

## MINUTES

**BUDGET WORKSESSION  
TOWN HALL**

**November 20, 2023  
12:00 PM**

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### **ATTENDEES:**

**Select board members:** Leon Rideout, Shane Beattie, Kathy-Jean Lavoie

**Others in Attendance:** Town Manager Benjamin Gaetjens-Oleson, Charity Baker, Finance Director Michael Nadeau, Department Heads, Members of the Public

Ben let the board know that not all budgets are 100% complete as he is still working on the numbers for the health insurance, property liability and wage lines.

**Library** – Barbara reported the trustees evaluated salaries for the part-time staff and the \$12.00 an hour rate is not in line with other part-time positions so they are increasing the part-time line to bring the staff's wages consistent.

The health insurance line has increased due to the policy renewal increase and Ronnie Buckman going from a single to a 2-person plan.

The book endowment is doing well and will be able to contribute another \$8,000 in revenue in 2024. It was explained that only the interest income can be used from the endowment fund. Jan Wipperman asked if there were any circumstances that the principal could be used to offset other expenses of the library. Ben mentioned that if a donation is made specifically to the endowment, it increases the principal amount and in turn increases the interest income. If a donation is received with no specific purpose those funds can be used to offset expenses. Linda did mention any donations that come in the trustees have customarily voted to add them to the endowment.

**Cemetery** – There is an increase in the salary line as they will need to hire more staff for the mowing in 2024. Roger Emery is going to do less of the mowing so other staff needs to be added. Kolin and Heather Bailey have expressed interest in assisting in 2024. Roger let the committee know he would like to retire in the next 5 years and Kolin has expressed an interest in taking over as sexton.

Ben mentioned they collected more from the trust funds than what was budgeted and Michael explained the amount reflects 2 years of contributions as 2022 was not paid by the fund until the beginning of 2023.

**Welcome Center** – Linda mentioned they plan to ask for \$10,000 for 2024 instead of the usual \$15,000 where they are now collecting rent from a new tenant in the building. She went over several projects that are needed on the building and the number of people that have visited the center. There was much discussion regarding the traffic through the Welcome Center.

Linda asked if the board has given thought to what they would like to do in the future as far as ownership of the building. Is the town interested in taking over ownership? Shane mentioned he believes that is the direction the board is looking to go. There was discussion regarding the future of the building.

**Town Clerk** – Charity reported her increases are due to the four elections in 2024 compare to one election in 2023. There were no questions or comments.

Ben mentioned the health insurance is going up 10% for 2024. The company did give other options a little late in the planning process. Ben reviewed the other options and does not feel any are better plans to move forward with. In future years, he is going to start working with the insurance company earlier in the year so he can do more research on the options offered and get input from the employees.

Ben also explained the town also pays for retirees that were grandfathered that benefit.

There was a lot of discussion regarding options to keep health insurance costs down.

**Executive** – The only proposed change is the health insurance line.

**Financial Administration** – Health insurance is the only known increase. Public relations line, Ben mentioned that Zach at Phlume Media is taking over the municipal recording from Phlume Media and he has not reviewed the new contract in detail. Zach does not have the capability to live stream town meeting however he can record it.

Ben also mentioned another part of the public relations line is the volunteer dinner and there is not a location to hold everyone so this year he would like to purchase local gift certificates to send with a thank you to our volunteers. It will also support our local businesses.

Heating oil – Ben has been tracking everyone’s deliveries so he can get a handle on the amount each of the departments use. He mentioned last year was a mild winter so he will want to add a little bit more than the numbers tracked just in case. The more years’ data that is collected the more accurate he will be able to determine what should be put in the bid request.

**Government buildings** – Shane asked if money was put in to start working on things that need to be updated/upgraded. Ben mentioned several years back there was a plan created to update the layout of the building and to add an elevator. Kathy-Jean asked what it would take to add an elevator. Ben thought a line could be added to the budget for an engineer to come in and assess how the space could be better used and an elevator installed.

Ben is going to pull out the plans that were created several years ago to add an elevator for the board to review. He feels someone needs to come in and create a plan or update the previous one.

**Police** – Chief John Woodworth mentioned the biggest increase in his department is in the wage line. His goal is to bring wages in line with area/size departments in order to keep staff or recruit.

Lancaster is the second biggest police department in the North Country.

He mentioned they are working a lot of over time right now where they currently have only 3 full-time police officers. He reviewed the breakdowns of the wage changes and where staff are right now with wages. He also went over where towns around us are with wages.

John mentioned it costs about \$30,000 to train a new officer. It is a big investment for them to leave and go elsewhere because they are paying higher wages.

Kathy-Jean asked if a cruiser will be purchased this year. John mentioned it is an off year for purchasing a cruiser.

Shane asked if there are any projects that need to be done in the coming years. John said, Highway Foreman Tim Brown told him the police department parking lot will need to be milled and repaved in the next couple years.

Ben mentioned that previously there was a K9 program and Rian Matthews would like to start that program up again. John and Ben explained what the program and training entailed. They are looking for a dog that will be used to detect drugs and able to be brought into the schools.

Kathy-Jean asked about the “Coffee with a Cop Program.” He mentioned the first one is coming up November 29<sup>th</sup> at the Granite Grind and he will report back if it is a success. It is a program where he will sit and have coffee with anyone that wants to stop in, chat and ask questions about the job and the department. The businesses participating at this time are Granite Grind, Polish Princess and McDonalds. The board was very happy with him implementing this in Lancaster.

John mentioned the State Police received a grant to purchase AFIS–Digital finger printing machines and will be providing one free to the department. There will be a cost to purchase a printer to print the finger print cards and he would like to start charging \$10 for fingerprinting to offset the cost of the printer. The cost of the printer is \$1,409.

Ben mentioned the wage line also includes Robert Sullivan’s wage which was removed from the 2023 budget as he was deployed in 2023.

Kathy-Jean asked about the fair budget. John feels it should be looked at as a special detail and he has a meeting set with Amy Landry of the Lancaster Fair to discuss the services that will be provided and when they will need more officers. Kathy-Jean asked if he thought the budget should be left at \$25,000 or if he projects an increase. She also asked if it can be included in the police department budget.

Shane mentioned one thing that should be considered is the Fair should be billed at the same rate they would bill any other entity looking for detail coverage. John and Ben both explained that is the plan to provided consistency.

Ben mentioned that Randy will be going to discuss Fire/EMS coverage with the Fair as well

**EMS** – Randy was unable to attend due to illness so Ben gave his report. He and Randy have not had a chance to discuss staffing and wage needs.

Ben explained how workers comp is calculated for Fire and EMS staff and because the EMS personnel work directly under the fire chief they are rated as fire personnel. He is trying to work with Primex to allow for a distinction for those that only provide EMS services even though they are under the direction of the fire chief.

Kathy-Jean asked about the increase in the new equipment line. Ben mentioned it is to purchase a new electric stretcher to lessen injury claims.

Teri Anderson asked how the contract amounts to other towns work. Leon explained each town is charged a per capita rate and the last couple years those fees have been low so they have increased the contribution of the towns to the same per capita rate as what it costs Lancaster residents. Ben mentioned they will be looking at the per capita contributions again in 2025 to see if it needs to be changed again.

Jan Wipperman mentioned Randy stated in a previous meeting that the ambulance department was up \$150,000 in revenue. Kathy-Jean explained they were up that amount from what was projected at that time of the year.

Ben reviewed how money ends up in the surplus fund balance.

Kathy-Jean asked about revenues for 2024 and Ben mentioned he doesn’t have those numbers at this time however he will discuss with Randy to see what he is projecting. Ben also reported the Town of Lunenburg has not paid their 2023 contract invoice. Shane thinks a letter should be sent by the board demanding payment. There was discussion on what is going to be required of them in future years. Jan suggested having late fee penalties included in the towns’ contracts.

**MIH** – Shane asked if a vehicle is provided by the town for the MIH program and asked if the town is being reimbursed for the cost of use of that vehicle. Ben explained the budget included a set amount a month for maintenance.

**EMS Special Details** – Ben mentioned that budget can be eliminated and the detail covering the fair can be included in the fire and EMS budgets.

**Fire** – Kathy-Jean mentioned it is down due to the workers comp rates being shifted to the EMS budget. Ben mentioned the board will need to discuss the plan to replace Randy when he retires. He would like to hire the new chief in advance of Randy’s retirement so they can learn the ropes before Randy leaves. He also feels the salary line for the fire chief should increase to take that into consideration.

Shane asked how the department is doing with radios. Ben mentioned they are good however they were bought all at once so they will need to plan replacing them a little at a time.

**Planning/Zoning** – Robin mentioned the clerical line is up because they are going to start using a clerk for the zoning amendment meetings/hearings as well as regular meetings.

Postage is up by 825. Robin estimated where she is now due to mailing increases and postage rate increases.

The advertising line is up for the increase in meetings due to the proposed zoning ordinance amendments. A lot of the expense will be offset by case fees.

The seminars & workshops is up \$800 for Robin to participate in the Supervisory Academy. Training for board members is also paid under this line.

Robin mentioned her bottom line is down from last year due to the 2023 budget including \$30,000 for the mapping project.

Kathy-Jean asked if the revenues included the new fee structure for the land use permits. Ben mentioned it will be updated to reflect the new fee schedule.

**Safety** – Robin said the safety budget can stay the same.

She mentioned Certified Computers Solutions let us know we have space to start scanning our property files and if we end up needing more space it will cost to increase our cloud space.

She thinks the mapping program will be able to go out to the public sometime in January.

**Highway** – Highway Foreman Tim Brown mentioned his bottom line has gone up \$23,000 and it does not include wage and related increases or the health insurance increase. He reviewed those lines that are increasing and why they are going up.

Tim asked if the board had any ideas what the plan is with wages. Ben mentioned it is not known yet and the plan is to discuss wage increases and to research other communities and what it is offered and discuss ways to retain/recruit.

Tim stated he is not requesting anything by warrant article this year and possibly the next 3 years.

**Transfer Station** – Rusty started off with the process he has done in the past for wage increases. He included a 4% cost of living increase and mentioned he is trying to catch up on wages to retain his employees.

He increased the part-time hours by 10 hours a week. He will spread the increased hours over the number of employees.

He went over the other lines and explained any increases and decreases. Some of the decreases are due to him moving those expenses being paid to the motor vehicle waste fund and 5 cent can fund.

Rusty mentioned he would like to help cut costs by emailing out bills instead of mailing them and he will work on trying to get more people to receive bills that way.

Rusty mentioned they are looking at getting an electric loader which then will eliminate a good portion of the diesel line. Ben mentioned one of the reasons to look at electric loader is the town generates electricity with the solar panels and the transfer station over produces and will accommodate an electric loader.

Kathy-Jean asked if that will be included in the 2024 budget and Rusty stated it would. There is a \$45,000 grant available to help cover the cost and the attachments from the current loader can be used for the new one. They also will sell the current loader and bobcat which he has asked Mike Ouelette to give me a cost for.

Rusty and Ben have discussed the two different tire disposal lines, one in the transfer station budget and the other in the motor vehicle waste fund (MVWF) budget, and they feel tire removal should be paid out of the MVWF because that is where the revenue is collected on each motor vehicle registration.

Rusty mentioned the glass has been stock piled for years and it has to be transported to Littleton to be crushed at a cost. They are going to continue getting rid of the stock pile next year, then it will be on a rotating schedule to transport and dispose of the glass.

**MVWF** – Rusty plans to create a tire barn using two of the existing containers and eventually he will get rid of the other containers as they are not safe. He will pay for the new storage with the money that already exists.

**5 Cent Can Fund** – Rusty went over any increases/decreases.

He mentioned he has a concern with mixed paper because sorting and bailing cost more than what is to get rid of it. He would rather spend more time sorting the metal pile where they make more money bailing metal than mixed paper. He thinks the town would save \$7,000 by just throwing out the mixed paper and bailing metal. The mixed paper market has not changed. Rusty mentioned he and Bill Zanes will come to the board to discuss moving forward with their plan to bail metal.

Transfer Station revenue – Rusty went over the change with demo revenue which is due to the requirements for dumping construction debris and contractors are probably using other methods to dispose of their debris. Ben asked if he is projecting a fee increase and Rusty mentioned the bag fees will probably go up.

Kathy-Jean asked if the other towns are using the new company he is looking into to purchase Pay-As-You-Throw bags from or do they use the company he uses now. Most use the same company as they do now and Dalton just moved to the new company.

Rusty also mentioned at some point they will need to get rid of the cement that is collecting down there. He has started charging when people dump cement/concrete because there is a cost to get rid of it. He said a lot has accumulated and he will be coming to the board to discuss what they want to do to get rid of it. The cost quote to only crush it is \$27,000.

Rusty mentioned is going to request a couple small things, the MSW pad as tilted and it needs to be replaced and metal needs a pad.

**Water** – Water/Sewer Supervisor Timmy Bilodeau mentioned the part-time wage line is coming out. He also reviewed those lines with increases/decreases and gave explanation of the changes. He also mentioned he is working on the wages to help retain/recruit.

Kathy-Jean asked if he has had any staff turnover this past year and he mentioned he has not. Timmy mentioned the town has created an infrastructure that can’t be maintained with just four people. Ben explained many towns have two separate departments with the same number of guys in each department. If they are ever one guy down they are in a pinch. A decision will need to be made on whether they want to keep gluing things back together or start upgrading the infrastructure.

He mentioned he has been very thankful for the help the highway department provides him however when they are helping they are not doing what they need to do.

Ben mentioned the last time the rates were changed it was due to the Summer Street project. Ben mentioned each year the budget is looked at and the rates for water and sewer should be reviewed each year.

There was much discussion regarding the condition of the water & sewer infrastructures.

**Sewer** – Timmy mentioned they have had good success with the sewer lining on those sections of line that are failing or close to failing. Ben asked if there is a priority list of areas that should be handled first. Timmy stated there was and it has been trumped by the paving projects.

The part-time wage line is no longer needed.

Timmy reviewed the lines that have increases/decreases and gave explanation for the changes.

There was discussion regarding rates and if they are covering the budget.

**Col. Town** – Recreation Director Eli Vincent mentioned they had a lot of new staff at Safe Haven and to insure they will return next year they needed to increase wages.

He reviewed those lines with increases/decreases and explained the reason for the changes.

He mentioned one of his big increases is grounds maintenance as there are many things in need of repair (tennis courts, pool cover, pool ladders, etc.) The ball fields also need to be reconfigured due to the new State baseball regulations. Ben, Kathy-Jean and Eli have discussed encumbering some of this year’s unexpended money to use toward those thing they can’t get done by the end of the year.

Ben asked Eli if he has heard from the investment committee regarding the 2024 projected revenue. He has not heard from them at this time however he will reach out to get those figures.

Kathy-Jean, Ben and Eli have discussed keeping track of each of the aspects of the department (pool, community camp, etc.).

Kathy-Jean asked about the increased traffic at the pool and if was more kids &/or adults. He mentioned they sold more family passes. She also asked if non-residents are charged the same fee for programs as residents and Eli stated no they are different fees except for Safe Haven.

**Legal** – Ben believes it will stay the same. He did mention they will be in litigation with Eversource regarding their most recent appeal however feels it will not require increasing the budget.

Kathy-Jean asked when the court date for 600 Main Street will be. Ben said sometime early spring. Shane asked if the legal budget would need to be increased to cover the 600 Main Street case. Ben stated he doesn’t think the bottom line will change, he just may need to redistribute among the line items.

**Personnel Administration** – The retiree’s health insurance will go up due to the policy renewal increase.

**Government Buildings** – Ben mentioned he is working on this budget, one thing he would like to do when Al Pryor retires (which believes it will be in 2024) is to turn his position into a Building & Grounds Manager for all the towns properties. There was a lot of discussion as to what this position would do and its job description. It would be a full-time position with benefits.

The board agreed that if the position is a need then Ben should move forward with putting it in the budget. Ben will have a discussion with Al before moving forward.

Ben mentioned all other deposits do not have many if any changes.

Respectfully submitted,

Charity M. Baker