

Ira Allen was present, with his rough figures as he remembers there is \$4,000,000 in rolling stock in the Highway and Fire Department. He was wondering what the annual cost to maintain our vehicles and how we can consider this regarding the Capital Budget. Those are major expenses in the Capital Budget. Bill explained there is a separate document that spells out the anticipated costs and replacement year of equipment and he greatly trusts our Highway Department, Fire Department and Town Treasurer who all review these numbers in detail. Ira remained curious what the annual replacement costs would be. Dave thinks the town is attempting what Ira is proposing already based on how we save up for down payments for equipment replacements.

Ira would like to see a more extensive report that shows the saving for the vehicle but also shows the loan payment, so we could see the overall costs during the lifetime of the vehicle. Ira's vision would be that we would be able to predict how much its going to costs in our idealized approach every year to maintain the rolling stock. Bill explained the Selectboard's current approach is to be fiscally responsible while giving back to taxpayers as much as they can without burdening future Selectboards with extra money they have to reapportion.

Dave Baczewski made a motion to close the Public Hearing on the Capital Budget. Lee McClenny seconded. Motion passed 3-0. Dave Baczewski made a motion to approve the Capital Budget from FY'23 to FY'27 as briefed. Lee McClenny seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

DRAFT FY'23 BUDGET INFORMATIONAL HEARING

The board presented the Fy'23 budget with an informational PowerPoint. Bill thanked Greg, Nanette and the Selectboard members for the hard work they had done on the FY'23 Budget. The total to be raised by taxes was \$1,748,314 in taxes and a projected municipal tax rate of .6861. That is a tax decrease of 1.895%. Bill wanted to make clear that this is just a municipal tax rate, and the town has no control over the education tax rate. Road improvements have decreased the Highway Expenses in several areas such as gravel, ditching and mud season expenses, but items beyond the town's control such as fuel costs have increased. Bill is very happy that despite the increased costs John was able to come to the board with the budget proposed.

In Non-Highway expenses Salaries & Benefits had a significant increase because the Town Administrator had been changed from part time to full time. A Planning Coordinator assistant and a clerk for the Planning Commission were also part of that money. Cost of living adjustments to existing employees was also part of the increase.

A significant cost increase was the cost paid to Essex Rescue; their budget request was an increase of 107%. They have had increased costs and trouble retaining staff. It was fair to note that Essex Rescue budget amount is \$12,000 but compared to what Fairfax rescue is paid in addition to the dispatching for their service it was significantly less.

Ira commented that in years past most of the expense for Fairfax Rescue was the dispatching service, not the actual rescue service. Nanette stated that the cost for the rescue service and the dispatching is about \$12,000 each.

Bill thanked those that helped put the budget together including Nanette, Greg, and the bookkeeper Mary Jane Featherstone. The board had again asked for reduced or level funded budget from town committees without having to sacrifice services and for the most part all

committees were able to meet this request. Bill thanked the committees, commissions, and boards.

Bob Bancroft thanked the board and staff for their dedication. He has a concern regarding the DRB coordinator and asked as what level employment it would be. It was a part time position with pay approximately \$12,000 a year. Bob is disappointed to hear that as it was not a long time ago the town existed with a half-time planner, and he cautioned the board for including this expansion in the Planning Department as he feels that this will allow Planning and DRB to grow too much as they will have more time to develop more items. Bill explained that in the last Selectboard meeting he had mentioned that some of the aggressive projects the Planning Commission took on were a strain on town resources, however he sincerely believes Melissa is overworked and needs help. He still believes the Planning Commission needs to realize what strain aggressive projects put on town resources. We are currently stuck in a position where the ball is already rolling on some of these projects and it makes no sense to abandon them. We need to take immediate measures to reduce the strain on Melissa. Bob does not think the assistant position will ever go away and he thinks if the town gives planning more resources they will create more projects. Dave added that they did have a very serious discussion about the position. Part of their decision-making process on adding this was if the Wastewater Project and 1705 do not occur is there still need for the assistance and Melissa laid out requirements for assistance that did not include those projects. While he agrees with a lot of what Bob is saying, he also thinks we should review all our personnel positions seriously. There is an increased workload throughout the office, and he does not feel it is just related to what the Planning Commission has taken on for projects.

Michael Kirick was present. He puts together the Summer Concert Series. When Bill first started on the Selectboard he got funding from several different sources, but he had to struggle and fight to get the funding. He came before the board last fiscal year to ask for funding directly from the Selectboard for that Summer Concert Series. Bill thought it a worthwhile endeavor. He lobbied on Michael's behalf to put it into the budget at \$1,650. This year as we were putting the budget together the Library had an anonymous donor for the Library to designate them as they see fit and the Library decided to fund the Summer Concert Series at a \$2,000 level so the board decided to not fund the Summer Concert Series because it was already funded by the Library. They assumed it had been communicated back to Michael but that is not the case. He thought the \$2,000 was in addition to his normal funding and had started to schedule some more expensive acts. He is now present and advocating for the funding to be put back in the budget.

Dave explained that as the board looked at the miscellaneous and donation sections of the budget it equals a small, but significant amount of money. Something that was added this year was an ask for monetary help from the Historical Society which is struggling due to the pandemic and inflation. They were asking for \$2,000. So, as the board was looking at the Library donation they thought it would be a good way to help offset what the Historical Society is asking for this year for help. As the board understands it each individual request for donation makes sense. There are good chunks of money that go out and what Michael does is valued. The board is simply trying to help the community at large. Bill feels that this is a communication issue and needed to be revisited. Dave thinks we do need to review the donation and miscellaneous section overall because there is a significant amount of money that goes out in that section.

Michael proposed a compromise of \$1,000 from the Town in addition to the Library donation which Bill feels is reasonable. Bill cautioned Michael to think that next year he would not have the Library money and that is something for which he should plan. Lee agreed there was some miscommunications and it is a learning moment for everybody involved, he was favorable towards a compromise. Nanette explained that the budget will be put to the voters in March and the budget is not a done deal until that time. All the board members agreed to add the additional \$1,000 in the budget for Michael.

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO MAIL BALLOTS TO ALL ACTIVE, REGISTERED VOTERS FOR ANNUAL SCHOOL DISTRICT VOTE IN APRIL 2022 – EWSD

Brendan Kinney from EWSD was present. EWSD is requesting permission to mail ballots to all active registered voters for the annual school district vote in April 2022. They have done this the past couple of years to help people more easily access voting during the pandemic. There has been a change in state statute that requires school boards to get permissions from their municipalities to mail ballots to the voters. It is an expense that is entirely on the school district and would not be at any additional cost to the town. Not only does it help ensure voters have access to express their opinion by voting, but it has greatly increased participation. Nanette advised that municipal clerks will still be responsible for the work of mailing out the ballots. It is a significant amount of work and often, when more hands are involved, like volunteers to help, there is a higher chance of error.

Lee made a motion to approve the request from EWSD to permit the mailing of school budget ballots in April 2022 to all active registered voters. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

TREE WARDEN RESIGNATION

Ned Meehan, Tree Warden, submitted his resignation. Bill thanked Ned for his years of service. Dave Baczewski made a motion to accept Ned Meehan's resignation with gratitude. Lee second. Motion passed 3-0.

RECREATION COORDINATOR RESIGNATION

Tonya Calley, Recreation Coordinator, submitted her resignation, effective April 4th, 2022. Bill thanked Tonya with gratitude for the service she provided for the Town. Lee made a motion to accept Tonya's resignation. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

TOWN MEETING WARNING

Recently a bill passed the House and Senate that will allow all questions for town meetings to be voted on by Australian ballot for town meetings held in 2022. The bill is awaiting the Governor's signature. Nanette explained that the Board needs to decide if they want to hold an in-person Town Meeting. With the wastewater bond vote being delayed, she feels there is less of a need to hold an in-person meeting. The only articles to be discussed and voted on this year for non-Australian ballot articles are the reports of the officers, collection of property taxes, and other non-binding business. A public hearing is still required for the budget because it is voted on by Australian ballot. The public hearing can be held anytime within ten days leading up to the vote. Usually, the public hearing is held after town meeting, which is the evening before the vote. However, if the Board votes to have all articles voted on by Australian ballot, there is more flexibility of when the public hearing can take place. There is also a bill awaiting signature that would remove the requirement of a physical location for the public hearing as long as it's within the ten days preceding the vote

Bill asked how often there was robust discussion over Article 2, which is regarding the collection of taxes. The last time it was amended was in 2001 to add the fourth quarter installment, but generally it does not get much attention. Bill sees the value in an in-person town meeting and feels there are years there is robust discussion but does not feel this will be one of those years. Dave agreed, not having the bond vote has him leaning all Australian ballot. He does not want to diminish Town Meeting day, but we are in a unique situation regarding the pandemic. He supports doing the public hearing on a different evening vs the evening before. Lee agreed.

A bill enacted in 2021 enables governing bodies to vote to mail ballots to all active, registered voters. The board discussed mailing out ballots for town meeting. When this was done in the 2020 elections, Bill did not think it was clear enough that one could bring their mailed ballot to the polls. The only item Bill had issue with was providing return postage on the mailed ballots. It is not required, and he does feel that there is some civic effort that needs to be involved which he feels is important. Lee does not feel personally compelled to provide return postage especially when the town provides multiple avenues to return ballots. Dave feels that because not everybody is going to return their ballot we would be wasting money by providing return postage.

Lee McClenny motioned to hold an all Australian ballot town meeting with no in person meeting, to send ballots to all active registered voters, hold the required public hearing on February 23, 2022 and a budget amount of \$2,047,224 to be presented to the voters. Dave Baczewski seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

CORRESPONDENCE

The board had received a communication from the Planning Commission that discusses why they have decided to delay the bond vote and what it boils down to is that the state did not meet the timeline for awarded funds for the projects. The Planning Commission does not feel they can go forward with a bond vote until their funding stack is in place.

Dave had received an invite to attend a Community Wastewater System funding discussion via Zoom, however he feels this may be ARPA related. He is planning on attending and will report back.

COMMUNICATION

Dave also communicated that the ARPA committee had seen a lot of changes with the ARPA funds and how it can be used. It was recommended to pause everything ARPA related until we can digest the new information. With that in mind he is delaying next Wednesday's meeting and the next ARPA meeting will occur in February.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & PAYROLL WARRANTS

Greg Barrows, Treasurer, reviewed the accounts payable and payroll warrants. Greg was present via Zoom.

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ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Bill Cleary, Selectboard Chair

Callie Hamdy
Assistant Town Clerk/Minute Clerk

**TOWN OF WESTFORD HIGHWAY DEPT.
ROAD SCHEDULE
December 23, 2021 – January 13, 2022**

Work to be done

- Plow and sand when needed.
- Brush cutting.

Work completed

- Sanded and plowed several times.
- Repair work on the 2014 Western Star. (Idler pulley mounting bracket, thermostat, power steering pump)
- Repair work on the 2017 Western Star. (Replaced the bed chain, 2 ABS sensors)
- Repair work on 2020 International. (Wing cylinder, back up light)
- Replaced two work lights on the loader.
- Repaired the sand screen.
- Cleaned the trench drain in the shop.
- Put up a few road signs.

Approved at the _____ Selectboard Meeting.