

## Minutes of the 2024 Budget Hearing February 13, 2024

Members Present: Lynn Sweet, Chairman; Brian Monahan

In Attendance: Randy Young, Police Chief; Matt Messenger, Road Agent; Greg Messenger, Asst. Road Agent; Scott Whitehouse, Fire Chief; Paul Stover, Fire Department; Jessie Copeland, Lindsay Aucella, Sharon Omand, Trustees of the Library; Larisa Molloy, Hill Library Director; Betsy Cozine, Charles Burnham, Linda Pape, Sue Higgins, JoAnn Brown, Mike Harrington, Tara Bickford Bailey, Judith Dupré, Steve Smith, Terri Marsh, Dan Howard

The Budget Hearing was called to order at 6:01PM. Notice of the public hearing was posted at the Strafford Post Office, Strafford Town Office, on the Town website, and in the Strafford Community Calendar. The purpose of the public hearing was to review the proposed budget and certain warrant articles to be voted on at the March 16, 2024 Town Meeting. Town Meeting will commence at 8:30AM at the Strafford School's gymnasium.

It was noted that Articles 1-3 on the warrant will be voted on Election Day, March 12, 2024 by ballot. Article 1 refers to Election of Officers. Articles 2 and 3 address amendments to the zoning and land use ordinances proposed by the Planning Board. The Planning Board has held public hearings for review and discussion on these articles.

Chairman Sweet read each Article, beginning with Article 4, asking for questions or comments after the reading of each Article. (Articles 1-3 are below but were not read or discussed.)

\*\* 1. To choose all necessary Town Officers for the year ensuing.

\*\* 2. Are you in favor of the adoption of the following amendment to the existing Town of Strafford Zoning and Land Use Ordinances as proposed by the Planning Board:

“To amend the definition of ‘Frontage’ in *Section 1.14.5, Definitions*, of the Zoning Ordinance to clarify that frontage is the contiguous length of the lot bordering on a road, to eliminate the use of private way frontage unless in an approved subdivision, and to clarify the determination of and requirements for frontage for lots that straddle the town boundary.”

\*\* 3. Are you in favor of the adoption of the following amendment(s) to the existing Town of Strafford Zoning and Land Use Ordinances as proposed by the Planning Board:

“To amend the definitions in *Section 1.14.12* (for Accessory Building), *1.14.13* (for Structure, and *1.14.14* (for Building), *Definitions*, of the Zoning Ordinance to add accessory structure and accessory use definitions to the accessory building definition, to clarify the definition of Structure including that all buildings are structures, and to clarify and simplify the definition of Building.”

4. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$430,000. for Capital Improvements (Drainage work, culverts, gravel and paving) of roads within the Town boundaries at the discretion of the Road Agent, as funding permits.

There was no discussion.

5. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$900,873. for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Police Department.

This is an increase of 4% over the 2023 budget.

6. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$101,889. for the purpose of funding a full-time Police Officer position and associated costs.

Police Chief Young addressed the necessity of hiring a new officer. The Police Department had a large increase of calls, 2,000+ more calls than in 2023.

7. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$21,000. for the purpose of repairs and improvements to the central air unit at the Police Department building.

Chief Young briefly discussed the Article.

8. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$20,000. to be placed in the Police Vehicle and Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

No discussion followed.

9. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$851,953. for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department.

Lynn Sweet stated that this budget is up 4% over last year.  
No further discussion followed.

10. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$129,915. for the purpose of funding a full-time Firefighter/Advanced EMT or Paramedic position and associated costs.

Fire Chief Whitehouse stated there are serious staffing issues with emergency services and explained the need for this position. Many are leaving for full time positions elsewhere.

11. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$60,217. for the fifth year's payment of the lease agreement for the new ambulance approved at the 2020 Town Meeting, and to authorize the withdrawal of \$60,217. from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Special Revenue Fund to be used for this purpose. This lease/purchase agreement contains an escape clause. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

No discussion followed.

12. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. for the purpose of purchasing equipment and supplies for the ambulances, and to authorize the withdrawal of \$25,000. from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Special Revenue Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

No discussion followed.

13. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$154,161. for the third year's payment of the lease agreement for the new Fire Engine Tanker approved at the 2022 Town Meeting and to authorize the withdrawal of \$77,081. from the Fire Engine Capital Reserve Fund to be used for this purpose. The balance of \$77,080. to come from general taxation. This lease/purchase agreement contains an escape clause. The Selectmen recommend this article.

It was stated that the CRF balance is just under \$200,000 and the thought is to take half the payment out of this account in 2024, and another half for 2025's payment. There was no further discussion.

14. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$13,984. for the purpose purchasing ZOLL Ventilator service contract, and to authorize the withdrawal of \$13,984. from the special revenue fund known as the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund established by Article 8 at the March 14, 2000 Town Meeting to be used for this purpose. This lease/purchase agreement contains an escape clause. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Fire Chief Whitehouse explained the purpose of this machine is to push air into the lungs. No further discussion followed.

15. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$23,824. for the purpose of purchasing a LUCAS Compression Device and associated equipment, and to authorize the withdrawal of \$23,824. from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Special Revenue Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Fire Chief Whitehouse explained this device is specific to chest compressions. No discussion followed.

16. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$19,000. for the purpose of purchasing an E-Hurst Tool.

Fire Chief Whitehouse explained this tool is a hydraulic tool similar to the jaws of life. No discussion followed.

17. To see if the Town will vote to establish a capital reserve fund pursuant to RSA 35:1 to be called the Fire Department Class A Uniform Capital Reserve Fund and to raise and appropriate the sum of \$15,000. to be placed in this fund, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Lynn Sweet explained that this is simply putting money away for future purchases for Class A Uniforms. No discussion followed.

18. To see if the Town will vote to hear the report of the New Fire Station Committee established by a vote at the 2022 Town Meeting to be comprised of the Fire Chief, one Fire Department member, one Selectman, and two Town residents. The committee to report back at the 2023 Town Meeting. Article was tabled at the 2023 Town Meeting until the 2024 Town Meeting.

There was no discussion that followed.

19. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$166,905. for the operation and maintenance of the Hill Library.

This is an increase of 9%. There was no further discussion.

20. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$6,000. for the purpose of repair of rotting trim on the library building (\$3,500) and to remedy poor drainage in the back of the building (\$2,500), and to authorize the withdrawal of \$6,000. from the Library Expansion/Improvement Capital Reserve Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

No discussion followed.

21. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. for the purpose of completion of projects associated with investigation for a new library site and building, which may include, but is not limited to land surveying, test pit etc., and to authorize the withdrawal of \$5,000. from the Library Expansion/Improvement Capital Reserve Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

The Selectmen are inquiring counsel because of the CRF account name. This may be amended at Town Meeting.

22. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$16,000. to be placed in the Library Expansion/Improvement Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

The current balance of the CRF is just over \$67,000. This is money being added to this account. No further discussion followed.

23. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Town Hall Building Maintenance, Improvements and/or Expansion Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

There is currently over \$36,000 in this fund. The Selectmen are Agents to Expend on this account. There was no further discussion.

24. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Future Reval/Statistical Update Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

There is currently just over \$26,000 in this fund. There was no discussion that followed.

25. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Highway Department Vehicle and/or Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

There is currently over \$21,000 in this fund. There was no discussion that followed.

26. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Reflective Road Signage Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

There is currently a little over \$4,600 in this fund. There was no discussion that followed.

27. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Repair/Replace Recycling Center Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

There is currently over \$31,000 in this fund. There was no discussion that followed.

28. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Bridge Construction & Repair Non-Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

There is currently over \$18,000 remaining in this fund after the replacement of the bridge on Barn Door Gap Road. There was no discussion that followed.

29. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,879,288. for general Town operations.

Executive.....	\$ 100,814.
Election & Registration.....	33,350.
Financial Administration.....	105,026.
Appraisal of Property & Tax Maps.....	47,992.
Legal Expenses.....	60,000.
Employee Benefits, FICA, Medi & Unemp. Comp.....	44,712.
Planning and Zoning.....	52,550.
General Government Building.....	53,575.
Auto Permits/Town Clerk Fees.....	42,350.
Insurance.....	69,148.
Advertising and Regional Association.....	4,637.
Strafford Regional Planning Comm. Dues.....	5,511.
Contingency Fund.....	15,000.
Annual CPA Audit.....	13,000.
Emergency Management.....	5,000.
Building Inspection.....	39,501.
General Highway Expenses and Town Maintenance.....	733,690.
Street Lighting.....	6,200.
Solid Waste Disposal.....	393,749.
Animal Control.....	1,800.
Cemeteries.....	9,000.
Cornerstone VNA (formerly Roch Dstr VNA).....	3,991.
General Assistance and Welfare.....	10,000.
Community Action.....	2,000.
Haven Sexual Assault Support Services.....	992.
My Friend's Place.....	1,000.
The Homemakers Health Services.....	3,200.
Catamount Womenaid.....	1,000.
Ready Rides.....	1,500.
CASA.....	500.
Strafford Nutrition & Meals on Wheels.....	1,000.

Parks and Recreation.....	6,200.
Patriotic Purposes and Fireworks .....	6,800.
Conservation Commission.....	2,500.
Interest Expense & Tax Anticipation Notes.....	<u>2,000.</u>
TOTAL.....	\$1,879,288.

(The intent of this article is to raise the sum of \$1,879,288. exclusive of all other Articles addressed.)

This is a 4% increase over the 2023 budget. No discussion followed.

30. Shall the Town of STRAFFORD ADOPT the ALL VETERANS’ TAX CREDIT in accordance with RSA 72:28-b, for an annual tax credit on residential property which shall be equal to the same amount as the standard or optional veterans’ tax credit voted by the Town of STRAFFORD under RSA 72:28? (Majority vote required)

It was explained that this is a change to include all those that have served in the armed forces- including National Guard- and not just those that have been deployed. No discussion followed.

31. “To see if the Town will vote to reclassify from a Class VI town road to a Class A Trail a section of First Crown Point Rd from a point at the northeast corner of Tax Map 17, Lot 20 and the southwest corner of Tax Map 17, Lot 19 to the Barnstead town line (approximately 5,900 feet).” By petition.

It was explained that all the abutting land is owned by Blue Hills Foundation. No discussion followed.

32. “Third of July Celebrations  
To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$4,000.00 for purposes of supporting the annual July 3<sup>rd</sup> fireworks display (This is would still be in consideration of the \$6,000.00 already allotted). This appropriation, together with individual and business donations, will pay all direct display costs as well as the inspection, repair, and insurance for both pyrotechnics launch platforms.” By petition. The Selectmen recommend this article.

A question of the what the cost of the fireworks were last year was asked. The cost was not clearly given.

33. “Shall the following provisions pertaining to elections be adopted? All voting shall be by paper ballot and all ballots shall be hand counted only, rather than by use of optical scanning or any other types of programmable electronic counting devices.” This shall constitute a return to hand counting ballots and the immediate discontinuance of all electronic voting machines and electronic devices authorized for use by trial in RSA 656:40.” By petition.

Petitioners were not in attendance to speak on this.

34. To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.

There was no discussion.

The Public Hearing closed at 7:01PM.