with the road costs. Morgan responded the cost of the road is going to be tight cost wise. Jones asked if road maintenance should fall under the government buildings budget. Morgan responded he understands the line to be for the maintenance of the rec facility. Jones asked Clement if it is appropriate. Clement responded she believes it would be appropriate and added the town hall land maintenance falls under the government buildings budget. Jones stated the request is to increase the current line from \$5,000 to \$7,500.

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Kleinman asked for clarification on the need for a new road. Morgan drew a diagram outlining the current traffic pattern and safety issues resulting from the current traffic flow. Morgan explained cars coming from Route 125 drive between Olsen field and the snack shack. He added there are children and families also walking on the road and crossing that dirt road to access porta potties and the snack shack. Morgan also mentioned that in addition to the road being narrow and cars sharing it with pedestrians, that road also serves cars traveling in the opposite direction. He added there is also no lighting. Morgan stated the plan would be to close down the current road to traffic and have a new road constructed to run behind Olsen field. He added that the new road would eliminate the current safety issue.

Kleinman asked if the road was going to cost \$7,500. Morgan responded it was not. He went on to explain the \$5,000 previously approved in the budget covers repairs/maintenance to the snack shack, kayak shed, rec building, other sheds/outbuildings, and basketball courts. Morgan explained he is requesting an additional \$2,500 to move the very large water tank for irrigation. Artimovich stated the tank could not be done until the road is in. Morgan responded it is preventing the next step in getting the road in because it is blocking the access to the new road.

Artimovich stated the road will not be funded in 2024. Morgan responded he believes it could be and he accepts the challenge it will be funded.

Kelly motioned, seconded by Artimovich, to add \$2,500 to line 694 in the government buildings budget bringing it to \$93,910. All were in favor.

Chief Ventura, police chief, was present to discuss the reason for reopening the police budget. He explained when the budget was previously presented, 11 holidays were factored into the budget. One holiday was missed. Additionally, the formula did not carry over for the part-timers resulting in about \$8,000 not accurately reflected in the budget. He explained to help compensate for that increase, he further reduced the overtime line by about \$900.

Kelly asked for clarification on the additional holiday. Ventura explained the officers are paid for 12 holidays but only 11 were represented in the budget due to a clerical error.

Kelly motioned, seconded by Morgan, to accept the police budget of \$1,256,508. All were in favor.

Alyssa Cynewski, EMS Captain and Chief Joe Bird, fire chief, were present to share their budgets.

Cynewski explained her budget is a revolving fund and separate from the fire department. The revenue comes from ambulance calls and is not taxpayer funds, according to Cynewski. She added there are 24 hours shifts and it has been difficult for her to connect face-to-face with all employees with her current allotted hours and their schedules. She feels it is important with all the newer people, that she be there to orient them and manage the clinical side of things.

Cynewski requested budgeting herself to work 32 hours per week. She added there has been an increased call volume, she manages the clinical operations of all EMTs, processes reports for each call, and otherwise assists in day-to-day operations. Cynewski added the EMS Lieutenant position is vacant. Bird outlined the different levels of EMS – basic EMT, advanced EMT, and medic. Cynewski also shared she teaches classes 3 times a month.

Kleinman asked if Cynewski's salary is in the line 120. Cynewski confirmed it was. Chief Bird added increasing Cynewski's hours benefits the taxpayers without impacting their taxes.

Morgan asked about the EMS classes Cynewski mentioned. Cynewski responded she teaches classes 3 nights per month. One class is specific to EMS and 2 are for fire personnel. She further explained that in order for EMT's to keep their licensing they are required to have continuing education hours. Cynewski shared one class was learning the new ambulance,

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it's features and capabilities. Other times, she explained, it might be about clinical changes/protocols mandated by the State. Morgan asked if this is typical of other departments. Cynewski responded yes.

Jones questioned the salary line being underspent. Cynewski responded that she does not always put in for the time she works resulting in the line being underspent. Jones asked where the remainder of Cynewski's hours are paid from. Cynewski responded her salary is only in the ambulance budget.

Kleinman asked if the plan would be for Cynewski to work four 8-hour days at the fire station. She responded 3 of the days she would work at the station and the fourth day she would work remotely where she would be doing QA/Q1 to be sure the services can be properly billed.

Kleinman asked what the revenues look like since the town switched to a new billing agent in 2020. Cynewski responded 2020 – \$137,162; 2021 – \$164,675; 2022 – about \$167,896. Kleinman asked what 2023 will be in terms of revenue. Clement responded they have collected about \$150,000 in 2023. Jones asked if the unspent revenue would remain in the revolving account. Cynewski confirmed that was the case.

Cynewski shared that Jeffrey Spencer from Medical Business Services (MBS) has been great to work with and has helped increase the amount received for ambulance services. Jones asked how much is in the revolving account. Clement responded there is about \$402,000. Artimovich asked how often ambulances are purchased. Chief Bird responded about every 6 years.

Kelly motioned, seconded by Artimovich, to accept the EMS budget of \$120,781. All were in favor.

Chief Bird, fire chief, presented his budget.

- Cut salary lines
 - First full year of 24-hour shift coverage
 - Due to staffing shortages, about 25 weeks the department was not fully staffed
 - Filled with per diems
 - Still searching for a fourth firefighter
- Cut the overtime line
- Vehicle repair line increased by \$20,000
- Administrative salary increase

Chief Bird spoke about a market adjustment for his position. He provided the board with a list of other towns and what their chiefs are paid along with other benefits. Jones asked when that position last had a market adjustment. Clement responded two years ago.

Kleinman asked what Bird would be increasing from and what he would be increasing to. Bird responded he would go from \$91,250 to \$107,247. Jones asked if there was another wage adjustment. Bird responded it was for his administrative assistant and the increase was based on the 2 surrounding departments. Morgan asked if other towns offer the same benefit of vacation buyout as Brentwood. Bird replied it varies. He explained many chiefs have contracts. Clement stated she believes Epping allows up to 400 hours and you can add 40 per year. Morgan asked what Brentwood allows. Clement responded it is case-by-case.

Morgan stated he has no issue with market adjustments. He added he feels it is a remarkable jump. Bird responded that if he left and the board had to fill the position, they would not be successful filling it at the amount he has requested. Jones replied she understands it is a competitive market. Artimovich shared the towns in comparison are not comparative to Brentwood. He added the police lieutenant is now making \$91,000. Artimovich added the fire chief is running the fire department and is

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underpaid to do so.

Jones suggested in the future that departments that are looking to do wage adjustment should share that information with the board ahead of their budget presentations to allow the board time to think on it and allow the public to provide input. Morgan questioned increasing the building maintenance in the government buildings budget and the fire budget. He added the government buildings budget is increasing that line by \$8,450.

Bird replied he handles the expenses for the furnace and generators while the town tends to handle the routine maintenance expenses like sprinklers. Clement explained the government building maintenance line for the fire department was reduced because of budget cuts at Town Meeting. Jones asked if it would be cleaner to have all maintenance together instead of in separate budgets. Clement responded that was attempted in the past, however, stuff kept breaking and she found there was not enough to absorb all the expenses in that one budget. Jones suggested increasing the line in government buildings for fire maintenance and removing that line from the fire budget. She believes it makes sense because all other departments are in the budget except for the library which has its own governing body.

Morgan questioned the amount needed. Bird responded it is hard to know what will break and he wants to be prepared to cover it. He added the generator repairs exceeded what he had budgeted for in the last budget. Jones asked Clement if the \$11,000 expenses is reflective of actual costs. Clement responded some expenses were submitted to the trustees of the trust funds for reimbursement from the capital reserves. Bird does not disagree about moving the money. He requested \$1,000 be left to cover incidentals such as light bulbs and lower cost expenses. Jones asked where other departments expend for lightbulbs and such. Clement responded it is from the general supplies line.

Artimovich believes the line should be for general repairs and maintenance. He added if the elevator breaks and needs to be repaired then that should come out of the capital reserve fund. Jones views the government buildings line as the place to cover yearly maintenance. She argued it does not need to be in both budgets. Clement suggested removing it from the fire budget. Morgan asked if \$18,000 would be the amount in the government building budget. Artimovich suggested increasing the general supply line (603) in the fire budget by \$500 to cover some items.

Jones asked if line 690 should be reduced to \$1 or removed from the budget completely. Clement suggested they eliminate the line and move those funds to the government buildings budget. Jones asked if Chief Bird's buyout has historically been built into the salary line. Clement responded it appears that way. Jones suggested keeping the 2 weeks built into the fire budget. She asked how Clement calculated the line item to \$107,373.

Katarina Tennant, fire administrative assistant, stated Chief Bird is a working chief and has no deputy or lieutenant. She explained a lot of work falls onto him that other departments may not face. Additionally, due to the inexperience and certifications of some of the firefighters, Bird is often required to drive the truck to an emergency, Tennant added. These circumstances, she pointed out, does not allow him to utilize his 240 hours of earned time.

Jones responded she understands Bird is a working chief and does not dispute that. Morgan added he is expecting questions from the budget committee. Jones stated she wants to be sure the numbers add up and make sense.

It was discovered, the chief's proposed salary line was factored at the new rate for all of 2024, rather than the current rate for 13 weeks and the proposed new rate for 39 weeks. The salary line was reduced by \$16,580, line 225 reduced by \$241, and line 230 reduced by \$5,032. These reductions totaled \$21,853 bringing the bottom line to \$1,007,287.

Kleinman questioned where the chief pay study came from. Bird responded it was a pay study a chief from another town did. He explained he utilized the numbers already available instead of making the same calls himself. Jones stated if the amount paid to the Town Administrator, Police Chief, and Police Lieutenant is compared to the fire chief's salary proposed amount, the requested increase is reasonable.

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Kleinman argued calling the information a study. He stated he is being asked to take the word of someone he does not know. Artimovich responded to Kleinman that the board trusts the fire chief to manage a million-dollar budget, his word should be valued. He added if the chief believes the information to be valid, he feels the board should not be doubting that. Bird responded he would not be using the information if he believed there was no validity to the information.

Jones supports the wage adjustments for the chief and his administrative assistant. She believes the overall impact to the budget is minimal because of the reduction of overtime. Clement stated it would be a 1.6% overall increase to the budget. Jones added the only caveat to the 1.6% increase is that the building maintenance line is being moved to the government buildings budget.

Kelly questioned the vehicle repairs line because \$50,000 is being requested but that amount has almost been expended. Morgan asked if \$50,000 will be enough. Bird replied a large amount of what was expended from that line was a result of the generator on one of the fire trucks needing to be repaired. He does not foresee that expense in 2024 but wants to plan for other possible needed repairs.

Kleinman questioned the increase of the fire administrative assistant. He asked Bird what it was based on. Bird responded it was based on the 2 towns near Brentwood – Epping and Kingston. Jones stated it appeared they were splitting the difference between the 2 towns.

Jones asked about the retention bonus listed under Note A of the budget worksheet. Bird explained he took the idea from Chief Ventura, but at a lower rate. After 2 years, the fire fighter is offered \$.25, after 3 years \$.50, and after 4 years \$.75 is offered. Bird stated he will reexamine the retention bonuses. Clement added that it was approved in 2022. Jones asked if the “bump” is enough to retain staff. She added the police are at a much higher rate for retention.

Clement asked how successful the previous program was. Bird responded it was very difficult to track. Jones asked how it worked. Bird responded there was a minimum number of calls a per diem member or on call person would have to respond to in order to benefit from the program. Morgan suggested seeing something more solid presented in the future. He would like to see a strategy of retention. Morgan stated he would also like to see the amount of money the retention bonuses total. Lastly, Morgan expressed his concern that the vehicle repair line might not be adequate.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to accept the fire budget of \$1,007,287. All were in favor.

Artimovich suggested Bird come up with better comparisons for his position and the admin’s position ahead of presenting to the budget committee. Additionally, he suggested Bird total the retention bonus amounts before presenting to the budget committee next week.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to reopen the government building budget again to add \$6,550 to the fire station repair and maintenance line (692) bringing the line to \$15,000. All were in favor.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to accept the government buildings budget in the amount of \$100,460. All were in favor.

Karen Clement, Town Administrator, presented the insurance budget.

Insurance Budget

- Property & liability
 - Increased 17.8%
 - 2024 rates

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- Workers' compensation
 - Increased 12%
 - 2024 rates
- Through Primex

Clement explained the increases are due to property insurance market, catastrophic weather-related events, cyber claims, recent legislation that provides extended coverage for firefighter cancer claims, and different coverage for firefighters. Jones asked if that was statewide. Clement responded yes.

Morgan asked if the increase was due to 1 cyber attack claim. Clement responded the increase was the risk pool not as a result of any claims. Jones asked if that was just for NH. Clement responded yes.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Artimovich, to accept the insurance budget in the amount of \$159,615. All were in favor.

Karen Clement, Town Administrator, presented the second insurance (benefits) budget.

Insurance (Benefits) Budget

- Pricing based
 - On current pool
 - Expected changes to medical coverage
 - Maintaining same plans
- Reduction in in lieu of insurance line

Morgan asked if the pricing was to maintain the "status quo" plan. Clement confirmed that was accurate. Morgan shared that the Budget Committee asked if there would be an impact on rates if the town joined a pool with the school employees. He asked if the Selectboard and School Board would be willing to submit a letter to Healthtrust for a rate quote. Morgan explained he was unsure if the town would save money or not.

Jones asked if there was a reason it had not been done previously. Artimovich responded he believes the town is matched with other towns of the same size. Clement added Brentwood is currently in a small pool with 50 or less employees. She stated if they combined with the school, they would be in the large pool of more than 50 employees. Morgan suggested there would be less variability in the larger pool.

Jones asked if the school offers the same plans. Clement responded they offer the AB20 plan in addition to a few the town does not currently offer. She stated one possible issue would be that the town is on a different budget cycle and renewal cycle than the school. Additionally, Clement noted, joining the school could not be done until July 2025 based on current budget cycles and insurance renewal cycles.

Jones asked if the entire budget would need to change. Clement responded the entire budget would not need to change. She added the amounts would need to be estimated for six months. Clement's recommendation would be to set aside unexpended funds into an expendable trust fund. She explained the unspent money would not be returned to the taxpayers and instead would go into that account. Clement stated there is no cost or obligation for Healthtrust to examine the cost comparisons.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to accept the insurance budget in the amount of \$568,649. All were in favor.

Artimovich shared there is a Conservation Commission meeting Wednesday, December 12 at 6:30pm.

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Morgan shared there is an Economic Development meeting on Thursday, December 13 at 6pm.

Kelly shared there is a Communications Committee meeting on Thursday, December 13 at 6:30pm.

Jones asked if the website launch was happening soon. Clement responded she met with Stefanie Lewendon today and based on that, Clement does not feel the launch is quite ready. She would like to provide each department head with a link to their page and allow them time to review the content. Additionally, she would like to have people trained on the back end before the launch occurs.

Kleinman shared there was a well-attended housing presentation for Planning Board last Thursday.

Clement stated the Planning Board originally earmarked \$6,000 toward the AV upgrades but now has \$4,000 to contribute. She asked if the “shortfall” should come from the town office impact fees. Morgan requested the board wait until after the committee meeting.

Jones shared there will be solar discussions on Monday, December 18 at 10:30am and 5pm for the school’s solar proposal. The public is welcome to attend.

At 8:01pm, Artimovich motioned, seconded by Morgan, to enter non-public for hiring. Artimovich – aye; Morgan – aye; Kelly – aye; Kleinman – aye; Jones – aye.

At 8:06pm, Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly to enter public session. Artimovich – aye; Morgan – aye; Kelly – aye; Kleinman – aye; Jones – aye.

Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to seal the non-public minutes. Artimovich – aye; Morgan – aye; Kelly – aye; Kleinman – aye; Jones – aye.

At 8:06pm, Morgan motioned, seconded by Kelly, to adjourn the meeting. Artimovich – aye; Morgan – aye; Kelly – aye; Kleinman – aye; Jones – aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Tamera Peek

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WEEKLY TREASURER'S REPORT			
DATE:		12/12/2023	
General Fund:		TD BANK	
Previous Balance:		7,461,699.54	
Deposits:		1,125,285.25	
Payroll:		35,763.07	DDP: \$35,024.27 CHK: \$738.80
FICA:		8458.62	
A/P:		650,171.90	Reg A/P Cks \$650,1741.90 NHRs \$ Swasey \$ CO-OP: \$
Transfer to REC CC			
Voided Check		\$400.00	
Transfer to Impact Fees			
Account Balance:		7,892,991.20	
Interest Earned YTD:		112,622.45	
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Joyce A. Gallant, Treasurer			