

**Board of Selectmen  
Special Hybrid Meeting  
MINUTES  
Tuesday, March 7, 2023**

**Present:** First Selectman Dan Jerram, Selectman Alesia Kennerson (both in person at Town Hall); Selectman Laura Garay (via remote access); Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward (in person)

**Others Present:** Jay Bailey, resident

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 6:37 PM. He stated that this was a hybrid meeting. Two of the Selectmen were present in-person at Town Hall, along with a Member of the Public; while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Selectman was participating via ZOOM. There were a few members of the public attending via ZOOM.

**Pension Fund Investment Recommendations:**

First Selectman Jerram updated the Board regarding a meeting he had with the Town's pension fund advisor at Hooker and Holcomb, Art Meisner. Mr. Meisner has been the consultant for the town for many years and will be retiring. He is being replaced by Pam Minish. Ms. Minish has been working with Mr. Meisner preparing to take over his clients. During the recent meeting, it was suggested that there be consolidation of the funds that are currently being used for the pension plan. There are currently 27 funds and Mr. Meisner has suggested that the town move to 22 funds.

**MOTION:** By Garay to approve the recommendations as made by Mr. Meisner; seconded by Kennerson.

Selectman Garay commented that "We have the financial advisor who makes these recommendations, and we should adhere to them." Jerram agreed, adding, "we are not making any major changes; just simplifying the investments."

**BUDGET WORKSHOP:**

First Selectman Jerram began his review of the proposed budget.

He discussed the revenue side of the budget. He noted that interest rates have increased and there are ARPA funds that have been deposited into the General Fund that are earning interest. The Town Clerk fees pulled in \$150,000 last year; but Jerram is skeptical about matching that this year, noting that real estate transactions were high last year. The number of transactions has been declining. He would recommend that the revenue in that line be decreased by \$25,000.

Another reduction he recommended was in Other Income. It had been at \$40,000 last year; however, income is no longer being received from the rental of the Surdam house and the Ambulance Association is no longer sending paramedic intercept payments because they are struggling to pay their own bills and don't have the revenue to reimburse the town for paramedic expenses. The First Selectman suggested cutting this revenue by \$15,000.

Mr. Jerram also recommended reducing the use of surplus by 10% resulting in a figure of \$660,000. The Selectmen wanted to review the rest of the budget before making any decision about what the level of funding in the surplus line item should be.

The Selectmen reviewed the proposed Capital budget next. Mr. Jerram commented that there is funding for a police car at \$65,000 in the proposal; however, there has been a change in the make-up of the police department and there are now part time officers who have replaced full time personnel. It may be possible for them to share a vehicle if necessary. The car that was proposed to be replaced is at 80,000 miles and 10 years old. It may not be necessary to replace this car right now. Jerram stated that the highway department is in need of a small truck and it might be a good idea to use the capital funds toward a truck rather than a police car.

Selectman Kennerson commented that with a new vehicle comes newer technology and better equipment; but if a truck is more of an urgent need than replacing the police car, she would support funding a truck. Jerram replied that if the Board is in agreement with getting a truck instead of a police car, he would recommend that there be \$80,000 of funding set aside rather than \$60,000.

Selectman Garay asked if Recreation Capital could be reduced, especially since the department is getting funds from American Recovery Plan Act. Kennerson suggested reducing the recreation capital by \$10,000 and bridge improvements by \$5,000.

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to amend the capital plan as discussed resulting in a proposed total capital budget of \$480,000; seconded by Garay.

*Unanimous.*

The Budget review continued with First Selectman Jerram informing the Board that the Northwest Transportation budget request was lowered this year. He stated that last year there was some dissatisfaction with the transit authority because the budget request was higher than what had been the usual request. A change in administration has occurred and the current budget request is back in line with prior years. Selectman Kennerson commented that she would like to get additional information regarding usage by New Hartford residents.

The West Hill lake Association is requesting an increase in funding to \$18,000. It was noted that they will be getting \$10,000 in ARPA funds. Kennerson would like to know what they use their own fund balance for. Is the town contributing to a special project and if so what is it? She stated that she can understand wanting to have a healthy balance in case there is a specific emergency need, but would like to know what they plan to use town funding for. Mr. Jerram noted that Barkhamsted does not contribute financially but they do contribute in-kind services. Kennerson commented that bigger houses with larger septic systems could be contributing to the decrease in lake water quality.

Jerram asked the Board if they felt that debt service for the Waste Water Treatment Plant should be removed from the budget. Kennerson questioned the timeframe and Dan replied that the payment is

due in September. The PURA decision may be completed in August. Selectman Kennerson replied that she felt it was too close and would prefer to leave the payment in the budget.

The budget figure for Regional Refuse Disposal District Number 1 is unknown at this time. The administrator at RRDD has had some health issues and the budget is not fully prepared. Mr. Jerram asked if the Board had any input as to whether this line item should be increased by \$5,000 or \$10,000. Selectman Kennerson would prefer to put it in higher for now as it is easier to reduce the line if needed.

The Selectmen briefly discussed the funding level for the libraries. Currently, the town funds about 60% of the total budget of the Beekley Library. They are requesting a 3.7% increase in funds from the town. The town funds 58% of the Bakerville Library budget. They are requesting a 4.5% increase. Selectman Garay commented that the town typically funds the same percentage of increase for each library. Ms. Kennerson stated that the narrative from the Beekley Library indicates that they cannot do fundraisers like they used to do because of the Pandemic. She challenged this statement, noting that many organizations have returned back to fundraising efforts. First Selectman Jerram stated that he would like to wait and come back to this. He is not certain he wants to fund the libraries at these levels.

Mr. Jerram pointed out that the line item for the Zoning Officer Salary seems like a larger increase than what it actually is for this year. There was a mid- year adjustment to the salary in the prior fiscal year and now the line item needs to be 'trued up.' A reduction in the Zoning legal and professional line item is due to the fact that First Selectman Jerram does not see a need to have this funded in the same amount as last year.

The highway department is responsible for over 80 miles of road. Mr. Jerram stated that repaving West Hill Road cost over \$300,000 and it is only 1.3 miles. South Road and Cedar Lane could wipe out the entirety of the paving budget if those were deemed to be the projects for the year. Jerram clarified that he was using those as examples -- there has been no decision regarding what roads will be addressed this year. He just used those as an example of what you get for the money.

Garay questioned the increase in the overtime line item, noting the 66.7% increase over the last year. Jerram replied that the actuals show that an increase is needed and felt that this needs to stay as shown.

The Paramedic Intercept costs are unknown at this time. The contract is out to bid; hopefully, there will be some figures to enter soon.

Jerram discussed the overall staffing of police. There have been 2 postings for full time officers – the reality is that there are no interested candidates. The town has hired part time police officers to fill the positions. 3 part timers are now working 24 hours per week each. One full time officer works 40 hours per week. Additionally, there is one resident trooper. The budgeted number One resident trooper. The budget includes some extra hours for the part timers in case they want/are willing to work extra shifts.

Mr. Jerram reviewed the General Administration department lines. He explained that there needed to be an increase in the retirement benefits due to having some new employees who are eligible to be part of the defined contribution plan. He stated that the positions filled used to be pension (defined benefit) positions and they are now defined contribution.

The First Selectman informed the Board that some mid-year adjustments (increases) were made to some employees during the year which makes the line item percentage for this year greater than what the actual wage is. Jerram stated that the increases were made in order to reward for their work. The health insurance line item was over funded last year and has been adjusted. The costs attributed to this line item can change due to changes in personnel and the type of plan coverage that is needed (i.e. family versus employee only).

Jerram mentioned that the Registrars budget does not allow for any extra costs that may occur due to extended in person voting. At this point, it is not known what may happen with that and what the costs may be.

The Assessor has asked for consideration of funding for a Personal Property Audit. Selectman Kennerson questioned adding \$10,000 without knowing the value of the return. How is a personal property audit conducted? Can it be a random sampling versus a directed sampling? Assessor replied that she would check into actual cost and would do some research as to what the return might be.

The First Selectman stated that the Probate assessment is still not known as there has not been a budget request submitted yet. Jerram stated that Probate is usually a nominal increase, but it is based on Grand List and New Hartford's Grand List increased. He suggested a \$1,000 increase in the line. Another unknown cost at this time is the cost for the 2023-2024 Annual Audit. The price for the Audit will increase due to the requirement for a Federal Single Audit. Jerram suggested \$3,000 to cover the anticipated increase.

The First Selectman summarized the suggested changes to the budget. At this point there is a \$251,910.05 increase in spending for General Government and a \$750,000 spending increase in Education. This equates to a 2.96% in taxes. The Board recognized that this is still early in the process and there is still time for changes before the final draft budget is released.

Selectman Kennerson asked about the Regional School budget. Mr. Jerram replied that there are 2 additional staffing positions included in the budget that seem to be warranted. One is a special education teacher that can help offset a potential outplacement and the other is a math interventionist that is needed to assist bringing math grades for incoming 7<sup>th</sup> graders up to speed. There was a loss to learning during the pandemic and it is believed that intervention is needed.

The Selectmen agreed that the draft budget is in good shape and also that ARPA and Capital are ready to be reviewed by the Board of Finance. The Selectmen agreed to meet one more time prior to the budget workshop to finalize the proposed budget.

**Minutes:**

**MOTION:** by Garay to approve the minutes dated January 24, 2023, as presented; seconded by Kennerson.

Selectman Garay commented that the minutes include her concern expressed regarding reaching out to Veterans and she reiterated that she would like to find a way to reach out to Veterans in Town to see what needs they may have that are not being met.

*Unanimous.*

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to adjourn at 9:04 PM; seconded by Garay.

*Unanimous*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant*

*Attachments filed with the Town Clerk and available upon request:*

*Portfolio Consolidation & Mapping/Recommendation: investment menu modernization*

*(Proposed Budget and Capital Plan are not included as attachments as they will continue to change until the budget is formally adopted)*