

TOWN OF ORFORD

Board of Selectmen

Minutes of the 2024 Budget Public Hearing

January 30, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kevin Follensbee, Chase Kling

OTHERS PRESENT: Esther Dobbins-Marsh

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm

2024 Proposed Operating Budget – the Selectboard reviewed the operating budget and took questions from residents in attendance.

- When did the percent employees contribute to health insurance last change?
 - 2019
- What percent do they currently pay?
 - 11% for health and dental coverage

It was suggested the Board survey neighboring town to see what they charge their employees for the cost of health and dental insurance.
- What percent does the Town pay for employees' retirement benefits?
 - Group I (Admin Asst and Highway employees) 13.53%
 - Group II (Police) 31.28% - however, the Town does not contribute to social security for the police department officers.
- What percent does the Tax Collector charge for collected taxes?
 - .85%
- Why did the IT Equipment line item increase to \$5,000 over the 2023 budget of \$2,500?
 - This line item includes the cost of toner and other supplies for printers, program updates. For 2024, the Planning Board is asking for a laptop to use during their meetings, and software needed. (The Town Offices Sonic Wall Security Appliance also needs to be replaced).
- Why the late increase in Legal Expenses?
 - In 2023 there were several events that required legal advice. Following a decision by the Planning Board that impacted two property owners, one owner filed a lawsuit against the Town. Another suit was filed to lower the road height on Upper Baker Pond road, and the Town had to respond to a 3M PFSA suit. There were several employee issues that required legal opinions to help the Selectboard navigate the process, procedure and policy reviews, and various citizen complaints that also needed legal opinions.
- Why was so much spent on Right to Know requests?
 - Depending on what the Right to Know request is asking, the Town's IT Company and Town Attorney need to be involved. When the request involves providing copies of emails and other documents, the IT Company must review and pull emails from various Town sources, then it's submitted to the Town Attorney to review and determine if the email data is considered confidential or not. This also applies to various documents that may be requested. If there is confidential information included in the document, it's not released to the requestor.

Unfortunately, all this take time and the Town is charged for these services and can't pass the expense onto the requestor.

- Why is so much time spent in non-public meetings – does this impact the legal fees?
 - There are specific reasons the Selectboard can hold non-public meetings – the most common reason is around personnel issues. These meetings are sealed and not shared with the public. There are times when the Board has had to obtain legal opinions on how to proceed based on the topics being discussed with employees.
- Engineering services increased over the 2023 budget – this was done to have funds available to pay for services needed for pre-project analysis.
- Archertown Road Phase I - questions were asked about the Archertown Road Phase I project, and concerns expressed about the condition of the road. The paving is already pulling up, guardrails to close to the road, and the road is very narrow. In addition, the road is very rough with lots of pot holes.
 - The area that will be considered Phase II was reclaimed as Phase I was reclaimed (to help save money), so it will be rough until Phase II is completed (but first will need to be approved at the annual meeting in March 2024).
- Why was Phase I over budget?
 - When the project started our Road Foreman Steve Williams was going to act a Project Manager, but after his passing the engineering firm took over that role. In addition, more ledge needed to be removed than was originally anticipated.
 - The Selectboard was reminded that all engineering services need to be put out to bid before starting a project.
- If the paving needs to be done to Phase I, who will pay for it?
 - The paving on Phase I is only the undercoat - part of Phase II includes the cost to top coat the Phase I section of the road, as well as Phase II.
- Why are we paying so much for the Planning Board assistant?
 - In the past, Planning Board members did the work and a member would take minutes. The Planning Board would ask for professional assistance on a limited basis which allowed for professional advice at a limited cost.
 - With new Planning Board members that will be elected at the March 2024 annual meeting, it's felt by some that having a professional at all meeting is necessary, at least for 2024
- Where is the cost of removing the tree from the Dame Hill Cemetery reflected in the 2023 expenses?
 - This was paid using the Cemetery Perpetual Care funds
- Fire Department wages
 - Effective 2024, Fire Department members will be paid a stipend per call. In the past members were paid an hourly rate per call, and a stipend to attend meetings and training, plus officers received a stipend at the end of the year. Paying a stipend will allow the department to stay under budget. Currently the stipend will start at \$15 per call.
 - Many area Towns are true volunteer fire departments and are not even paid a stipend.
- Are the current Fire Department members okay with the change in compensation?
 - The members have discussed and appear to be fine with this.

- Why is vehicle maintenance over budget for the last 2 years? It appears maintenance funds are being used for 1991 Forestry truck which should have been traded/sold several years ago when the 1996 Engine was purchased.
- It was mentioned at a recent Selectboard meeting that the Board plans to develop one of the Highway Crew members into a Road Agent position. What would the Board expect a Road Agent to do and what would their rate of pay be?
 - There are many duties the Road Agent is responsible for – some areas of knowledge would be creating the operating budget, obtaining quotes for project work, dealing with the public, sending emails and have knowledge of some computer programs. In addition, they would be used as Project Managers for Town road projects, would need to know how to operate the Highway equipment, specifically the grader, attend public meetings and supervise the department employees.
 - If one of the current employees were trained in this position, the addition to the budget would increase between \$20,000 and 44,000 (based on a salary between \$75,000 - \$90,000 plus overtime)
- How will the Town deal with repairs to the Common following large events?
 - It was agreed at a prior Selectboard meeting the funds to repair the Common, as necessary, would come from the Town Properties CRF.
- If Rivendell decides to non-renew the lease for the Community Field, what impact does that have on the Town Budget?
 - We would lose the income received from Rivendell. In addition, all repairs and maintenance would be the Town's responsibility. Currently the Town pays for the mowing out of the Parks & Playgrounds operating budget, and the remaining maintenance comes from the Town Properties CRF.

2024 Proposed Warrant Articles

Article 3 – Capital Reserve Funding

- It was requested the fund balances be added to the warrant article as of 12/31/2023 as informational data

Article 4 – Charitable Appropriations

- no questions

Article 5 – Unanticipated Funds transferred into the Road Improvement CRF

- no questions

Article 6 – Archertown Road Phase II

- During Phase I there were often two engineers on site – is this necessary? How do we prevent over spending this warrant article?
 - Due to unforeseen circumstances, additional work was required, specifically around removal of additional ledge, and add underdrains, plus the additional funds to hire a Project Manager. The amount spent over the \$400,000 warrant article was absorbed within the Highway Department operating budget.
 - Phase II is not as extensive of a project than Phase I was, so the project should stay on budget.

Article 7 – Mousley Brook Bridge

- Why are we installing a bridge vs replacing the culvert?
 - The hydrology study indicates a larger culvert than the existing culvert will be needed. The estimate to install a bridge is lower than the estimate to replace in kind, or to add a concrete box culvert, similar to the one on Town Road #100. The bridge will be steel with wood decking.

Article 8 – Indian Pond Culvert project

- The cost on the Warrant Article of \$100,000 may need to be revised to \$125,000 at the annual meeting. It was suggested getting a cost breakdown of this project to better explain why it will cost so much to replace two culverts with three. The total cost will include the engineering fees, the survey of the area, Wetland Permit, the culverts and construction.

Article 9 – Hand Held Radios for the Highway Department

- Will the radios work throughout the Town?
 - The radios will work thru the radios in their trucks, which do work throughout the Town. The purpose is to have a radio available when working outside their trucks and an event occurs that requires them to radio for help when they can't get back to their truck.
- The article as written indicates three radios will be purchased for each highway crew member
 - The wording will be revised to indicate 3 radios, one for each highway crew member

Article 10 – Quinttown Road Apron extension

- Why is the Town considering this? Who requested this?
 - It was requested to have the current apron extended a 240' as pot holes regularly occur due to many large trucks using the road. The highway department repairs the potholes consistently. Residents that live on the road made this request.

Article 11 – Church Study continuation

- This article will be asking the voters if they want the Selectboard to continue exploring uses of the Congregational Church if the Town were to take over ownership of the building.
 - Sylvia Paxton, from the Church Study Committee said residents should read the report the committee out together – it's on the Town of Orford's website, and at the two libraries in Town.

Article 12 – Funding to cover expenses to continue exploring uses of the Church

- No questions

Article 13 – Amend the Income Limit for Elderly Tax exemption

- No questions

Article 14 – Rescind the Personal Wireless Service Facilities Ordinance

- Are there areas in Town where service can't be accessed?
 - Chief Bachus said there have been a few instances where a person has had to walk to the nearest house to make a call for emergency services. This doesn't happen often, but it's not good when it does.

Taking the total of the 2024 operating budget and warrant articles of \$2.7M, has the Selectboard considered the impact on taxes. In additional, Rivendell will most likely have an increase in their

budget too. Kling responded the Town can only control its portion of the budget, and it's up to the voters at the annual meeting to approve or not.

Adjourn

Motion made by Follensbee, seconded by Kling to adjourn the meeting. Motion Passed 3/0

The Public Hearing adjourned at 9:40

Respectfully Submitted,

Esther Dobbins-Marsh