

## Budget Hearing February 5, 2019

Selectmen present: Lynn Sweet, Chairman, Bryant Scott, Scott Young

In attendance: JoAnn Brown, Carolyn Clark, Davis Clark, Greg Messenger, Matt Messenger, Brian Monahan, Scott Whitehouse, Paul Stover, John Hall, Donna Reed, Michael Richard, Betsy Cozine, Jessie Copeland, Paige Holman, Meggan Yeaton, Irving Johnson, Sharon Omand, Charlie Burnham Lindsay Aucella, Paul Yergeau

Selectmen Sweet stated that notice of the public hearing was posted at the Post Office, Town Office and on the Town website.

The public hearing was called to order at 6:05 PM, stating that its purpose was to review the proposed budget and certain warrant articles to be voted on at the March 16<sup>th</sup> Town Meeting which will commence at 8:30AM at the Strafford School. Before reading through the articles, Ms. Sweet stated that the Board would welcome questions from the floor as the hearing proceeded.

Warrant Article 1 which is the election of Town officials to be voted on Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> was not read.

Warrant Article 2 for the appropriation of \$385,000 for Capital Improvements (Drainage work, culverts, gravel and paving) of roads was read. Road Agent Greg Messenger addressed the group. His 2018 plans are to pave the cul de sacs in the Crown Point Road area of Town and possibly the Cross Road. No questions were asked.

Warrant Article 3 requesting \$77,718 for the hire of a new full time police officer was read. Chief Richard addressed the article stating that it's increasingly hard to get good part time help, a problem felt statewide. One problem is that if you can even find a good officer, they leave for full time after we have trained and prepared them. His plan is to reduce the part time officer line to nothing. If this is approved the regular budget will be reduced by \$20,000, leaving him some part time wages until he can hire a new officer. This new officer will allow full coverage of 2 officers every night, which has become necessary in today's world. In response to a question about how many officers he has, he responded 5.

Warrant Article 4. Requesting an appropriation of \$591,776 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Police Department was read. Chief Richard briefly explained the budget is up 3.3%, owing to a COLA, a 2.8% raise, an increase in cruiser maintenance and dispatch, and the addition of a computer maintenance line item which will enable the PD can be compliant with federal regulations.

Warrant Article 5 was read. It requests an appropriation of \$15,000 to be placed in the CRF for Police Vehicles and Equipment. In response to a question about the current status of the account, Selectmen Sweet stated that approximately \$81 is in the account now. There was no discussion.

Warrant Article 6 which seeks funding in the amount of \$492,984 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department and Rescue Squad was read. Chief Whitehouse addressed the article, explaining the increases in the proposed budget. He is proposing to offer a more reasonable wage to make the department more competitive in hiring. No questions were asked.

Warrant Article 7 pertaining to the withdrawal of funds from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund in the amount of \$10,000 for the purchase of equipment and supplies for the ambulance was read. Chief Whitehouse explained that the department has been doing this for several years. There is no funding from taxation. He expressed his appreciation for the support.

Warrant Article 8 was read. It requests withdrawal from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund \$1,700 for extended warranty coverage and service contract on the Zoll X-Series Defibrillator. Chief Whitehouse spoke to the article. It is a maintenance program for the defibrillator, to ensure we have one in good working order at all times. The \$1700 will be adjusted down to closer to \$1340.

Warrant Article 9 pertaining to funding for the new Crown Point Fire Station was read. The request is for \$50,000 to be placed in the CRF established for the rehab/replacement of that station. Chief Whitehouse addressed the article, explaining he has some setbacks last year after the Town Meeting approval to move forward. One problem was the realization that the lot size is only 50X100. He took a couple steps back and has reevaluated this year and decided to refurb the existing building with an addition for office and shower space. Ms. Sweet stated that the design is simplistic, but will suit our needs; people have been donating time to help this project work. Carolyn Clark asked if it would be better to buy another piece of land. Ms. Sweet responded that the lot is in a good location to serve the Crown Point area. The Chief added that with the 2 bays projected, it will serve us well for quite a while. The Chief will have a design and better figures to present at Town Meeting.

Warrant Article 10 was read. The article seeks an appropriation of \$50,000 to be placed in the CRF for the future purchase of a fire truck. Chief Whitehouse spoke to the necessity of beginning to save for a new firetruck; right now we have \$56,000 in the CRF. In 2021 he hopes to secure bids and do a lease purchase. The price will be \$450,000-\$500,000. If we can do lease/purchase, we only initially pay 1/3 at the worst. The truck that will be replaced is from 1992, but it has been well taken care of.

Warrant Article 11 requesting an appropriation of \$100,626 for the operation and maintenance of Hill Library was read. This article is new this year; formerly the library budget was under the General Operations Article. Paige Holman, Library Director, addressed the meeting by first amending the article to add an additional \$500 to make the request \$101,126. She went on to explain that the use of the library and attendance at programs are significantly up. They are hoping to reach out to families with young children and encourage them to grow up using the library. They have hired a new children's librarian and increased the hours for that position. Also, the library budget also includes FICA and Medi payments which were previously handled under the Town Office budget. Davis Clarke praised the wonderful job Ms. Holman has done.

Warrant Article 12 was read. It requests an appropriation of \$10,000 to be placed in the Library Expansion/Improvement CRF. Ms. Sweet stated that currently \$22,000 is in that account. Trustee, Jessie Copeland added that if we continue to have growth we will outgrow our space, and we need to prepare for the future. JoAnn Brown added that there is also a parking problem.

Warrant Article 13 which seeks the establishment of a CRF for the purpose of repairing or replacing Recycling Center equipment and an appropriation of \$10,000 to be placed in the fund was read. Mr. Young addressed the article. It is necessary to prepare for some future and inevitable expenses at the Recycling Center; the 2 compactors the Town owns are aging and will need repairs, and the backhoe will soon need to be replaced with a "new to us" model. These expenses extend beyond the regular budget.

Warrant Article 14 which seeks an appropriation of \$25,000 to be placed in the NCRF for the purpose of funding any future bridge project was read. Ms. Sweet state that the Selectmen are going to pull this article. One of our 5 bridges, the Barn Door Gap bridge, is on the State’s Red List. Road Agent Greg Messenger and Ms. Sweet addressed the bridge situation. In the past we have benefitted from the State Bridge Aid program, but no money is available through that program for 10+ years. Currently we available funds of \$218,000 and have just heard from the engineer who believes we can repair the bridge for \$170,000. The Selectmen would like to move forward with the repair this year, but are not sure if we can do it ourselves or must bid it out.

Warrant Article 15 for the appropriation of \$10,000 to be placed in the CRF established for the purpose of repair, improvement, or maintenance of the Town Hall was read. Currently \$10,000 plus a little interest is in the account. When asked if there were plans to expand the Town Hall, the Board members replied that there are no long range plans to that end. This fund is for major improvement or maintenance outside the scope of the regular budget. Better outside lighting was suggested.

Warrant Article 16 was read. It proposes to change the purpose of a current CRF, Records and Storage Fund to the Town Office Equipment Fund to the CRF for the purchase and maintenance of Town Office Equipment. As required by State Statute, this will require a 2/3 vote to pass. Ms. Sweet stated that its original purpose of this CRF was micro phish storage which has been replaced by equipment which saves documents to hard drives and secure servers.

Warrant Article 17 to appropriate \$500 to the Bicentennial Fund was read. This has been a yearly contribution for several years. JoAnn Brown stated that next year we will have to appropriate more.

Warrant Article 18 to appropriate \$9000 for the maintenance of the 3 cemeteries was read. The Selectmen addressed the article. Last year this was a petition article requesting \$6000 (\$2000 per cemetery), primarily for mowing expenses. The 3 individually owned cemeteries showed us their mowing expenses, and requested \$3000 each this year. The Town obligated by law to maintain a Town cemetery. The cemeteries receive income only by donation and selling lots.

Warrant Article 19 which funds general Town operations was read. An appropriation of \$1,431,381 is requested in the following areas:

Executive.....	\$ 85,152.
Election & Registration.....	28,220.
Financial Administration.....	98,682.
Appraisal of Property & Tax Maps.....	39,738.
Legal Expenses.....	30,000.
Employee Benefits, FICA, Medi & Unemp. Comp.....	37,659.
Planning and Zoning.....	12,056.
General Government Building.....	41,000.
Auto Permits/Town Clerk Fees.....	36,610.
Insurance.....	57,083.
Advertising and Regional Association.....	4,066.
Strafford Regional Planning Comm. Dues.....	5,006.
Contingency Fund.....	16,000.
Annual CPA Audit.....	13,000.
Emergency Management.....	5,500.
Building Inspection.....	17,953.

General Highway Expenses and Town Maintenance.....	517,700.
Street Lighting.....	5,000.
Solid Waste Disposal.....	316,234.
Animal Control.....	3,800.
Health Inspector.....	200.
Cornerstone VNA (formerly Roch Dstr VNA).....	3,991.
General Assistance and Welfare.....	15,180.
Community Action.....	2,000.
Haven Sexual Assault Support Services.....	992.
My Friend's Place.....	200.
The Homemakers Health Services.....	3,200.
Ready Rides.....	1,500.
CASA.....	500.
Parks and Recreation.....	21,859.
Patriotic Purposes and Fireworks .....	6,800.
Conservation Commission.....	2,500.
Interest Expense & Tax Anticipation Notes.....	2,000.
 TOTAL.....	 <u>\$1,431,381.</u>

A question from the audience was raised about the expenditures under Government Building. The Selectmen responded that it is general maintenance and upkeep - electricity, heat, telephone, trash removal, small repairs, cleaning, mowing, etc. No further questions were raised.

Petition Article 20 was read. It seeks to establish Wyman Lane as a Class V Town maintained road. The Selectmen do not support this article. The petitioner did not realize at the time the cost to be incurred to bring the road up to Town specs.

Article 21 will transact any other business. Brian Monahan asked why the Town warrant has so many articles, unlike the School District Warrant which has only a few articles. Board members responded that the purpose is transparency, so the voters can see how much is being spent and for what purpose.

There being no further business to conduct, the budget hearing closed at 6:47PM.