

TOWN WARRANT NARRATIVE

OVERVIEW: Responding to the pressure of inflation appears to be the consistent theme of budget discussions throughout the last few years. We started 2023 with a lean budget, seeking to ensure budgeted increases are justified. 2023 budgets for most departments were in the range of 97-99% expended. Our 2024 overall budget reflects a 2.75% increase, primarily due to operating costs. As always, we seek to balance our current needs with projected capital outlays for the upcoming years. The recent adoption of a semi-annual tax billing cycle has profoundly improved our cash flow and reduced the town's reliance on debt to fund town services. In addition, this transition has generated modest revenues that ultimately benefit our taxpayers. We are very grateful for the support of the Quimby Trustees and their ongoing generosity to the town.

The following is a brief overview of each Article listed in the Town Warrant.

ARTICLES 1 & 2: Articles 1 and 2 in the Town Warrant will be decided by ballot on Tuesday, March 12th at Town Hall. Voting hours are 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. All other Articles contained in the Warrant will be considered at the Deliberative Session on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at the Sandwich Elementary School at 10:00 A.M.

ARTICLE 2: The following is an explanation of the substantive changes to Sandwich's zoning ordinance proposed by the Planning Board.

Questions 1 and 2: These proposals seek to revise the existing Groundwater Protection Overlay District provisions for consistency with regulations of the NH Department of Environmental Services.

Questions 3 and 4: The zoning ordinance currently restricts Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to a maximum size of 1000 square feet. The proposals increase the maximum size to the greater of (i) 1,000 square feet or (ii) 50 percent of the size of the principal single-family dwelling on the property but in no event larger than 1,500 square feet.

The proposals further provide that (i) ADUs are only allowed on lots on which the only other residential structure is a single-family dwelling and (ii) either the single-family dwelling or the ADU must be exclusively used by (rather than being the primary residence of) the property owner.

Questions 9, 10, 11, 14 and 15: The zoning ordinance currently allows two family dwellings in all districts permitting residences (except the Shoreland Overlay District) under the provisions governing multiple unit dwellings. These amendments permit conversions of existing single-family dwellings into two-family dwellings and new two-family dwellings in all districts permitting residences (except the Shoreland Overlay District) under the provisions governing single-family dwellings. The primary differences between multiple unit and single-family dwelling regulations are minimum lot sizes and setbacks.

The proposals are separated for voting with respect to the Rural/Residential Zoning District (Question 9), Village Zoning District (Question 10), Historic Overlay District (Question 11), steep slopes (Question 14) and cluster subdivisions (Question 15).

Question 12: The zoning ordinance currently requires a larger minimum lot size for any parcel having slopes of 15% or more, but does not specify the amount of steep slopes required to trigger such an increase. The proposal clarifies that the larger minimum lot size is triggered only if 60% or more of the parcel has a slope of 15% or more.

The remaining amendments (Questions 5, 6, 7, 8) propose non-substantive changes to clarify ambiguous and inconsistent definitions and references in the zoning ordinance and to require Planning Board review of site plans for the development of multiple unit structures (Question 13).

ARTICLE 3: The Energy Committee has spent over a year working to develop a plan for a municipally owned photovoltaic array. The Energy Committee recommends construction of a 120 Kwh array adjacent to the town's leach field (Squam Lake Road). As proposed, the Board would seek to finance the project with a 10-year loan from the Community Development Finance Authority Clean Energy Fund. The Clean Energy Fund provides resources for municipalities, businesses, and nonprofits to invest in renewable energy projects. The Town would be subject to a 4.5% fixed interest rate. Any future grants, donations, or rebates obtained would be used to offset loan costs. Due to the scale of debt required (over \$100K), this vote requires 3/5 majority vote by ballot.

ARTICLE 4: General article notifying of any changes to Town Officer wages. In 2024, we propose the addition of a stipend for our Welfare Administrator.

ARTICLE 5: The General Government section increases were largely due to insurance fees and our upcoming assessment revaluation cycle. In 2024, we made the decision to move property and liability insurance premiums from departmental budgets into one budget line; the historical process of allocating departmental portions of the premium was imperfect, and arguably this budget area is distinct from the general operations of each department. This shift in accounting is responsible for approximately \$35,000 of the proposed increase. The Administrative and Town Clerk/Tax Collector budgets were increased 1% and 7% respectively. With several elections in 2024, we anticipate more hours for our employees and included a 2% wage adjustment. The Town Building budget was slightly reduced as we expect continued vacancy of our contractor position but hope to fill this role either internally or with an outside vendor. Our legal retainer increased as we near the resolution of several outstanding cases. Debt service continues for our Town Hall Building Renovation bond (bond ends in 2027) and the Young Mountain Road and Schoolhouse Road Bridge Projects (bond ends in 2032). Our welfare budget was modestly decreased due to reduced demand over the last few years; at the same time, housing is the most consistent challenge clients face. Short-term housing is extremely expensive - if available and is often unavailable locally. Also included is our proposed budget to facilitate professional support to study employee compensation and conduct an organizational assessment. As our population increases, we

are keenly focused on ensuring our organizational structure is aligned to best meet the town's needs for services while effectively utilizing our limited budget resources.

ARTICLE 6: The Police Department's operating budget increased by 5.3% from 2023 due primarily to increased personnel expenses. In addition to compensation adjustments for our full-time officers and part-time administrative assistant, the 2024 budget includes a compensation increase for our part-time officers to remain competitive with neighboring communities. The 2024 budget also includes one additional shift per week for coverage by our part-time officers. Our part-time (specials) officers are typically utilized when one of our full-time officers is off duty (paid time off, etc.). We plan to use an outside instructor to continue the LEAD program taught at Sandwich Central School which will be funded by the Robert Ramirez Trust.

ARTICLE 7: The Highway Department excavator (2009) is scheduled for replacement this year. We purchased this equipment in 2014 as a used, former rental unit; this will be traded in to offset the cost of purchase for a new excavator. Additionally, a one-time highway block grant from the State of New Hampshire last year will offset purchase costs as the equipment is utilized for road maintenance. An excavator is readily available pending Town Meeting approval. Our Road Agent researched used equipment options but due to the nature of the used equipment market, available incentives, and warranties, we are seeking to purchase a new excavator.

ARTICLE 8: The Highway Department Ford 550 is a smaller truck than the rest of our fleet. We intend to trade in or sell our existing truck to offset the purchase cost. The 550 is a dump truck/plow truck used to plow more narrow town roads, transfer station and parking lots. It's also used to haul some of our smaller equipment.

ARTICLE 9: Ambulance prices for 2024 will increase according to our contract. Contract prices are formulated based upon valuation and call usage as a percentage of total calls among Moultonborough, Center Harbor, Meredith and Sandwich. In addition to regular ambulance service, this inter-municipal agreement provides for 24/7 paramedic coverage out of Moultonborough. This contract does not cover an individual's costs for ambulance services. Our 2023 budget was underspent due to a reduction in available paramedics to meet our contractual requirement for additional paramedic coverage as an auxiliary service. The 2024 budget includes this surcharge as Stewart's hopes to fill its paramedic vacancies.

ARTICLE 10: We are fortunate to have an active departmental roster and due to increased participation by members, our department budget was nearly overspent in 2023. The Fire Department's operating budget is up by 17% from 2023 due primarily to personnel costs and insurance. Our worker's compensation insurance nearly doubled in cost and is responsible for 7% of the total increase. The 2024 budget includes compensation adjustment for our Fire Chief, additional resources for existing members and compensation of standby pay to ensure coverage for time our Fire Chief is off-duty and/or unavailable. Our Fire Chief is otherwise on-call 24/7 as the only full-time member of the Department. Additionally, we've included resources for the Chief to offer two shifts per week of part-time detail work for existing

members. Included within this budget are the costs for the special detail at the Sandwich Fair (\$5,275), which are offset in full by the Sandwich Fair Association.

ARTICLE 11: The Highway Department operating budget has decreased by 6% from 2023 when you factor in outlay for pavement in 2023. For capital outlay, our 2024 focus will be gravel road improvements as opposed to paving. We are now fully staffed after a 3-month vacancy in 2023. Our 2023 budget was underspent but likely would've been fully expended if fully staffed. Increased expenses include personnel/benefits and anticipated training for one of our drivers to obtain CDL certification. The cost for vehicle repair and maintenance has also increased, though we are fortunate that many repairs are done in-house.

ARTICLE 12: Upper Road bridge railings have been on our capital improvement plan for several years but delayed due to increased paving costs and other capital needs. In 2024 we propose replacement of the railings with offset from a one-time highway block grant restricted to use for bridge maintenance/repair.

ARTICLE 13: This Article is to raise and appropriate funds for the sixth year's lease payment for the two dump trucks acquired in 2019.

ARTICLE 14: The Transfer Station operating budget reflects an 11% increase mostly due to increased costs for waste removal; the 2023 budget was overspent due to an unanticipated surge in waste removal fees. Due to volatility in the recycling market, recycling costs spiked considerably. In addition to variable costs based upon tonnage, we have a built-in 3.5% increase in fees per our multi-year contract with Waste Management. We are fortunate to have a multi-year contract as many vendors have dramatically increased costs and/or are unwilling to undertake new contracts. Landfill monitoring has also significantly increased due to reporting/monitoring requirements. Several monitoring requirements are cyclical and not required annually, however 2024 is a year with additional sampling and reporting required.

ARTICLES 15 & 16: These Articles are submitted on behalf of the Sewer Commissioners and cover their operating expenses and Capital Reserve deposit. These monies are derived from sewer user fees and have no impact on the tax rate.

ARTICLE 17: This article includes the Parks and Recreation Department, Old Home Week, 4th of July and Memorial Day celebrations. Personnel costs, sanitation facilities, winter ski program and supply costs have increased within the Parks & Recreation budget. The Town is very grateful to the Quimby Trustees for their continued support of these programs and the Parks and Recreation Department. Overall, this budget reflects an 8% increase from 2023.

ARTICLE 18: This article is for ongoing maintenance of the Quimby Field. Quimby Field is owned by the Alfred Quimby Fund and made available for use to by the public/for parks and recreation programs. The Quimby Trustees have generously offered to continue funding this maintenance.

ARTICLE 19: The Remick Park Advisory Committee has spent more than a year assessing existing conditions and planning for improvements at Remick Park in North Sandwich. Approximately \$7,000 will be used to address existing safety and ADA compliance issues. The remainder will be used to purchase and install a new playground suitable for ages 5-12. We are thankful for the Quimby Fund's generous support in contributing \$27,000 to this project. We also anticipate future park improvements as this is a multi-year, phased project.

ARTICLE 20: There are two components to the Groundskeeping expenditure: General Groundskeeping (around Town buildings and other Town properties) and Roadside Snow Removal to provide downtown parking along Main and Maple Streets. These are contracted services.

ARTICLE 21: The Town's Forest Account will pay for expenses related to the maintenance and improvement of the Town's Meadow Brook property; specifically, mowing a small section of existing fields and encouraging/introducing pollinator plants.

ARTICLE 22: This appropriation is used to support the Conservation Commission, assist with the funding of Five Days of Sandwich (a three-week summer program for children ages 7-14), and contribute to the Green Mountain Conservation Group (GMCG) toward their annual river testing. The Coolidge Conservation Trust assists the Town in funding these endeavors, as do camper fees and general taxation.

ARTICLE 23: The Selectmen propose funding \$105,671 of the library's operating budget; this reflects a 2% increase from last year's request. The balance of the library budget is derived from income from the Wentworth Trust and private donations.

ARTICLE 24: The Selectmen continue to prioritize funding of the Town's Capital Reserves and Expendable Trusts to save for future projects or purchases, however this area represents our sharpest decrease in the 2024 budget. The Town has made several significant capital expenditures over the last three years: grader, loader, and fire engine to name a few. The Selectmen continue to prioritize planning for the future replacement or renovation of the Police Building and replacement of a fire engine in the more distant future. While we purchased a new fire truck in 2023, due to the scale of replacement costs, we seek to rebuild the Fire Equipment Capital Reserve to position the town favorably when the next engine is due for replacement. Saving for these expenditures assists the Selectmen in achieving tax rate stability particularly during years of capital cost spikes. The Selectmen actively pursue grant funds to offset most capital expenditures.

ARTICLE 25: Every five years the Town must update its hazard mitigation plan (as well as its Emergency Operations Plan). Expenses will be mostly offset by a grant via the Department of Homeland Security. Hazard Mitigation Plans assist in identifying our community's vulnerabilities and ensure FEMA assistance if a disaster occurs.

ARTICLE 26: One of the Police Department's doppler radar units (in-vehicle) is no longer functioning appropriately; the radar was a hand-me-down from the Moultonborough Police Department and is used to monitor vehicular speeding on our roads. The Alfred Quimby Fund has generously offered to pay for this expenditure.

ARTICLE 27: The Fire Department is working with the Tamworth Fire Department to apply for a joint grant to purchase portable radios. The Quimby Fund Trustees have offered to offset the Town's portion of expenses associated with the project, resulting in no tax impact.

ARTICLE 28: The Town seeks to replace a computer in the Selectmen's Office and the shared public/Supervisors of the Checklist computer in Town Hall. We anticipate increased use of the public computer with the rollout of our GIS (online tax map) system as well. In addition, we propose the replacement of our antiquated Town Hall phone system as its functionality has deteriorated considerably over the last year. The Quimby Fund has offered to offset these expenses in their entirety.

ARTICLE 29: The Elderly Exemption has not been modified since 2005. Due to the rising cost of living and anticipated spike in property assessments resulting from the 2024 revaluation, the Board seeks to raise the exemption amounts and update eligibility criteria including income and asset thresholds. Proposed increases include: \$5,000 increase to exemption on assessment amount (from \$25,000 to \$30,000); \$5,000 increase to Income Limit (from \$20,000 to \$25,000/single, from \$30,000 to \$35,000/married); \$30,000 increase to Assessment Limit (from \$50,000 to \$80,000).

ARTICLE 30: The Marjorie Thompson Trust may be used to assist the children of Sandwich with the costs of their education or other needs. This is an annual article.

ARTICLES 31 - 42: These petitioned articles require the signatures of at least twenty-five registered voters in Sandwich to be placed on the Warrant. Brief descriptions are as follows:

Community Food Center: The Community Food Center is a food pantry that serves the towns of Sandwich and Tamworth.

Tri-County Community Action Program: Community program which provides necessary services to Sandwich residents if they are financially distressed. Services include fuel and electric bill assistance, emergency shelter, and support of several food pantries.

Doris L. Benz Community Center: Our local community center that provides a gathering space for private parties, club meetings, social groups, Town government, charitable organizations, exercise, musical groups and more.

Moultonborough-Sandwich Senior Meals: The Sandwich Senior Meals program (Meals on Wheels) is run under Ossipee Concerned Citizens and provides home-delivered meals to area residents as well as hot meals served at the Benz Center and Moultonborough Lions Club.

Starting Point: A non-profit organization serving victims of domestic and sexual assault in Carroll County. Services include a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, court and hospital advocacy, and support groups and education. All services are provided at no charge.

InterLakes Community Caregivers: An organization which provides rides to medical facilities, grocery stores, and personal appointments to Sandwich residents at no charge to assist them in remaining independent and in their own homes.

Sandwich Children's Center: Since 1985, Sandwich Children's Center has provided a high-quality, affordable, early-learning experience for the children of Sandwich and surrounding communities.

Lakes Region Visiting Nurse Association: Visiting Nurse Association, providing Hospice Care, Nursing, Therapy and Aide Care to homebound residents.



Little Pond

~ Photo credit: Susan MacLeod ~