

MINUTES

DRAFT

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

February 6, 2023

Town Hall

7:00 PM

Committee Members Present: Chair Justin Kenison, Leo Enos, John Eddy, Leo Rideout, Jr., Tricia Frenette, John Garrison, Linda Upham-Bornstein, Racheal Stuart, Selectmen Rep. Shane Beattie

Absent: Erik Becker

Others in Attendance: Select board members Leon Rideout and Kathy-Jean Lavoie, Town Manager Benjamin Gaetjens-Oleson, Michael Nadeau, Charity Baker, Department Heads, Members of the Public

The hearing was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairman Justin Kenison.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Justin welcomed everyone and let the them know that we would be reviewing the entire budget and allowing for questions and comments.

He asked if everyone had a chance to review the minutes from the January 9th meeting and entertained a motion for approval.

Motion made by Leo E. and seconded by Linda to approve the January 9, 2024, meeting minutes. All in favor. Motion carried.

Justin explained the special request articles would be reviewed first so those present to explain the article would have the chance to leave before reviewing the operating budget. He also mentioned the warrant articles being reviewed at the hearing were those dealing with money only.

Article 15 – CASA. Justin read the article. Ben Gaetjens-Oleson spoke to the article as a member of the organization. He explained what CASA is all about and how it helps the community and that it has a .2 cents tax impact.

Article 16 – Red Cross. Justin read the article. No one was present to speak to the article.

Article 17 – Tri-County CAP. Justin read the article. Ben spoke to the article. He explained in past years CAP would ask for funding for each division of their organization separately however in the last few years they have consolidated their requests which has equaled less funds being requested. Ben expressed that CAP has been very helpful with many situations for the Town not to mention members of the community.

Article 18 – Mt Washington Regional Airport. Justin read the article. Rob Christie, Lancaster’s airport representative explained how the amount being requested is calculated and the value in having the airport in the area.

Article 19 – Northern Gateway Chamber of Commerce. Justin read the article. Linda Hutchins was present to explain what the chamber has to offer to the local businesses in the area. The chamber has a very active board now and she went over the many activities the chamber is offering.

Article 20 – Northern Human Services/White Mountain Mental Health. Justin read the article. Ben Gaetjens-Oleson spoke to the article. It is the same amount as in the past. He went over the services they offer to the Lancaster residents.

Article 21 – Backpack program. Justin read the article. Ben Gaetjens-Oleson spoke to the article. He explained the program provides meals on the weekends, vacations and during the summer to children in need.

Article 22 – Food Pantry. Justin read the article. No one present to speak to the article.

Article 23 – Androscoggin Valley Home Care. Justin read the article. Margo Sullivan was present to explain to the committee and public what their organizations has to offer and the costs to get their staff to the residents they serve.

Leo asked where they came up with \$14,000. She mentioned a spreadsheet was included with their request to explain the cost calculation. Ben mentioned, he will look for the calculations and forward it to the committee.

Tricia's concern is each year the requests keep going up and it becomes harder and harder to keep the budget within the taxpayers means and the increase in taxes may push them out of their homes.

Article 24 – North Country Home Health & Hospice. Justin read the article. No one was present to speak to the article.

Margo Sullivan added that Androscoggin Valley Healthcare is not a Medicare certified agency and wanted to point out that North Country Home Health & Hospice is. She explained that AV Home Care was approached to take over the services they provide because the previous provider was dropping the services being provided because those services were not covered by Medicare.

Ben explained that any of those special funding request organizations take a risk in their funding not being approved if they do not have a representative present to speak to their article at Town Meeting and the next year, they will be required to submit their request as a petitioned warrant.

Ben explained the process the Budget committee and department heads went through to arrive at a budget they are happy to present to the tax payers and he is happy that the committee was receptive to bringing the employees' wages in line with today's pay scales in an attempt to keep the good employees we have.

The committee went through the budget by department.

Executive – John E. mentioned there is a 3.4% increase and most of that is in due to the medical insurance increase.

Election/Registration – John G. reported there is an increase of about \$10,000 over last year to bring wages in line and there are 4 elections in 2024.

Financial Administration – John E. reviewed the lines with increase, and that overall, it is about a 3% increase over 2023.

Legal – No change from 2023.

Personnel Administration – Leo R. reported there was not much change since 2023.

Planning/Zoning – Linda reported there is an increase in the salary and health insurance lines and a decrease in services contracts which brings the bottom line down from last year.

General Government Buildings – Leo R reported a decrease of \$200 due to a change in the proposed alarm system line.

Insurance & Bonds – Ben mentioned there is a slight increase due to the estimated calculation for the town hall. In previous years the calculations have been off.

Police – Leo E. mentioned their budget is up due to payroll and the associated lines. He also reported the department is now fully staffed.

Police – Fair – Leo E. reported this budget is an in and out budget. The Lancaster Fair reimburses all expenses of the department.

Peter Riviere asked if the department is fully staffed and Chief Woodworth reported they are however 2 are at the academy. John Jefferson is going to be starting back with the department and Robert Sullivan will be back from deployment this week.

Advertising and Regional Association – Teri Anderson asked if there had been clarification on what was considered a “call for service” under dispatch services. Ben explained that every time the dispatch office receives a call of any kind for the Lancaster Police Dept, it is considered a call for service no matter the size of the situation. Ben also explained it was a big jump because the first year was an estimate and this year, they had enough real data for it to be budgeted more appropriately.

Welcome Center – Down \$5,000 from previous years.

EMS – Justin reviewed the increases. He mentioned the wage lines are up however the overtime line is down.

He also read the warrant article for a new ambulance. Fire Chief Randy Flynn mentioned the ambulance they are looking at purchasing, he believes will last them for 6 years.

MIH program – It was reported that it is an in and out budget. It is the paramedic program that is run in conjunction with Weeks and Weeks reimburses all expenses for services provided.

EMS special detail – Nothing requested.

Fire – Full-time wages are up to bring them in line. Justin reviewed other changes in line items.

Safety Committee – Linda reported the budget is level funded.

Highway – Leo E. reported the wage line went up along with all wage associated lines. He reviewed all the lines that changed from the previous year and mentioned that some of the paving money from last year was encumbered because the work didn’t get finished in 2023.

Peter Riviere asked what percentage is the pay increases. Ben explained it varies depending on position. Each department head was tasked with researching the pay scales of the surrounding communities and other communities of like size in an attempt to bring wages in line.

John G. explained, the budget committee asked the department heads to research pay scales because Lancaster is basically serving as training ground for surrounding communities and it was time to bring those wages in line with other communities to keep our good employees here.

Leo E. mentioned this is his 9th year on the budget committee and the wages discussion was eye opening. The department heads were tasked with a big undertaking and did a great job bringing back the information.

Fuel – No change. This budget line is to pay the fuel deliveries. Ben explained the budget was created to be a pass through for the fuel deliveries so that Tim Brown could accurately see where his budget was each month.

Street lighting – John E. reported, it is down 12%

Transfer Station – Tricia reviewed each line. She mentioned the supplies line is down because some supplies will now be taken out of the 5 cent can fund. The uniforms line is down because it will also come out of the 5 cent can fund. The tires line is down because it will now be paid out of the Motor Vehicle Waste Fund. PAYT bags are up because they are no longer accepting non-town bags. Overall budget is up a little over \$35,000.

Justin read the article for the new loader for the Transfer Station. Rusty explained what the DERA grant is. He also mentioned the transfer station has been trying out an electric loader. He explained the current loader will be traded and the bob cat will go to the highway department for their use.

Kathy-Jean asked when will he hear about the grant. He contacted the representative he spoke to last year and they have not confirmed funding at this time, she will let him know as soon as funds are available. She believes it will be funded.

Justin read article 12 for general improvements to the Transfer Station. Rusty explained the containers that are currently there now have been there for a long time and are no longer safe and will be purchasing new containers to serve as a new tire barn.

Health Administration – Level funded.

Animal Control – Level funded.

Health Agencies – All warrant articles.

Welfare – Level funded.

Other welfare – All warrant articles.

Parks & Recreation – John E. reported an increase of about 12% and that is due to adding a line for the Main Street Beautification project which is offset by donations collected by Tricia Frenette and her team.

Col. Town Recreation – Racheal wanted to express how lucky Lancaster is to have a facility like Col. Town. She explained that Col. Town is a bit different as they have an endowment that assists with expenses. The endowment contribution will be around \$200,000 for 2024.

Expenditures are up \$18,000 from 2023 and revenues are also up. She mentioned the increases are mostly wages along with lines associated with wages. She reviewed all other lines with larger changes up or down.

Racheal mentioned over the next year she and John Garrison will be looking into the structure of Safe Haven in order to help the fees cover the costs.

She also mentioned the buildings of the entire facility definitely need some TLC and maintenance.

Rob asked if the grandstand is still standing and Ben mentioned it is and taking it down is part of a grant that was received so the cost to remove it is not included in the operating budget.

Patriot purposes – Level funded.

Conservation Commission – Leo R. mentioned it is down about \$1,000.

Long term bonds and notes – Leo R. mentioned previously it was the pool bond however it was paid off in 2023.

Water – John G. explained the biggest increases are wages and the associated lines. He reviewed the other lines that had significant changes.

Sewer – John G. explained the big increases. He praised the water/sewer and highway departments on how well they work together to take any situation that comes their way.

Water/Sewer Supervisor Timmy Bilodeau mentioned the budget is just enough to cover the operation of the department and nothing more which means nothing is being added to a capital reserve fund to upgrade the Town's failing infrastructure.

Cemetery – Leo E. reported the increase in wages is due to staffing changes. Teri Anderson asked about a previous meeting where there was discussion about increasing fees for some services at the cemeteries. Leo E. mentioned they did increase the lot and corner stone fees.

Library – Justin read the warrant article for the soffit and fascia replacement & repair. Linda reported wages have increased as they have across all departments along with the associated lines. She mentioned there is an increase in the health insurance line as one employee went to a family plan from a single plan. 2024 bottom line minus project revenue puts the budget down from 2023.

MVWF – Tricia reported the budget changed about \$600. As she mentioned previously the cost for tire removal will be paid out of the budget moving forward.

5 cent cans – Some expenses from the Transfer Station budget will now be paid out of this budget.

Peter Riviere mentioned each year there is discussion about infrastructure planning and feels those things should be discussed more in order to move forward with taking care of the issues. Ben explained at the beginning of the budget process the Select board and the Budget committee discussed which was the priority to start with and it was decided wages was the priority this year to keep the Town's biggest asset, its employees, here and to stop losing them to other communities.

It has been the Budget committee's goal to work on the town's capital improvements and the Select board has decided to hold an additional meeting a month to discuss future planning for the town.

John Garrison mentioned Robin Irving has been working with the department heads on a capital improvement plan to prioritize what needs to be done to update our infrastructure. Robin mentioned she has adjusted the plan to reflect what was or was not done in 2023. She is working on prioritizing projects and working on getting quotes.

Rob Christie wanted to speak to article 25-27 – Elderly Exemption and Veterans' credits. He went over his research and findings with respect to the elderly exemption and veterans' credits and when

mentioned when the last time they were changed. He mentioned with inflation those exemptions and credits are not serving the elderly and veterans as they were in the past. Rob supported increasing those credits and exemptions however he doesn't feel the amounts will be increased enough. He reviewed his recommended increases.

Rob praised Budget committee and department heads for the job they have done making the process much more comprehensive.

Shane thanked the committee members and department heads for their participation and work done.

Article 7 – Operating Budget. Justin read the article.

Motion made by John G. and seconded by Racheal to approve the operating budget as presented. 8 yes, 1 no. Motion carried.

Both the Select board and budget committee reviewed the special warrant articles that were petitioned or included the capital reserve funds and voted to recommend or not recommend. Votes are as follows:

Article 8 – Appropriate to Capital Reserve funds –

Motion made by Leo E. and seconded by John E. for the Budget Committee to recommend article 8. 8 yes, 1 no. Motion carried.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy-Jean for the Select Board to recommend article 8. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 9 – Reimburse Industrial Development fund –

Motion made by Leo R. and seconded by John G. for the Budget Committee to recommend article 9. All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy-Jean for the Select Board to recommend article 9. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 11 – Change Purpose of Capital Reserve fund –

Motion made by John E and seconded by Tricia for the Budget Committee to recommend article 11. All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion made by Kathy-Jean and seconded by Shane for the Select Board to recommend article 11. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 12 – Improvements to Transfer Station –

Motion made by John E and seconded by John G. for the Budget Committee to recommend article 12. 8 yes, 1 no. Motion carried.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy-Jean for the Select Board to recommend article 12. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 13 – Purchase New Loader –

Motion made by Racheal and seconded by Tricia for the Budget Committee to recommend article 13. 8 yes, 1 no. Motion carried.

Motion made by Kathy-Jean and seconded by Shane for the Select Board to recommend article 13. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 14 – Library soffit & fascia replacement & repair –

Motion made by Linda and seconded by Racheal for the Budget Committee to recommend article 14. All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy-Jean for the Select Board to recommend article 14. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 23 – Androscoggin Valley Home Care Services –

Motion made by Racheal and seconded by John E. for the Budget Committee to recommend the article 23. 4 yes, 5 no. Motion failed

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy-Jean for the Select Board to recommend article 23. 2 yes, 1 no. Motion carried.

Article 24 – North Country Home Health and Hospice –

Motion made by Racheal and seconded by Shane for the Budget Committee to recommend article 24. 3 yes, 6 no. Motion failed

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy-Jean for the Select Board to recommend article 24. All in favor. Motion carried.

Kathy-Jean thanked John E. for his 9 years of service to the committee as this was his last meeting.

Motion made by Linda and seconded by Leo R. to adjourn. All in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved:

Charity M. Baker

Justin Kenison, Chair