

hired a fourth road crew member and the road Crew continued road projects from the 2019 Halloween Storm.

The proposed budget is \$2,020,310. After taking into consideration the anticipated revenue, \$265,170, and applying \$20,000 from the FY'20 balance, the amount to be raised by taxes is \$1,735,140. This results in a reduction in the tax rate of approximately 1.329% which means people with property valued at \$200,000 will pay \$18.80 less in taxes or \$37.60 less in taxes for property valued at \$400,000. Julia pointed out that this is the town tax rate and does not include the school tax rate.

The overall highway budget is decreasing by 0.74%. Some major changes in the highway department are a reduction in town ditching and culverts, the addition of a loan payment for a new truck that was purchased, an increase in equipment rental and a decrease in roadside mowing due to locking into a three-year contract.

The non-highway budget is increasing by 0.55%. Some major changes include an increase in the Admin. Capital Budget Reserve, which is how the Town saves for large capital expenses, a decrease in Listers' salaries, which is due to the addition of funds for an Assessor. Julia explained that Caroline Brown, who has served as a Lister for a long time, is retiring therefore the Town is looking at hiring an assessor to do the work which has evolved into a complex position. There is a decrease in the Fire Dept.'s appropriation and an increase in the Fire Dept. Capital Reserve. Julia pointed out that two budget items were added. The summer concerts are now being shown as their own budget item rather than being included in other parts of the budget and the Westford Common Hall requested an appropriation from the Town of operating costs.

Anticipated revenue for the Highway Dept. is increasing by 1.36% and the non-highway revenue is projected to increase by approximately 2.1%. The increase in the non-highway revenue is based on including an amount for delinquent taxes, which has not been budgeted in the past as well as a steep increase in recording fees based on the past few years.

Julia recapped the decrease in the estimated tax rate which corresponds with a decrease in taxes paid to the Town. She pointed out that the Selectboard asked for reduced or level funded budgets due to the uncertainty of COVID and departments and organizations were able to help the Board meet their goal to present a budget to reflect the times. On behalf of the Selectboard Julia acknowledged the entire municipal family including town staff, volunteers and elected and appointed officials.

Bill observed that when the Board applied \$20,000 of the fund balance to try and keep the budget flat and reduce the amount to be raised by taxes, he looked at the other fiscal years for comparison, where in some cases the Board applied \$50,000. Not only did the Board accomplish a decrease in the tax rate but they did so with less money. Bill thanked the departments and commissions for their part in reducing their budget; they stepped up to the plate.

Sarah Pinto asked how we got Highway Revenue? Julia responded that the metal dumpster and the rest comes from the state for allocations and grants.

Suzanne Blanchard gave her thanks. The Board has done a wonderful job this year.

Nanette thanked Allison and Julia for their service on the Board adding that they will be missed, but she knows they will enjoy the extra time in their lives.

Mark Drapa knows that the voter participation rates last year were phenomenal. He was curious about comparing the cost of always mailing a ballot out to everybody to running the polls to doing the absentee ballots. He is wondering how we can keep that high level of participation going forward. Nanette explained that the polls still need to be open for in person voting regardless if every voter is mailed a ballot. There would be an increase in costs for postage printing of the ballots as well as staff time. There are some fixed costs, such as programming the voting machine, when it comes to elections.

Karen Stetson thanked everybody in Westford. She didn't know how great it truly was to be a part of this community until the disaster that destroyed her home. Westford came together to help her in her time of need.

Bill thanked Julia for her confidence in him in becoming chair. He then asked Vicky Ross, who was helping with the PowerPoint, if she would be available to do so in future meetings because he struggles with Zoom. Vicky would be happy to do so for other meetings going forward.

Mark Drapa wanted to update everybody on the Wi-Fi on the common. Since getting the public Wi-Fi up on the common towards the end of summer, the increase in the number of users in one month's time is equivalent to the population of Westford!

Even in the winter they still see numbers that are in the 800 and 900 users per month range. The concept of connectivity and people's ability to have a necessary utility to work remotely or file taxes, etc. at the town common and neighboring buildings is benefiting a lot of people. The plan is to expand on the current service so it will cover outside of the Country Store and up to the Common Hall.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julia Andrews, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Assistant Town Clerk