

Town of Brentwood Municipal Budget Committee
Minutes of December 16, 2024 Meeting held at Town Office

Members Present: Jack Mitchell (chair), Michelle Siudut (secretary), Brian Duffy (Swasey rep), Jennifer Jones (Selectboard rep)

Members Remote: Alina Arida

Members Absent: Gabbie Kelly, Kat Niemiroski (excused)

Jack called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Motion by Brian, seconded by Michelle to allow Alina to attend remotely; Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-aye, Jack-aye.

Meeting Minutes

Motion by Brian, seconded by Jennifer, to approve the December 9, 2024 meeting minutes; Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-aye, Alina-abstain, Jack-aye; passed 4-1-0.

Selectboard Report - Jennifer Jones

The remaining budgets will be presented tonight.

Jennifer emailed information about Dragon Mosquito Control.

Preliminary budget is very high. Selectboard is trying to find cuts line by line, hoping to get to single digit percentage increase. Jennifer hopes to have Selectboard-approved reductions for January BudCom meeting, at which time we may reopen some budgets.

Swasey School Report - Brian Duffy

Nothing aside from the budget discussion on the agenda tonight.

Budgets

Swasey Central School - Presented by Brian Duffy.

The overall budget increase is 5.8%, which includes the solar panel bond (7 years); without the bond the increase would be 3.99%. The Board met tonight to authorize getting the bond; the rate was expected to be as high as 4.2% but could be below 3.75% - won't know the actual rate until January 15 2025. After year 7 we should see payout. It is unclear on the timing of the Federal rebate or how it will be paid, but the registration is done. Panels should be connected by end of year; hoping to be operational in January.

*Increase in Student Body Activities includes 5th grade travel and other club activities.

*Regular education - includes staff salaries.

*Special education - includes some staff salaries. Also includes anticipated out-of-district placement (new this year). Students with IEPs require certain needs, which greatly affects the salary line of SpEd.

*Teacher contract will renew in 2026; Para-professional contract will renew in 2027. Increases for these lines in this budget are contractual.

*The number of teachers will remain the same; there is an added para-professional in this budget.

*Education Commissioner announced a reduction in state reimbursement. This only applies to spending 3.5X of SpEd. We don't currently have students in this category, so the state change will not affect us.

*CIP includes \$50K for roof repairs; \$45K for library doors (in this budget), \$30K for field maintenance.
*Jack asked about potential warrant articles - Chris Andriski said there will be no other warrant articles.
*Projects line in this budget will be used for field maintenance unless something else comes up.

Motion by Jen, seconded by Alina, to approve \$7,459,745, a 5.38% increase.

Public comment: Resident Bruce Stevens asked about student population decline (decrease of 27 students from Oct 2016 to Oct 2024). Bruce Stevens asked the average number of SpEd; Swasey Principal Ron Kew said 20% of total enrollment is SpEd, which is over 50 students. Bruce Stevens asked how much came back to town at year end? After 2020 school year \$87,514, after 2021 school year \$225,472, after 2022 school year \$328,352, after 2023 school year \$36,001, after 2024 school year \$101,221.

Bruce Stevens was interested in knowing how unexpended fund balance monies not turned back to town are utilized.

Voting on the motion: Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Alina-aye, Michelle-nay, Jack-aye; approved 4-1.

Regional Associations/Welfare. Rebecca Dunham presented. Earlier this budget season, this budget line request was level funded from last year, at \$18K. Applications which came in during our application period totaled \$12,537. Rebecca was here to reduce the budget line by \$5,000.

Motion by Jen, seconded by Michelle, to reopen the Welfare Budget. Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Alina-aye, Michelle-aye, Jack-aye; approved 5-0. Motion by Jen, seconded by Michelle, to reduce the Welfare Budget by \$5,000 from \$25,407 to \$20,407; a 19.78% reduction from last year. Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Alina-aye, Michelle-aye, Jack-aye; approved 5-0.

Rebecca mentioned that applicants who were approved this year at Town Meeting, were not notified as required by our process. The Regional Associations Committee has asked that the payout process be streamlined for next year, to require payments to go out promptly after Town Meeting. This will save a step in the process and save employee time.

Insurance - Property/Liability. These are contracted rates through Primex. All lines have increased except for unemployment; that line was reduced to \$1. Deductible line was increased from \$1000 to \$5000, to reflect our actual deductible. We currently have a case pending, that has been ongoing for several years. Motion by Brian, seconded by Jennifer, to approve \$186,111, 16.6% increase. Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Alina-aye, Michelle-aye, Jack-aye; approved 5-0.

Resident Rebecca Dunham requested the establishment of a health insurance sub committee to research options. Jack explained we inquired about joining the school insurance program; but that did not succeed. Jennifer said once a new Town Administrator is hired, we will look into what changes could be made. Discussion about increasing the employee portion. Rebecca asked that each employee be presented with their entire employee/compensation packet. Jennifer said that could be done. Michelle asked that such package amounts be provided to this committee as well.

Insurance - Benefits. Letty Bedard presented. A plan overview was provided. There are 2 medical plans, through HealthTrust. Buffers have been added for potential new employees or employee changes. The Selectboard modified this budget from previous years, removing the employee-paid portion from the budget calculation.

Motion by Brian, seconded by Jennifer, to approve \$582,725, a 2.48% increase. Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-aye, Alina-aye, Jack-aye; approved 5-0.

Waste Collection. Jennifer Jones presented. An RFP should have gone out during the summer, but did not. The Town has been in a 5 year contract with Casella in which the built-in YTY increases did not meet actual costs. A letter from Casella outlined the many cost increases that our current contract did not cover. This budget is set at an average of automated and manual pickup; it is Casella's hope that we convert to automated by next summer. This would be another 5 year contract; shorter contracts would be at much higher prices. Area towns have seen similar large increases.

Jack requested the cost for North Hampton and Danville.

Alina asked about the number and size of carts; there are various sizes with 96 gal being the largest. Michelle suggested smaller bins may encourage less waste/larger bins may encourage more. She suggested making an effort to encourage residents to repurpose/recycle to reduce our amount of trash. Alina asked why the RFP process did not happen; it was unknown.

Michelle raised concerns that without RFPs, is the Town not following a process they should be. Discussion about whether or not recycling is actually as good for the environment as claimed, or even if materials picked up as recycling may end up in the landfill. The Town may want to have a discussion about the effectiveness and efficiency of recycling.

Motion by Brian, seconded by Jennifer to approve Recycling Pickup \$143,050; an increase of \$72,588 and 103%.

Resident Jim Hajjar asked if this includes transitioning to fixed bins; yes, but not for 6 months. Jim Hajjar asked what the savings is to go automated; \$25-30K. Question about the tonnage for recycling; Jennifer did not know.

Michelle noted that the Casella rep had said they would cover the cost of the bins; Michelle clarified that although residents won't have to purchase bins, the Town is paying for them in this contract.

Resident Rebecca Dunham asked if bulky item pick up is included; Jennifer said she believes it is an hourly rate. Michelle suggested a Bulky item day, similar to Hazardous Waste day.

Voting on the motion: Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-nay, Alina-nay, Jack-aye; approved 3-2.

Motion by Brian, seconded by Jennifer, to approve Rubbish Collection at \$362,938; an increase of \$101,567 and 38.86%. Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-nay, Alina-nay, Jack-aye; approved 3-2.

Waste Disposal. This is separate from Casella contract. The Town is part of the Southeast Regional Refuse Disposal District (8-10 towns), transporting to a dump in Rochester. If we go below tonnage, we are refunded.

Motion by Jennifer, seconded by Brian to approve \$166,170; an increase of \$7,680 and 4.85%.

Question if our tonnage rate went up; yes. Resident Rebecca Dunham asked for total tonnage amount.

Voting on the motion: Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-nay, Alina-nay, Jack-aye; approved 3-2.

Town Administrator. Jennifer Jones presented. The Selectboard is hoping the amount in this budget will be sufficient. Pay range for this position varies greatly across the state, depending on urban vs rural, and size of town. There have been 10 applicants; the Selectboard is hoping for a candidate with experience. Jack asked about training; Jennifer said there is a certification.

The Selectboard has been discussing the division of labor between the Town Administrator and the Finance department.

Alina believes we will need a professional finance person; she also feels \$110K is not adequate for all of the responsibilities the position has.

Jennifer said there may be funding in the Finance budget to allow for expanding the role of the treasurer, remove some tasks from the TA; potentially bring reconciliations back in house.

The role of the current treasurer is to sign checks, move money between accounts, and release payroll. Deputy is backup; necessary to have someone able to sign checks if treasurer is not available. They are hoping to maximize the treasurer role to relieve some of the TA.

Motion by Jennifer, seconded by Brian to approve \$135,066, mostly salary and related expense; an increase of \$5,538, or 4.28%.

Resident Rebecca Dunham asked if anyone other than Selectboard will have input in hiring. Jennifer said right now they are just screening; perhaps during the final interview other department heads will be involved. Rebecca requested that in addition to department heads, committee heads could be involved and maybe also residents.

Voting on the motion: Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-nay, Alina-aye, Jack-aye; approved 4-1.

Street Lighting. Motion by Jennifer, seconded by Brian to approve \$1, which is level funded. Jennifer-aye, Brian-aye, Michelle-aye, Alina-aye, Jack-aye; approved 5-0.

Alina excused herself from the meeting at 7:58 pm.

Public Comment

Jim Hajjar, as chair of cemetery trustees, previously presented the cemetery budget with a 3% wage increase plus 1.7% merit for the cemetery superintendent. Jim said he was told that did not happen for anyone else. Jennifer explained that some employees did not go through the review process because their superiors (TA/Chief) were absent, therefore the Selectboard gave increases. Jillian and Lt Doty received 4% increases (3% wage and 1% merit). Fire did not go through the normal process because they had departmental wage adjustments.

Old Business

Discussion of advertisements for the public hearing - changes were suggested.

Budget Impact - Jack is working on exacting verbage for better articulation.

Re-valuation: Question if we had direct valuation or statistical valuation; it looks to be direct valuation.

Discussion about how to measure the impact of increased staffing in the Police and Fire Departments.

ARPA. There is \$87,258 remaining which must be committed before the end of this year or we lose it. Jennifer will suggest it be used for recycling with half in 2025, half in 2026.

Warrant Articles. The Selectboard has not decided on or received any warrant article requests. Some of the CRFs may be amply funded.

Code Enforcement Officer. Skip is cutting his hours, he wants to retire but will assist an incoming CE Officer. There may be room to trim this budget, it depends how long it takes to fill the position.

Motion by Jack, seconded by Jennifer to adjourn at 8:23; passed unanimously.

Upcoming Meetings

- Jan 13 2025 at 6 pm: Regular Meeting
- Jan 27 2025 at 6 pm: Regular Meeting
- Feb 3 2025 at 6 pm: Regular Meeting
- Feb 10 2025 at 6 pm: Regular Meeting
- Feb 10 2025 at 6:30 pm: Public Hearing
- Mar 3 2025 at 6 pm: School District Meeting at Swasey School
- Mar 11 2025 7 am to 7 pm: Town Election
- Mar 15 2025 at 9 am: Town Meeting

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Siudut, Secretary