

**Board of Selectmen
Special VIRTUAL Meeting
Thursday, March 3, 2022**

MINUTES

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

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Mr. Jerram stated that the purpose of this special meeting it to continue to get the budget in shape to be able to present to the Board of Finance for their review. He stated that the Motor Vehicle Tax increase that residents will face this year adds revenue to the budget. The Regional School District increase in assessment to New Hartford taxpayers is minimal.

Jerram said that the 2022-2023 Budget is still a work in progress. The budget is subzero-- it does not reflect an increase in the mill rate; although the general government expenses have increased about \$190,000.

The Selectmen reviewed the line items in the budget. Mr. Jerram has included funding for the recreation director to be full time and stated that the health insurance line item will need to increase to adjust for the benefits that come with a full time position. The health care costs will be increasing by about \$11,000 just to cover the increased cost of the policy.

Jerram reminded the Selectmen that the wages for the Assessor are increasing due to a limited supply of Assessors and other towns pay more. New Hartford could lose the assessor if not justly compensated. A lot of training has been invested into the current employee and Jerram does not want to have to start over with a new untrained Assessor. He stated that the current Assessor is a good fit and he would like to keep her here.

There is an employment plan that has been developed with the current assessor—the wage increases incrementally depending on successful completion of coursework. It is anticipated that she will pass the certification exams and therefore need to budget appropriately so that the funds are in place when that occurs.

Jerram noted that he feels strongly that if the assessor wage is increased, the tax collector needs to be increased. She has more seniority and should be rewarded for her commitment. The First Selectman stated that the Tax Collector, the Assessor and the Town Clerk wages will all be in parity.

The Pension line item continues to be adequately funded at this time. Investments have done well for the past few years.

Jerram pointed out that there is an increase in the Public Safety department. This is due to an increase in the salary for the Resident Trooper and the assessments that are included with that increase. The Ambulance is requesting an increase due to moving toward hiring full time staff. They can't get enough volunteers and need to cover shifts.

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Animal Control line item has a slight increase to offset the revenue decrease caused by not doing a “door to door” survey for unlicensed dogs which allows the town to keep a higher percentage of local dog license fees. The Animal Control Officer was not able to conduct the survey due to health issues.

The highway wage line has increased to cover the cost of an additional employee. As stated previously, the town has added responsibilities to this department and there has not been an increase in personnel in several years. Selectman Garay asked if there will be increased maintenance to the center island in the downtown business area. She noted that this was an item of concern last year. Jerram replied that the highway crew are not gardeners. If the town needs to maintain it regularly; it will be lawn.

The Zoning officer salary had included hours for a consultant to train the current ZEO. There is no need for that service anymore and therefore those funds can be removed, therefore resulting in a decrease in the line item.

The Selectmen discussed the Libraries. The Beekley Library has requested a significant increase and Selectman Kennerson cautioned against allowing such a large increase in the budget as she feels it will be unsustainable in future years. She also noted that the Libraries will be getting some ARPA funds towards their expansion project. Selectman Garay agreed. Mr. Jerram observed that the library labor costs and interior building operations expenses are basically being funded by the town through the annual budget. The town is shouldering a major portion of their budget already and he expressed concern about the expansion and questioned whether they can they afford this addition and the expenses that come with it. Kennerson would like to return to the library request later but suggested that a 5% cap for the library could be put in for now. She commented that she is concerned with setting a precedent for large increases.

Health sanitation and welfare section of expenses shows a slight increase. Jerram explained that the increase in assessment for Regional Refuse Disposal District Number 1 (RRDD) is due to MIRA increase. Costs for processing trash are increasing because there is no offset in revenue for recyclables. RRDD will increase their sticker prices and Jerram said it is “still the best deal in town.” Farmington Valley Health District cost is also an assessment; and that shows a slight increase as well.

The Selectmen reviewed the parks and recreation budget. Selectman Kennerson would like to have the Recreation program account cover a portion of the expenses of the director position. She suggested that the program account cover one half of the benefit package.

First Selectman Jerram briefly discussed the projected revenues and commented that the anticipated revenues from the building permit fees and town clerk fees may need to be adjusted down a little bit.

Selectman Kennerson commented that she would like to recommend an incentive be added to the compensation package offered to the position of First Selectman. She is aware that the salary offered to the First Selectman in New Hartford is lower than what surrounding towns offer and has been thinking about how to make the position more attractive. She is not in favor of adding directly to the salary line item because she feels that it is not always advantageous to bring new employees without experience in at the same wage as one who had more experience. An incentive that increases with longevity is one that she feels would reward experience and offer incentive to continue to be willing to

stay in the position. She stated that the Police contract includes an incentive that increases with longevity and since the position of First Selectman acts as Chief of Police, it makes sense that the First Selectman should have this same benefit afforded to the position. She would like to see \$5,000 added to the retirement line item to be used to compensate the First Selectman following the guidelines that currently exist in the New Hartford Police contract. Selectman Garay commented that she would like to take time to think about this incentive, but ok'd the addition to the line item at this time; reserving the right to discuss further.

Request for Tax Refunds:

Mary or Hans Anderson	\$21.90	Motor Vehicle
VW Credit Leasing	\$259.13	Motor Vehicle
Pamela S. Jerram	\$7.68	Motor Vehicle

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve tax refunds as presented; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

The Selectmen agreed to meet again on March 21 to continue to work on the budget.

MOTION: by Kennerson to adjourn at 8:30 PM; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant

No attachments – budget still in draft form –changing constantly