

**SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING**  
**January 8, 2024**  
**Minutes**

Present: Bill Cleary Holly Delisle  
Lee McClenny Callie Hamdy  
Dave Baczewski Greg Barrows

Guests: Carl Rogers, Sheila Franz, Lori Johnson, Vicky Ross, Pat Hechmer,  
Paul Birnholz

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. The meeting was held in person and via Zoom.

**CHANGES TO AGENDA**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**BUDGET EXPENSES REVIEW AND REVISIONS**

Carl and Holly had put together budget highlights. Holly also included multiple versions of the expense budget and the salary budget, due to her feeling she will need an Admin Assistant within this budget cycle. She also adjusted the Town Planner line item as well as the Highway Department salaries.

Carl went over the budget highlights. Admin and Highway together had an almost 8% increase. The Admin portion is going up 4.3% and the Highway portion is going up 12.08%. The big increase in the Highway Department is in the roads section, mostly relating to the cost of equipment we've already purchased. The largest accounting increase in the admin portion is the fire department change, funding their on-call payment/stipend. The library is the next largest due to last year's budget being bulked out by ARPA funds. The library is asking that their funds be kept whole, they don't want to go backwards. Legal and professional fees went up, mostly because of paying NEMRC to do payroll. In highway the big changes are the grader payment, increase in equipment reserve and the interest payments increasing.

Carl also presented some potential budget reductions. If we wanted to achieve a 4.5% budget increase, we would have to reduce the budget as currently presented by \$74,800. Decreases could be made to the following accounts: grant writer, legal and professional fees, administration, library, and recreation capital reserve, server, Planning Commission minute clerk, planning special projects, trash & recycling, and capital plan contribution adjustments. Bill noted the expense of the town administrator computer. We seem to buy new computers a lot in his opinion. He asked Holly if she needs a new computer. She thinks the current computer serves her fine, but the current computer is part of a computer replacement plan with our IT services where we replace computers every five years. Bill thought we could set up our own computers. Holly and Callie mentioned valuing VTC Tech's ability to assist them with things as well as the set up not falling to them as they are busy with their jobs.

Carl mentioned deferring the fire department capital plan payment. We could defer a payment from FY'25 to FY'26. Bill thought we had a lot of new equipment we could try and push the useful life out. Carl explained that the longer we keep a piece of equipment the more we are

likely to pay for repairs and our resale value will also decrease. Carl mentioned that we are possibly not getting sand/gravel as efficiently as we could be. We currently drive to get our sand/gravel which puts significant wear and tear on our vehicles. We could hire a contractor to do the trucking. The board wanted to explore the expenses of keeping our vehicles longer. Bill debated if we should get rid of some equipment. If we lower our contributions to new equipment funds, we may have to pay more later, but if we pay more now, we pay less later. The question becomes: is this money growing for us? We are gaining interest in our general fund checking, contingency funds, and CDs? Dave thinks that while these all do add up, is there something bigger that we go after first? Carl's recommendations could make a positive impact for a 4% increase instead of our current increase of 8%. Lee felt optimism. Dave does not see any way we get to what we have accomplished in previous years. We have made some decisions to purchase equipment to put us in a healthy position as well as other budget additions such as personnel we cannot cut, while other areas we are cutting to the bone. He does not want to hand an overly tight budget, or one offset with ARPA funds, to the new board coming in. Bill thought there were some reserves we could tap into now without waiting until the end of the fiscal year. There was residual money from FY'23. Bill wanted to try to avoid a big tax increase as much as possible, citing worries for people with lower incomes. Dave thought that because of the decision we had to make for personnel and equipment he could not find the room to not have a tax increase, he thinks this is the reality of where we are. He would like to see it as reasonable as possible. There were several reimbursements we were also going to get: grant reimbursement and FEMA.

Carl went over to the Highway Account savings. Carl thinks that equipment rentals and equipment reserves could be reduced. There's money put away for the salt shed that could be reduced as well, but Bill thought there needed to be further conservation about the Salt Shed. The state will eventually force our hand to build a compliant salt shed and the state proposes something larger than what we have now to alleviate environmental concerns. The next was the building improvements account. Carl thinks it could be reduced by \$30,000.

Bill likes what has been presented so far, he thinks it is going to get down to how much fund balance we apply to get the tax rate down. Bill questioned why we have a chipper at the Highway Department. In his tenure on the Selectboard he only knows of two instances that we've used it. He suggested selling it and renting equipment or contracting when we need chipping done. Carl noted that if we do not have a chipper, we run the risk of cleaning up after storms and having to leave cut branches etc. or carry them in the back of the truck to dispose of them. We should ask Sean what he thinks before proceeding.

The board discussed the money they had in CDs. Interest rates are coming down, it is good while it lasts but will not last forever. As our CDs mature and we renew them the interest is being swept to our bank account. Bill would be happy to get the budget to a 3% increase, even more so if we could get it to 2%. Dave thought that by using interest revenue and general fund surplus we could get it to 3%. Dave thanked Carl personally for setting such a good foundation for them to work from. This is the most information the board has had coming into a budget cycle and he wished he had that a few years ago. Bill was wary of cutting the Planning Commission special project fund. They have asked for an increase and we're proposing taking a lot of money out of it. They do already have a balance in there with some of the money earmarked for specific projects. Dave thinks Carl has presented a logical reason to drop it this year, and if they do need more funds we can make exceptions further down the line for those items. If they needed an extra \$2,500, he is sure that can be found.

Paul Birnholz was present. He opposed any of his taxpayer dollars going towards the Westford Common Hall because he felt it was inappropriate for the nonprofit to support the Community Wastewater System.

There is a childcare tax that the state will be implementing in July. It is a 0.44% tax that can be offset by a 25% contribution from the employees. The Selectboard can choose to hold that entire 0.44% tax or pass .11% on to the employees. Lee's feelings are that if he were the employee, he would not be happy paying an additional tax to save the town money. Bill thought otherwise. It would be \$66 for the library, which is a tiny amount, for the office is \$1,367 at the full 0.44%. So again, a small amount of money. Vicky Ross was present and did not think it was worth it to add that expense to the payroll process. Dave thinks that not having the tax from the paycheck could be seen as a benefit to the employee.

The board discussed the timeline for presenting the draft budget to the public as well as when they will have the approve the Town Meeting warning. The board will be having special meetings on the next few Mondays to complete. Lee thinks we need to focus on how we're spending the money and how we're raising the money. To an expect the actual increase/decrease is something we cannot control in the end. Bill wanted to see scenarios of how the budget would change with increases from different amounts of applied reserves.

**ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

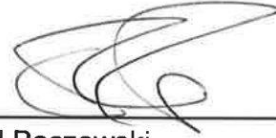
Lee McClenny, Chair  
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy  
Minute Clerk

ADOPTED THIS 25 TH DAY OF JANUARY 2024.

**WESTFORD SELECTBOARD**

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Lee McClenny, Chair



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David Baczewski



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William Cleary