

TOWN OF ORFORD

Board of Selectmen

Minutes of the 2025 Budget Public Hearing

January 28, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kevin Follensbee, Chase Kling, Larry Taylor

OTHERS PRESENT: Esther Dobbins-Marsh

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm

Kling reviewed the process for the Public Hearing. The Operating Budget will be discussed first, followed by the Warrant Articles

2025 Proposed Operating Budget – questions asked as follows:

- General salaries & Benefits
 - What salary increase is reflected in the budget?
 - The Town used COLA of 2.8%
 - Are the Short-Term and Long-Term disability benefits new?
 - It was requested of the Selectboard to look into the cost of these two benefits for the 5 full-time employees. The total annual premium of both benefits is \$3,450
 - Why were they added?
 - The Board agreed for the annual premium, these policies provide coverage to help when an employee goes out on short term due to an illness or accident. Short-term is for 13 weeks and provides 66 2/3% of the employee's base salary, and long-term, which starts after 90 days (which is the end of short-term coverage), for 12 months providing 60% of the employee's base salary. Owner occupation coverage is for 24 months.
 - What is the HRA/FSA for?
 - The medical plan provides HRA coverage which reimburses employees ½ of their deductible. Once the employee pays the first half, they start receiving reimbursement for the 2nd half of the deductible. The budget reflects the max that might be reimbursed.
- Town Clerk
 - Why did training increase?
 - The Deputy Town Clerk retired, and when a new person is hired for this position, they will need to spend time in Concord for training, which will include mileage reimbursement and possibly an overnight stay.
- Revaluation of Property – This expense is for their Assessors regular work load. There is a warrant article for the cost of revaluating the entire town in 2025.
- Legal
 - What is the amount that's reimbursed to the Town for the cost of Right to Know requests?

- The Town is only allowed to charge to requestor for the cost of copies and memory sticks. Legal fees and office time spent gathering the information are not reimbursable.
- Engineering Services
 - What was spent in this line item in 2024?
 - This line item is used to pay for engineering fees that are charged to work up estimates prior to projects being introduced as warrant articles. It also covers surveying costs for projects. This is not where engineering fees are reflected once they are part of an approved project.
 - What is the total the Town spent on Engineering fees in total for 2024?
 - In 2024, the Town paid \$219,212.36 in engineering fees (Archertown Road Phase II \$128,085.30, Indian Pond Culvert project \$37,020.71, from the operating budget \$3,214.90. State and FEMA projects: Archertown Road Jacobs Brook bridge \$47,920 and the Mousley Brook bridge \$2,971.45 – the last two projects are reimbursable to the Town at 80% and 75% respectively)
- Planning Board
 - Are there fees charged when applications are filed?
 - Yes – they vary based on the application being submitted
- Government Building
 - Why is the shredding budget up?
 - The police department needs to have documents securely shredded. In 2024 we purchased the shredding bin, and in 2025 the budget will cover the cost to have the contents of the bins shredded quarterly or as needed.
- Cemeteries
 - Why did the Town decide to contract out the mowing vs hiring a seasonal employee?
 - The Cemetery Commissioners need someone that has experience mowing and trimming cemeteries. They felt the contractor that responded to the advertisement was the better choice over the 2 applications for the seasonal position. If an inexperienced person is hired, the damage caused to headstones can possibly cost the Town more in the long run.
 - Could the bid have been rejected and re-bid?
 - Kling spoke with several local contractors that provide maintenance to cemeteries, but they chose not to send in a bid. Most likely the results would have been the same.
 - Dave Smith of the Cemetery Commission said the bid contractor is the person who mowed the Cemeteries in 2024 so has the knowledge of the work required.
 - Does the contractor have insurance?
 - Yes – and the contract requires proof of liability insurance
- Police Department
 - Why is the social security budget lower than 2024?
 - Social Security is only deducted from the Police Chief's salary when he's paid for special duties, which varies year to year. For his regular salary,

- the Town does not contribute to social security, but pays more towards his retirement fund.
- What percentage does the Town pay for his retirement?
 - Currently it's set at 31.28%, but effective 7/1/2025 it will drop to 30.95%
 - Why did his Uniforms & Equipment budget line item double from 2024?
 - In 2025 a new vest will be ordered and currently there are no grants to cost share. Also, he will be purchasing a rifle for the department.
- Fire Department
 - Why did the Dues line item increase by \$2,000?
 - The Fire Chief explained the department will now pay dues to belong to the Hazmat Team, which provides training to the members.
 - How many members are on the department currently? – There are 11
 - Road Maintenance
 - Why did we spend so much on Vehicle Maintenance?
 - This includes the cost to maintain the 2013 International, grader and loader – all requiring a lot of service.
 - What is in the Special Road Project line item for 2024?
 - This includes work done that wasn't planned for – it includes the wetland mats for the Indian Pond Culvert emergency repair, the cost for the gate at the Recycling Center, and hemlock board for the Quinttown Road bridge repair.
 - Street Lighting
 - Why was so little spent in 2024?
 - After the LED lights were installed in 2023, it took several months for the electric company to make the change in their system – meanwhile the Town was still paying based on the old lights. Once the billing system was updated, approximately \$1,500 was back credited, which resulted in a credit balance for most of 2024.
 - Waste Disposal
 - Why did the Waste Disposal increase so much?
 - The contract includes the increase of tipping fees at the Lebanon Landfill
 - Landfill Closure
 - Can this expense be paid for using the Dump Closure Capital Reserve Duns?
 - The Selectboard will take under consideration
 - How much longer does the Town need to monitor the closed landfill?
 - The Town has asked this of the State who indicate it could be up to a total of 30 years or more – but the Board will reach out to the State again
 - Parks & Recreation
 - How many months do we pay for portable toilets and where are they placed?
 - 1 each at the Community Field (April-November), Indian Pond Beach (June-September), Lower Baker Pond (June-September), and at the Playground (May–October)

- Why is the Town charging Rivendell \$29,000 for maintenance of the Community Field when we only spend \$14,924 on mowing?
 - The lease between the Town and Rivendell is there to share the cost to maintain the field. It includes the costs for mowing, electricity, water, fertilizing and grub control of the field, and additional maintenance for the baseball and softball areas. Only mowing and electricity are included in the operating budget, the other expenses are paid out of the Town Properties Trust Fund.
- Library
 - How does the Board decide on the funding to the two libraries?
 - The Free Library is considered the official Town Library, and they submit a budget request to cover salaries and an allocation to help with other operating costs. That amount is matched for the Social Library as an appropriation, as that library also serves the public of Orford.

Other Comments:

The 2024 expenses were less than the 2024 budget by approx. \$114,000. What happens to these funds?

- They are added to the Unassigned Fund Balance which can be used to reduce the Town's tax rate, or to apply to cover a Warrant Article expense.

How much is in the unassigned Fund Balance?

- At the time of the tax rate setting, the balance was \$523,562. The Selectboard agreed to use \$51,000 to reduce the Town's tax rate, leaving \$472,562. The NH DRA recommends 5% of the General Fund Operating Expenses be the minimum (\$341,122) and the max is recommended at 17% (\$1,159,815) Current we are at 6.93%
- The NH DRA assumes that all taxes have been collected when they calculate the unassigned fund balance.

The Selectboard was reminded that in 2024 Orford had the 2nd highest tax rate in the State.

- The Town can only control our portion of the budget – The School, County and State play a big part of the tax rate.

2025 Proposed Warrant Articles – questions asked as follows:

#3 – Capital Reserve Funding

- It was suggested the Town not purchase the extended warranty when purchasing highway & fire trucks. Instead take the warranty offered, and add the cost of the extended warranty to the respective Capital Reserve fund.
- Because it looks like we will contract out the mowing in 2025, do we need to fund the Cemetery Mower/Equipment Capital Reserve?
 - For this year it was felt it should be funded, however, if we contract the mowing another year, the CR funding could be removed in future years.

#4 – Charitable Organization Funding

- Why did we add two new organizations?
 - North Country Healthcare and Orange East Senior Center both requested funding as they service Orford residents.
- Can we find out the # of residents they assist?
 - The Board will request this

#5 – Revaluation

- What happens if we don't complete the revaluation in 2025?
 - Per State law, Town's must complete a revaluation every 5-years. If we choose not to, the State will assign an assessor to complete the work.

#8 – Top Coat paving Phase I of Archertown Road

- Why was this paving not completed in 2024?
 - There was a Warrant Article in 2024 for the work on Phase II that included the cost to add the top coat of paving to Phase I, but the Warrant Article was amended from the floor and Phase I paving was removed.
- How much repair work will be needed on the base coat on Phase I before the top coat can be added?
 - R&D Paving has agreed to patch areas of concern prior to the top paving coat being added.

#9 – Reconstruction of Archertown Road from Newcomb Hollow bridge to Norris Road

- Can this and the paving project be put out to bid now, so the work can start after Town Meeting, assuming they pass?
 - Yes, the Selectboard and Road Agent will work on this

#10 – High Bridge Road bridge – this bridge is red listed by the State, therefore there is state funding to help with the cost for replacement.

- If it's reconstructed, would the state require regarding weight and width, etc.? Can private property be taken by eminent domain?
 - Unsure, but we'll ask the State for this information
- Can a bailey bridge be installed?
 - Kling said it's possible, but the State still needs to inspect and may only allow on a temporary basis. Taylor will look into the cost to purchase one.

#11 – Purchase of a new Rescue Truck

- Can the Extended Warranty be removed from the Warrant Article?
 - The Fire Department will discuss. The warrant article can always be amended at the annual meeting

#12 – Indian Pond Culvert Project add'l funding – the Selectboard agreed to remove this article

#13 & #14 – Discontinuing the WWII Monument Maintenance ETF and establishing a WWII Monument Maintenance Donor Trust Fund

- Why are the funds in the EFT being added to the General Income account – why not just transfer into the new Donor Trust fund?
 - The NH DRA requires the two-step process – the funds from the discontinued EFT will go from the General Fund into the Unassigned Fund Balance, and the new Donor trust will be funded using the Unassigned Fund Balance.

Other Comments:

Can the tax impact for each warrant article be reflected?

Because Orford is going thru a revaluation, the assessed property values that are used in the tax calculation are unknown at this time.

The meeting ended at 9:25 pm

Respectfully Submitted, Esther Dobbins-Marsh