

## MINUTES

### Sanbornton Budget Committee

**Meeting Date and Time:** Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 6:00pm

**Meeting Place:** Old Town Hall, 19 Meeting House Hill Rd, Sanbornton NH

**Present:** Chair Ray Masse, Scott Fogg, Craig Weisman, Bob Presby, Selectman Jim Dick, Kate Osgood

**a. Approval of minutes of 1/24/23** – Craig Weisman a motion to approve the minutes of 1/24. Bob Presby seconded the motion and the motion passed, with Kate Osgood abstaining.

**b. Budget Committee declared candidates** – Chair Masse stated that there are two candidates for BC, Dick Gardner and Robert Sylvia. There are two openings for three-year terms and one for a two-year term, and both have filed candidacy for the two-year term. Chair Masse stated that one of them could be appointed to the Budget Committee for a three-year term if they do not win.

**c. BC process next year** – Chair Masse asked how the budget approval process could be improved; Kate stated that she feels waiting for the Selectmen to approve the budgets before moving to the BC would be more useful. Chair Masse stated that having fewer long meetings versus more frequent short meetings would be useful. Scott stated that budgets should be voted on only once all of them have been submitted.

**d. Organizational meeting date** – Members agreed on a meeting date of Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:30pm.

**e. FY24 Budget Public Hearing opened at 6:30pm** – Chair Masse explained that the theme for the FY24 budget process is a tight labor market and wage pressures that many municipalities and businesses are dealing with. The operating budget increase of 8.73% happens to be the exact increase of Gilford and they have reported the same issues with necessary payroll increases. The Budget Committee's overall budget increase is 5.4%, the BOS's is 7.3% and the department head requests reflect an 11.4% increase. The Budget Committee did not recommend Article 5 to create two new full-time firefighter positions with the vote being two in favor and three opposed. The Budget Committee did vote unanimously in favor of all of the remaining warrant articles. When including Article 5, the grand total of appropriations proposed would be 5.4% for the Budget Committee (no change), 10.3% for the BOS and 14.4% for the department head requests.

Chair Masse stated that Sanbornton has a problem with filling positions and retention, particularly for entry-level positions. Police Chief Steve Hankard did a wage study of 18 local communities and requested wage increases for his department which became effective in November 2022 and included raises between 8.9% and 13.9%. The police department would also see a 5% pay matrix adjustment in FY24. After the PD increases were approved, other departments resubmitted their budgets that included pay increase requests ranging from 10% to 30% and they provided some level of supporting data for those requests. The Town Clerk's request for a pay increase was submitted before the Police and the BC and BOS both agreed to a 19.6% increase for that position, considering the responsibilities of that particular role. Other than Police, Town Clerk, and substantial increases for Transfer Station Attendant positions (raising from \$12.50/hr to \$16.13), the BC voted to cap department head raises to 9% and

other positions to 20%. Minor variations in these caps occur dependent on where each position falls within the pay matrix.

A decrease to the Personnel Administration budget of \$34,000 was voted on by the BC and though the BC cannot set personnel policies, they did so with the intention that the BOS will require employees to share in 10% of the cost of their health insurance premiums, which the Town currently pays 100% of. Chair Masse stated that 14 of the 18 towns included in the PD's wage study require their employees to pay a portion of their healthcare premiums, with 11 of those requiring a 10% or higher cost sharing, and it's not fair for employees to want to be comparable to other towns in regards to higher wages but not when it comes to benefit plans.

Andy Sanborn stated that he hopes that there is a structure for elective, administrative and hourly positions to have clearly defined paths towards pay increases. He added that he would like to see a CRF created for the purpose of funding Winnisquam Watershed Network projects as the lake should be a high priority; Chair Masse responded that the WWN projects are not a mandate on the town though he agrees the lake is important. Karen Bordeau asked why the line for Tree Removal was cut to \$8,000. Chair Masse stated that in FY22 the spend for that line was \$850 and there has been much discussion about it, but ultimately he does not think the taxpayers should be burdened with funding a line that does not get spent and that there is no plan for. Karen stated that not funding the line because there isn't documentation on tree removal is hurting the taxpayers. Craig stated that if the BOS find a need to fund the line later on they can do so but he doesn't support funding it based on history.

Highway Dept Director Johnny Van Tassel stated that at the beginning of the budget process he did provide the plan which was a quote for \$2,700 per day for ten days of tree removal. Kate responded that that is not accurate; Johnny stated that he had told the BC that he would work on the list of actual trees to be removed with the BOS later on. Melanie Van Tassel stated that it is not in the BC's purview to ask for specifics on how the departments spend their money so they should not be asking which trees and where need to be removed. Kate responded that the BC is authorized by RSA to ask what expenditures are for. Johnny noted that his position is at a lower labor grade in the BC's budget and Selectman Dick responded that the BC had to adjust the grades to fit in with the wage increases they decided on but that the heads of all of the larger departments, including Highway, are at the same pay grade.

Donna Ledgard stated that a large percentage of the budget is being spent on payroll and this leads to sacrifices in other parts of the budget. Nina Gardner stated that government is personnel-driven and they do not make products that can be sold for profit; she does not feel the employees should have to pay for their insurance premiums. Fire Chief Paul Dexter stated that Sanbornton has some of the lowest salaried department heads in the region and they cannot work overtime; he feels it's unfair to cap only some department heads at 9%. He went on to say that he is the lowest paid fire chief when compared to surrounding communities and that the wage comparisons he provided showed that even a 29% increase in his wage would only get him up to the lowest paid of the other fire chiefs.

Mary MacMahon asked if this budget has been voted on yet to go to Town Meeting and Chair Masse responded Yes, but after public input the BC can re-vote on a different number if they feel it's necessary. Andy noted that some CIP requests are not being funded according to this budget, particularly for heavy equipment, and Chair Masse stated that there was previously an aggressive plan to

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start purchasing versus leasing heavy equipment, but to better control the FY24 budget that pace has slowed, so less funding was approved for those lines. Even with that, funding for this CRF has seen a substantial increase from \$35,000 in FY22 to the proposed \$94,000 in FY24. Selectman Dick noted that we made a similar choice in the FY23 budget cycle.

Public hearing closed at 7:42pm.

Ray Masse asked if anyone on the Budget Committee wished to propose any changes in the budget based on the public hearing input. No changes were offered.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Audry Barriault