

**Board of Selectmen
Budget Workshop – Virtual
March 2, 2021**

Minutes

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

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM

The Selectmen met to prepare the 2021-2022 Budget.

The budget timeline was reviewed, noting that the Board of Finance budget workshop is scheduled for Saturday, March 13, 2021.

Jerram informed the Board that revenue estimates are down from last year. He noted that this year's budget was funded using surplus from prior year. Kennerson asked if it is anticipated that the \$850,000 from the surplus will be used. Jerram replied that he is currently gathering figures to see where things stand.

The general government labor costs show an increase of 56%. This is due to reinstating the assistant in the tax collector office and also funding for the individual providing certification training to our current assessor.

An increase in petroleum costs is expected to cause paving costs to be higher this year.

Cyber Security coverage will no longer be included in the basic insurance policy provided to the town. It is now a separate coverage that needs to be purchased in addition to basic liability. A recent quote of \$18,000 was received. Selectman Kennerson questioned if employees receive regular training regarding safe use of the internet and security. Jerram replied that the town has very little personal data stored, which is in contrast to the Board of Ed which has more. Jerram believes that the risk for accessing personal information on the Town's server is minimal.

Mr. Jerram stated that due to an increase in overtime this past winter, it is likely that workers comp will see an increase in premium to account for the increased exposure. He also noted that the Town Attorney line item will be underfunded if the sale of the water and wastewater assets is approved. A sale will result in the need for legal assistance to prepare and review documents and assist in the closing of the sale. Selectman Garay asked if Carpenter Road Bridge legal fees will also affect this line item. Mr. Jerram replied that the legal fees associated with the bridge project have been charged directly to that project.

Ms. Garay questioned an increase of 8.74% in the line item for wages for bookkeepers assistant. Mr. Jerram explained that the increase is a result of the regular annual increase that is scheduled for this year plus funds to cover an increase in the base wage for the specific individual for the position. The position will be different than it has been. The individual hired has an extensive resume and will be beneficial in many areas. The experience and expertise she brings with her to this position resulted in an increase in the pay rate for the position.

Mr. Jerram explained that there has been some restructuring of offices this year. A plan to have the

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Assessor in the tax office has not worked out as originally designed. The Assessor has relocated to a separate office. The former Assessor who had tax collecting experience has moved on to another town and the current assessor is in training. Additional work space was needed for the current assessor so that training can be accomplished more efficiently.

Mr. Jerram commented that the Assessor “trainee” is doing a great job. She is pleasant and competent. Jerram stated that these positions are very fluid; there should be consideration of incentives in the line item. The First Selectman said that there is good collaboration and this is a good partnership.

An adjustment has been made in the Town Clerk Salary line item due to the retirement of the former Town Clerk. The current Town Clerk has received an increase in wage, but not to the level of the former Clerk.

The Police line item saw some savings in the 20-21 fiscal year due to a retirement; some of the savings were used to purchase needed supplies.

Jerram explained that Paramedic Intercept funding has received lower than anticipated reimbursements. However, the CARES funding (Covid funding) should cover this loss. Also benefiting from the CARES funding is the Farmington Valley Health District. They have asked for additional funding due to increased costs associated with vaccine distribution.

Highway line item expense for wages for assistance with mowing was requested by Superintendent Dave Helt. He had been using the services of former employee George Phillips to perform roadside mowing as needed in the fall and will continue with this in the spring.

The Selectmen briefly discussed the status of the Town’s libraries – questioning what services have been provided during the pandemic. They were uncertain as to the status of each library regarding whether or not they are open to the public. Beekley Library has stated that they will remain flat for a request for funding this year and the Bakerville Library will be requesting a nominal increase.

Selectman Jerram praised the efforts of the Farmington Valley Health District stating that they have done a great job and have “raised the level of their game” taking on the task of vaccine distribution.

Selectman Kennerson stated that she did not feel that New Hartford is getting \$15,000 worth of services from the Foothills Visiting Nurse Association and felt it might be time to revisit how this line item is expended. Garay asked how many clinics were able to run last year – flu clinics, foot clinics, blood pressure, etc. There were few clinics that were able to run due to COVID. Jerram commented that there never is any communication from Foothills regarding services until it is budget time. Jerram stated that Foothills continues to state that they are the community nursing provider; when in reality Farmington Valley Health District provides that service. Kennerson expressed her annoyance that the annual letter is the same each year, with no new information being given. Selectman Garay stated that she will contact Foothills to gain specifics of services. Jerram asked that information be provided regarding the number of unique individuals being served by the agency and also information as to how many are not being reimbursed by insurance.

Regional Refuse Disposal District# 1 will be seeing increases in expenses due to MIRA plant issues. The price per ton of tipping fees continues to escalate and gets passed on to the users.

Recreation expenses will remain flat; there is no one in the Recreation Director position full time right now, but Ed McCann will act in this capacity once again this summer. Shannon Guiheen will return as camp director and hopefully, camp will be able to run without too many restrictions this year.

A review of Commissions and other Agencies shows that there is not a need to increase most line items as their expenses remain relatively stable. The Senior Van is being used often and there should be an increase in the allocation for funding for the driver as there has been an increase in the number of hours he is working. Selectman Garay asked if there had been any savings in the line item due to decreased use. Jerram replied that this was not necessarily the case due to the fact that the van would only take one passenger at a time and this increased the number of trips. Seniors still needed to go shopping and get to the doctors. Jerram stated that is a popular program and gives more service to our Seniors than any other program. Discussion of a wage increase for the driver was discussed and it was agreed that he is deserving of an increase. The Board will look at this next meeting to see if this line item should be increased.

The Selectmen briefly discussed revenue projections and if all remains as projected with revenues and expenses, the increase with this proposed budget is at 3.89% - which is too high, stated Jerram. Cares Funding – the American Recovery Act is still an unknown. There is no concrete number to put in as a revenue at this time. Congressman Larsen has called Mr. Jerram and there is a \$600,000 number being floated around, but it is not known what the process will be to access these funds.

Jerram stated that there will be an additional meeting to fine tune the budget.

MOTION: by Garay to adjourn at 7:08 PM, seconded by Kennerson.

Unanimous.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant*

Draft Budget dated 03/01/2021 was available with Agenda as a “hand out”