

Minutes of the Budget Hearing February 15, 2017

Members present: Lynn Sweet, Chairman, Bryant Scott, Scott Young
In attendance: Brian Monahan, Michael Richard, Scott Whitehouse, David Hartranft, Jude Chauvette, Paul Stover, Greg Messenger, Kerry McMahon, George Preston, Michelle Benger, Charlie Burnham, Jean Ewen

The Public Hearing for the review of the Town budget was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Ms. Sweet opened the public hearing by welcoming all those in attendance and stating that the purpose of this public hearing is to review the proposed 2017 budget and certain warrant articles to be voted on at the March 14, 2017 Town Meeting. Town Meeting will commence at 8:30AM at the Strafford School. Notice of the Public Hearing was in the Foster's Daily Democrat, on the Town website, and posted at the Town Hall and Post Office.

Warrant Article 1 for the election of Town officers and Articles 2 through 5 will be taken into consideration on Election Day, March 14th.

Ms. Sweet read through the remaining Warrant Articles and opening the floor up to comment or questions with each article.

Warrant Article 6 requests an appropriation of \$380,000 for Capital Improvements of roads within the Town boundaries at the discretion of the Road Agent and as funding permits. Road Agent, Greg Messenger commented that paving would be in the Water Street area of Town. No further discussion.

Warrant Article 7 was read. This article requests an appropriation of \$555,414 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Police Department. No questions or comments. Chief Richard addressed the articles saying that the budget reflected a little salary adjustment left over from last year.

Warrant Article 8 which seeks to raise \$15,000 to be placed in the previously established Capital Reserve Fund whose purpose is the purchase of future police vehicles and associated equipment. Chief Richard stated that the appropriation from this article along funds from the O2 fund will be used to purchase a Chevy Tahoe, replacing the current Ford Explorer.

Warrant Article 9 for the appropriation of \$355,361 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department and Rescue Squad was read. No questions were asked or comments made.

Warrant Article 10 was read. It proposes the purchase of a replacement defibrillator for

\$29,000 to be purchased from the special revenue fund known as the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund. Fire Chief Whitehouse briefly addressed the reasons for this purchase. Since submitting the article he has learned that the defibrillator will cost about \$1500 less. No questions were asked.

Warrant Article 11 was read. It requests an appropriation of \$4680 for the purchase of a two way radio system for the ambulance with funding to come from the Ambulance Fund. Chief Whitehouse stated that this would replace the Motorola they are currently using which is no longer supported. The equipment has been giving them problems. In response to a question, Chief Whitehouse stated that this is the installed price.

Warrant Article 12 for the appropriation of \$10,000 to purchase of equipment and supplies for the ambulance was read. Funding for the appropriation is to come from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund and not from taxation. There were no questions or comments.

Warrant Article 13 for the purpose appropriating \$15,000 to be placed in the CRF established in March 2016 for the purpose of repairing or replacing dry hydrants was read. There were no questions or comments.

Warrant Article 14 to appropriate \$50,000 to be placed in the CRF established last year for the rehab or replacement of the Crown Point Fire Station was read. Ms. Sweet asked Chief Whitehouse if there were any updates on the plans for the building. Chief Whitehouse stated that they were working on a design which is being done 'pro bono'.

Warrant Article 15 appropriating \$4500 for the purchase of Forest Fire equipment was read. \$2000 would come from taxation with \$2500 to come from a VFA Grant. The article is contingent upon the award of the grant. Chief Whitehouse stated that they have been awarded the grant.

Warrant Article 16 to add \$25,000 to the Non-Capital Reserve Fund established for funding any future bridge repairs/construction was read. Selectmen Sweet spoke to the request, stating that these funds were being targeted for the repair of the Barn Door Gap bridge. When we have set aside 20% of the cost of the bridge, we will qualify for State Bridge Aid Grant. There were no questions or comments.

Warrant Article 17 requesting a \$500 contribution to the Bicentennial Fund was read. This is in anticipation of the 2020 Bicentennial celebration and is the same amount contributed last year. Ms. Sweet added that this was the 3rd year this contribution had been made. Mr. Burnham, Canaan Back Road, said he would like to see a \$1000 contribution. It was suggested that he could amend the article on the floor at Town Meeting. No further discussion.

Warrant Article 18 which seeks to raise \$500 for CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) was read. Ms. Sweet added that his was a new request. No further questions were asked.

Warrant Article 19, which requests funding for general Town operations, was read. Included is an itemization of that appropriation.

Executive.....	\$79,245.
Election & Registration.....	\$32,720.
Financial Administration.....	\$95,828.
Appraisal of Property & Tax Maps.....	\$40,009.
Legal Expenses.....	\$10,000.
Employee Benefits, FICA, Medi & Unemp. Comp.....	\$41,038.
Planning and Zoning.....	\$7,590.
General Government Building.....	\$32,460.
Auto Permits/Town Clerk Fees.....	\$33,550.
Insurance.....	\$52,200.
Advertising and Regional Association.....	\$3,800.
Strafford Regional Planning Comm. Dues.....	\$4,678.
Contingency Fund.....	\$16,000.
Annual CPA Audit.....	\$10,890.
Emergency Management.....	\$5,000.
Building Inspection.....	\$17,540.
General Highway Expenses and Town Maintenance.....	\$443,500.
Street Lighting.....	\$4,900.
Solid Waste Disposal.....	\$249,289.
Animal Control.....	\$3,800.
Health Inspector.....	\$200.
Cornerstone VNA (formerly Roch Dstr VNA).....	\$3,991.
General Assistance and Welfare.....	\$25,180.
Community Action.....	\$2,000.
Sexual Assault Support Services.....	\$992.
My Friend's Place.....	\$200.
The Homemakers Health Services.....	\$1000.
Ready Rides.....	1,500.
Parks and Recreation.....	\$19,923.
Library.....	\$85,000.
Patriotic Purposes and Fire Works.....	\$4,800.
Conservation Commission.....	\$2500.
Interest Expense & Tax Anticipation Notes.....	\$2,000.
TOTAL.....	<u>\$1,333,277.</u>

Ms. Sweet noted some of this year's changes in the general operations budget which is up about 3.9% over last year. The road maintenance budget was increased to account for an increase in plowing costs and the Road Agent's stipend was increased from \$5000 to \$10,000. The Selectmen had addressed salaries of Recycling Center attendants and of summer lifeguards in this budget. The Conservation Commission budget which had been severely decreased several years ago was somewhat reinstated.

Article 20 considering the adoption of the All Veterans Tax Credit of \$200 was read. This credit would extend the qualifying periods of service to non-wartime periods, thus qualifying more

veterans for the credit. Ms. Sweet stated that we currently have 185 veterans receiving the Optional Veterans Credits of \$200, but the Board does not know how many more credits might be granted, nor the tax impact if this new addition to the law is adopted. Several questions were asked and some clarification was given. More information will be available at Town Meeting.

Warrant Article 20, submitted by petition, requests appropriation of \$4000 for Body Armor Vests for EMTs and First Responders. No questions were asked, nor comments made.

Warrant 18 to request any further business be brought forward was read. David Hartranft spoke to the subject of salaries for all Town employees, stating that he feels the salaries of all Town employees, in particular those of the EMTs and Fire and Rescue call wages, are low relative to other Towns. He would like a committee to be organized to study this and make recommendations. The Selectmen acknowledged that there is some catching up to do and pointed out that they are trying to chip away at the problem year by year. They said they had researched other Towns similar in size and nature to Strafford. The Board suggested that Mr. Hartranft bring this up at Town Meeting.

Ms. Sweet concluded by stating that the estimated tax impact of the 2017 Warrant Articles would be 8 cents.

There being no further business to discuss, the Public Hearing was closed at 6:35PM.