

WARREN BOARD OF SELECTMEN BUDGET HEARING MINUTES
Tuesday, February 6, 2024

Present: Donna Hopkins, Bryan Flagg, Suzanne Flagg, Theresa Corless, Marlene Wright, Pat Wilson, Dorothy Gove, Lesa Romano, Donna Campbell, Donald Bagley, Peter Boncek, Sheila Foote, Phyllis Rothemich

Chairman Sackett called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM. Charles Sackett, Shirley McCartin, and Todd Bixby were present.

Chairman Sackett welcomed and thanked the public for attending the public budget hearing.

The Selectboard presented the Draft Warrant, 2023 Expenses, 2024 Budget by Line-Item, MS 636, MS 535, as well as, a summary of the Trust Funds. Also available was a copy of each non-profit annual report and/or 2024 funding request.

The Board began review of the 2024 budget by warrant article.

Discussion about Article 1: None

Discussion about Article 2: None

Discussion about Article 3: Theresa Corless asked what is included in the executive government budget. The Board responded that was detailed on the first page of the line-item budget. Donna Campbell asked what company the Town contracts with for assessing services. The Board responded that the Town contracts with KRT Appraisal. Suzanne Flagg sought clarification on the inclusion of advertising and regional associations within General Government on the MS-636, but a separate article on the warrant. The Administrator responded that the Town has historically presented a separate warrant for the body to approve advertising and regional associations but it is always included with General Government on the MS-636. Peter Boncek asked what was included in the cemetery operating budget. Don Bagley, Cemetery Trustee, explained that includes all annual maintenance of the cemetery such as mowing and brush removal.

Discussion about Article 4: Sheila Foote explained that the NHGFOA line-item (\$70) represented membership for the Town Treasurer and Town Administrator in the NH Government Finance Officer Association. Peter Boncek asked what the North Country Council does for the Town. The Administrator explained that they are a regional planning commission that provides planning board and land use expertise when needed. Chairman Sackett also indicated they were involved in annual traffic counts throughout the region. Donna Hopkins asked why the Town was funding the Baker River Watershed Association noting that they were not funded in 2023. The Board

replied that all organizations such as the Baker River Watershed were included in the budget for deliberation by the body at Town Meeting.

Discussion about Article 5: The Administrator explained that the numerical amount in the draft (\$128,851) warrant did not match the written amount (\$128,821) and the correct amount was \$128,821. There was a question about animal control and whether fines were issued for violations. The Board replied that the Chief of Police provided animal control for the Town of Warren and that it was their understanding that fines were issued for repeat offenders. Donna Hopkins asked about the emergency management trust fund balance (\$8,683.14) and suggested that the Board reduce the proposed amount to be raised for emergency management.

Discussion about Article 6: Peter Boncek asked what was included in the subcontracted work line-item. The Board explained that the subcontracted work line was for only for the use of the highway department. The Administrator added that a few years ago, there was discussion about hiring an additional highway department employee but after deliberations, the Town chose to increase subcontracted work rather than hire an additional employee. Donna Campbell asked what was included in the line-item for street lights. The Board replied that was solely the cost of electricity for the lights. The Board added that in response to Town Meeting 2023, there were approximately a dozen lights removed and NHEC is working to replace older, less efficient lights with newer, more efficient lights. There was general discussion about the status of the Town's bridges and state aid.

Discussion about Article 7: Peter Boncek asked whether the new compactor purchase was included in the sanitation budget. The Administrator explained that the purchase was federally funded (ARPA) and that the funds were encumbered in the 2023, therefore it is not in the 2024 operating budget. Donna Hopkins asked how long the Town was required to conduct monitoring of the wells at the Transfer Station. The Administrator replied that he understood the State law required testing for at least 30 years.

Discussion about Article 8: Suzanne Flagg asked about the funding amounts for the food pantries, noting that the Warren Wentworth Food Pantry receives only \$175 more than a food pantry in Woodsville. She asked whether Warren residents utilize the food pantry in Woodsville. The Administrator replied he was unsure but most non-profit organizations provide user statistics in their report, which was available for review. Peter Boncek asked about the funding process for the non-profits. There was discussion about the Willing Worker's Society and their efforts to rehab the interior of the building. The Administrator explained that each of these non-profits had submitted a request for funding and the Board further explained that all requests were included for presentation at the Town Meeting for deliberation by the legislative body.

Discussion about Article 9: Chairman Sackett noted the uptick in welfare cases and increased costs in 2023.

Discussion about Article 10: Peter Boncek asked what was included in the library budget. The Board replied that included every facet of library operation including salaries, equipment purchases, and subscription fees.

Discussion about Article 11: None

Discussion about Article 12: Pat Wilson noted that the library trust fund was not on the list to be funded in 2024 and was not funded in 2023. There was a discussion about the procedure to submit a request for the next budget cycle. Peter Boncek asked the Board for clarification on the purpose of these funds. Chairman Sackett likened them to the Town's savings account and explained that CRF meant Capital Reserve Fund and ETF meant Expendable Trust Fund. Dorothy Gove inquired about why an allocation was requested for SCBA units, noting the previous year's contribution was not spent. Chairman Sackett explained that each of the SCBA units' costs nearly \$10,000. There was discussion about the Town's engagement with the UNH School of Engineering and the team of students working to design a plan for a new highway garage to be placed at Transfer Station. The Administrator noted that these graduate level students were completing their course work and this was their final project. The Administrator also noted that the students were working closely with a professional engineer in the Seacoast who is providing technical assistance. Sheila Foote asked why the amount requested for the Missile CRF increased from \$200 to \$800. Donald Bagley of the Warren Historical Society, responded that the cost to repaint the missile would be close to \$13,000 and while that project was not on the immediate horizon, the Town should plan ahead.

Discussion about Article 13: Donna Campbell asked about the irrigation project. The Board explained the project was to utilize the abandoned well on Warren Village School property to provide irrigation to the school playground, as well as, the Town Common. Donna Campbell followed up to ask about the total cost of the project. The Administrator replied that while he was not certain, he thought that these funds, coupled with the \$2,500 raised and encumbered in 2023 would provide funds enough to get water to the common and playground.

Discussion about Article 14: Sheila asked what the Fire Department Expendable Trust was used for, noting that the balance of the fund was around \$45,000. Don Bagley of the Warren Fire Department responded that the money has been used in the past to rebuild and purchase equipment with less of a burden to the taxpayers.

Discussion about Article 15: None

Discussion about Article 16: There was discussion about a number of trees near the cemetery that should be removed and the costs associated with that.

Discussion about Article 17: There was general discussion about the current condition of the highway equipment. The Board informed the residents that their goal at this time was to repair the Town's 2015 "Big Truck" which is believed to be experiencing issues with the engine control module and has been down the majority of the winter. The Town's 2020 "Orange Truck" is also experiencing computer issues relating to the emissions and the DEF system. The Administrator noted that we have one more year of "Orange Truck" payment which is presented in the 2024 budget. Chairman Sackett explained that this article was included in the event we learn it is not feasible or cost effective to repair the "Big Truck". It was noted that if it is feasible to fix the truck in 2024, it was likely that the highway department budget for maintenance and repairs will be increased.

Discussion about Article 18: There was general discussion about the petitioned warrant article to revert to a part time police department. It was noted that at this time, the Board did not

have an estimate relative to potential cost savings.

Discussion about Article 19: None

Discussion about Article 20: Peter Boncek suggested that the Town only read the once instead of twice during Town Meeting.

The Chairman of the Board asked if there were any additional questions or comments about the budget or warrant articles.

Selectman Sackett moved to approve the budget as presented and adjournment of the budget hearing for the Town at 8:04 PM. The motion was seconded by T. Bixby. Voting in favor of the motion were Sackett-yes; McCartin-yes and Bixby-yes. The motion passed 3-0-0.

Submitted by Austin Albro