

**Board of Selectmen
Special VIRTUAL Meeting
Tuesday, February 15, 2022**

Special Meeting Minutes

Present (Virtually): First Selectman Dan Jerram, Selectman Alesia Kennerson, Selectman Laura Garay, Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward.

Others Present: (Virtually) Charles Neale, Sue Lundin, David McCunn, Randy Miller

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 6:36 PM.

First Selectman Jerram stated that this meeting has a limited agenda; the purpose is to review and discuss the capital and general government budgets for 2022-2023.

Review/discussion/action of proposed Capital 5 year plan:

Jerram explained that the capital budget was difficult to prepare due to the uncertainty of American Rescue Plan Act funding requests. For example, the inclusion of a truck for the DPW (highway department) should be on the capital plan; however, a truck has been requested as one of the recommendations made to the Board of Finance using ARPA funding. If ARPA funding is approved the truck does not need to be in the capital plan. But if ARPA funding is denied, then the highway department is minus a needed truck. Jerram included rolling averages for many of the budget line items those figures have been impacted by COVID. For example, town hall electricity use shows a decrease for the past couple of year; but usage of town hall was down considerably. Now that things are returning back to normal, it will increase. The Board needs to be cognizant of those types of things that have impacted the budget numbers.

Capital Project list – proposed year one/ 2022-2023:

Jerram explained the rationale behind a large mower for Browns Corner included as a capital request. This would be stored at Browns Corner; where a majority of time is spent maintaining the fields. Having a mower on site that does not need to be trailered would be an asset to the operations. The Diesel Fuel Storage Tank at the Town Garage needs to be replaced. It is getting to its end of life. A Water Treatment for the heating system at Town Hall is also on the list. The water that is in the system could use a treatment to remove the impurities, which will extend the life of the heat pumps. This is recommended by the HVAC contractor.

The Police Department could use a “make-over.” The carpet is worn and the walls need to be repainted. This is the only office that has not been upgraded since Town Hall was built in 2000. Sidewalks and lighting continue to be in the budget so that work can continue on adding sidewalks and repairing those that already exist. Funds for bridge work is also included as repairs are needed for the bridges.

Jerram asked the Board of Selectmen if they would like to add the DPW truck back into the Capital plan for the 2022-2023 year. His concern is that if the BOF does not authorize the use of ARPA funding for the truck, the highway department will not get a truck.

Garay felt that the Board of Finance seemed to be in support of the truck. Jerram replied that the issue is that the capital plan needs to be presented at the next Finance Board meeting, so a decision needs to

be made prior to that.

Garay asked where the downtown improvements might be needed (sidewalks). Jerram stated that sidewalks could be along Route 44 – in the vicinity of Food Town, Dollar General and in the area of the proposed senior housing. It might make it more walkable.

Jerram added in 100,000 to Capital Proposal for one year's payment of the truck; increasing the bottom line of 2022-2023 to \$470,000 for year one.

Proposed year 2: 2023-2024

A Police Car will replace the oldest police car in the fleet. The underground oil tank at Town Hall needs to be replaced. Bridge Work continues to be funded in this year. Boiler at town hall is included in this proposal in order to have a redundant system for heating. Revaluation expense will be included in this budget; it will be a full revaluation and will require a 2 year funding proposal. Selectman Kennerson noted that an additional payment for the plow truck will need to be added to the 2023-2024 proposal, since that was added to 2022-2023. Garay noted her concern, for the record, that certain things keep getting pushed down the road. She stated specifically that the town garage keeps getting pushed away and she would like to "bite the bullet" at some point and form a task force to investigate the possibility of finding another location for the garage. Jerram rebutted that until there is a plan for some economic development along the river, it doesn't make sense to spend a lot of money on a new garage and then have the land sit vacant for years. Jerram prefers to fund capital expenses that are more "needs" rather than "wants." Kennerson would like to see a 4 bay facility identified as more of a "need" than a "want" stating that protecting the equipment is important. Garay asked if there is any opportunity to reach out to area towns to see if they have a wash bay and ask if they would allow the Town of New Hartford to wash trucks occasionally.

Jerram added \$90,000 to 2023-2024 for year 2 truck payment.

Proposed year 3 – 2024-2025:

Technology, Town Hall Equipment remain as proposals. A utility pickup truck will be needed. Kennerson asked why the plow truck is not broken into two payments. Jerram replied this is further out in the planning and there may be adjustments as this gets closer. However, he prefers to have one lump sum. Sinking fund for land acquisition is added to this fiscal year.

Remaining years – 4 and 5:

The Selectmen did a quick review of the remaining years – this plan is a plan that can be modified as the years change. There may be funding available for a water line through Federal funding (IIJA grant). These later capital plan years are more conceptual.

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the capital plan as presented (\$470,000 in year one; \$600,000 in year two; \$605,000 in year three; \$680,000 in year four; \$715,000 in year 5); seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Budget Workshop – Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023:

The First Selectman presented a brief overview of where some of the changes in the budget proposal occur. He mentioned that some salary adjustments are needed (escalations) in order to keep trained

personnel in New Hartford, rather than have them leave for neighboring towns that pay more. He stated that there are also some adjustments needed as minimum wage continues to increase. Entry level positions are now coming in at levels that create less separation between new and senior employees. There are also equity issues with personnel employed by the Board of Ed with less years of service who receive the same salaries as town hall employees. Years of experience and longevity should be fairly compensated. He stated that the Town Bookkeeper has been in the position for over 20 years, yet the same position in the Board of Ed office is held by someone with far less years of service, but the wage is similar. He would like to see that his administrative staff (bookkeeper and administrative assistant) receive increases due to years of service.

Mr. Jerram informed the Board that the Grand List increase is the largest increase in value in many years. The increase is due to the value of used cars. This is due to COVID and the lack of available vehicles for sale. The values are not generated by the Town; the values are set by the "blue book values." This is market oriented and not debatable. The car taxes will be a surprise to many. Those who are expecting a decrease in car taxes will be surprised when they get their tax bill. No matter what happened with the mill rate, car tax bills will be higher than last year and this will be hard for many to understand.

The Highway department has not seen an increase in personnel in many years. There have been additional duties added to the department with the acquisition of several properties that need to be maintained. The Butler Trail, the Beekley property on Town Hill, Goula property being maintained by the town (volunteers used to assist with this, but help has been limited and the town has had to step in); all create extra responsibilities for the crew. Mr. Jerram has increased the salaries line item for highway to allow for an additional employee to be hired mid-year of fiscal 2022-2023 and then be added full time in 2023-2024. This will be a gradual phase in of an additional employee for the department.

Jerram informed the Selectmen that he has added the Recreation Director back to a full time position. The usage of the parks has increased substantially during COVID. Additionally, there have been numerous recreation responsibilities that have been handled by the Selectmen's Office staff. As things get busier, it would be best to shift those responsibilities back to the department where they belong.

Debt service for the Waste Water Treatment Plant/WPCA remains in the budget as a safe guard in case the sale is not completed by the time the payment is due.

Kennerson went back to discuss wages and would like to ask what similar communities are paying their Chief Executive officer. She has looked briefly at other town's wages and has a concern that not offering a competitive wage will not lend well to the position. She stated that "you want a qualified person to run a town of this size; offering a lower salary does not translate into getting qualified persons to run for office." She asked Mr. Jerram if he had information regarding other towns and what they pay. Jerram replied that there are salary surveys that are available and offered the following information that he is aware of. In Barkhamsted, the wage is less but the town is much smaller and it there are differences – no public water and sewer. He stated that Canton is a similar sized organization and the salary is between \$120,000 - \$125,000. Winsted offers \$125,000 plus health care and 401(k) contributions. Harwinton is currently in the midst of a salary adjustment to the mid \$80,000's. Jerram stated that while he advocates for his staff getting just compensation, he would rely on the Board to establish

salaries for elected officials. Selectman Kennerson commented that the board needs to keep an eye on the position to make sure it is adequately compensated. Wages should reward experience and institutional knowledge; just like any other position. Selectman Garay would like to think about this before adding to the discussion.

Jerram continued his review of the budget. He provided detail on several of the line items.

- *Town Hall utilities will see an increase due to increased costs associated with upgrading to from cable fiber optics to meet standards for police camera video storage.

- *Pension -- some of this line item can be used to decrease accrued time liability.

- *Health insurance forecasting a 6.5% increase in costs; but also need some extra in case of change in status in any of the current policy holders (ie – single to plus one)

- *Tax office – adjust Tax Collector salary to a level that keeps her similar to the Assessor, don't want to lose one employee due to compensation of another.

- *Assessor salary – have paid to train her, very few certified assessors available due to the fact that courses are not offered frequently. Our current Assessor was recently offered a position elsewhere.

Jerram stated that it was important to keep her on staff as she is good at what she does and is a valuable team member. He did not want to lose her and have her go elsewhere; therefore, he negotiated an increase to keep her on staff.

- *Assistant town clerk was given additional compensation after she came and asked for a wage increase She was brought in at a lower wage. She is working well and has passed the first certification test.

Jerram stated that she is a “good fit” and adjusting the compensation is a reasonable request.

- *Litchfield County Dispatch: they had approved a budget with a very high increase, but due to concerns expressed by Harwinton, Torrington and New Hartford, they have readjusted and are now at a reasonable level.

- *Highway- as previously mentioned, the plan is to add an employee in January 2023.

- *Pavement preservation- there is still funding for spring paving from last year's budget. The leftover from last year and the funding for this year will be all that the department can handle. No need for an increase at this time.

- *Sand – Ms. Kennerson asked if sand is still available for residents. Jerram explained that there is only one sand storage facility and it is up at Antolini. Therefore, the public sand supply is at that location only.

- *New Hartford Night – there were bands x 2, tent rental, other miscellaneous expenses; this event will need additional funds.

First Selectman stated that there are still some ‘holes’ in the budget that need to be filled in and there is still work to be done to complete the budget. He will review projected revenues, and there is need for some additional information.

MINUTES

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the January 4, 2022 Board of Selectmen Minutes as presented; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Executive Session – real estate

MOTION: by Kennerson to go into executive session at 9:13 for the purpose of discussion related to real estate; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Jerram, Kennerson and Garay entered into Executive Session.

Executive Session ended at 9:43 PM with no action taken.

MOTION: by Garay to adjourn at 9:44 PM; seconded by Kennerson

Unanimous.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant*

Attachment:

Capital Project list dated 2/15/2022