



Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary

Jan. 26, 2022

6:30 p.m.

Select Board members Present: Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston and Mitch Garnett

Others Present: Dave Williams

Wes Daniel called the Select Board/Assessor's meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Approve Summary of Jan 19, 2022: Motion to approve summary by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Sign Treasurer's Warrants dated Jan. 27, 2022:

P/R Warrant #8: \$6,103.52

A/P Vendor Warrant #9: \$23,243.62

Motion to approve by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Road Foreman Report: Written by Frank Jones Jr. and read by Wes Daniel

1/17: Holiday. Frank called Steven, David and Jason to plow; Ricky came in to learn how to sand on ice; truck off the road on Skidmore Road which messed up the sander on P200

1/18: Fixed P200 sander and replaced throttle pedal on loader; Travis Kilbreth came to look for oil leak on P200, it has a cracked front cover on the motor and one has been ordered from White & Bradstreet

1/19: Called out to sand dirt road for school bus; sanded in afternoon for snow; unplugged culverts on Fitch Road, one for ice and one filled in

1/20: Worked on P500 lights and washed off trucks; Frank got parts for P200 and checked Fitch Road culverts

CEO Report: None

Health Officer Report: None

Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report: None.

Other Agenda Items: None.

Other business: Tom Johnston spoke about the town vote to fund development of a broadband internet plan. He said the \$12,500 already is approved and in light of two grant applications being tabled, he

would like work to begin on the “roadmap” so the town knows what is needed to move forward when grant awards are announced (even if no grants are awarded).

Wes Daniel made a motion to proceed with developing a broadband internet plan, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion passes. Tom said he would get in touch with Mark Oullette from Axiom.

Motion to Adjourn by Mitch Garnett, Tom Johnston seconded; all in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

The Budget Committee meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Don Grinnell. Members present were Don, Deb Bocko, Wendy Carr, Kathy Ocean, Peg Hobbs, Jesse Casas and David Williams. Select Board members present were Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston and Mitch Garnett. Also present was Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson.

Don asked if Select Board members had any opening remarks. Tom said generally, payroll is up by 5 percent and he estimated increases to TriCounty Solid Waste Management Organization as well as Union Ambulance. He said firm numbers for both organizations should be available soon, as TriCounty mailed its budget and a meeting was scheduled to go over Union Ambulance’s budget the following day (Jan. 27).

Don said the Budget Committee would move forward with each grouping in the budget. In regard to the Assessments line, he requested an update with final numbers via email. No vote was taken on a Budget Committee recommendation.

Tom commented on Legal Fees and said there are pending cases that could return some attorney’s fees to the town. Kathy made a motion to recommend \$7,500, Jesse seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Dave asked about town report printing – under the Office Administration line -- and said he thought costs increased last year because the full list of taxpayers was included. Mary said that was true but this year, the report also will probably cost more because of expected ordinance changes.

Don asked about the increase to postage. Mary said it is because fees have gone up for certified mailings (needed for the tax lien process) as well as money order fees. Jesse asked what money orders are used for and Mary explained the cash received at the office is used to purchase money orders so it can be deposited via the check scanner.

Don also asked about replacing computer equipment. Mary said one office computer will be replaced with new, and the old office computer will go to Public Works.

Kathy made a motion to recommend \$49,494 for Office Administration, Jesse seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Dave made a motion to recommend \$33,448 for insurance, Peg seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Under the Salaries line, Don asked about the assessor's agent (Becky Adams took over for Stan Millay in October). Wes said she's in the office once a month. Tom said her contract is for \$8,500 and Select Board members increased the line to account for several additional days beyond those outlined in the contract. Jesse asked if the recommended \$10,000 is more than enough to cover and Select Board members said they do.

Don also asked about the Code Enforcement Officer position. He said early in 2021, the town was paying both Bob Temple and Corey Fortin but Wes said there was not much overlap.

Kathy noted there was no increase in pay for Select Board members, which was briefly discussed at a prior Budget Committee meeting. Dave asked if an increase this year could come from ARPA funding. Tom said that would be allowed under the rules for spending ARPA funds. Dave suggested including a raise in a future year. While the sitting Select Board members said they were happy at the current stipend, Budget Committee members noted the stipend is not based on need, but on the job. Jesse pointed out that other town employees are recommended to increase and Select Board members also should. Peg said if ARPA funds are used this year and next year's budget is strapped, it would be difficult to increase the Select Board stipends then. She said this year – with some higher-than-expected revenues – is the year to increase the stipends. Don made a motion to increase Select Board stipends by \$1,000 each, to \$7,500 annually for each Select Board member; Peg seconded. All in favor, the recommendation for \$7,500 per Select Board member per year passes.

Kathy made a motion to recommend the overall Salaries line in the amount of \$168,115, Dave seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Dave made a motion to recommend \$64,000 for FICA and Employee Health Insurance, Jesse seconded; all in favor, motion passes. Tom said an employee asked about joining Maine Public Employees Retirement System (Maine PERS) and said the cost is significant. Mary said the cost would increase 7.5 percent of payroll per employee. Tom said most current employees would see little benefit from joining PERS but it is something to consider in the future. Kathy said that years ago, Select Board members looked into setting up Simple IRAs for employees on the recommendation of the town auditor, which would provide an employer match of up to 3 percent. She said that would probably cost much less than PERS but it was voted down at Town Meeting at the time.

Under Maintenance of Town Roads, Dave asked why utilities increased. Tom said the Public Works garage ceiling is not insulated and the air flow needed to keep everything dry leads to increased heating costs. As well, the cost of propane has increased, he said. Don asked about culverts and Tom said the cost of both plastic and steel has doubled. He said Frank tried to purchase extra culverts but could only find seven. Dave asked about the increased cost for screening sand. Tom said the estimate is from the same company used this year and it does not include crushing the screenings into surface gravel. The company has increased its yardage minimum and that is reflected in the estimate. Jesse asked if that

means more sand will be screened and Tom said yes. Tom said he will look around for other options. Deb asked if the town still puts out sand for residents and Wes said about 80 yards has been used so far by residents. Deb said she heard Union stopped offering sand to residents because commercial vehicles were using it. Don said placing Jersey barriers near the sand pile could prevent that type of use but he did not think there was a problem now. Dave asked if Select Board members expect to ask to spend surplus money for roads this year (\$40,000 from surplus was approved at last year's Town Meeting) and Tom said it depends on the audit report and several other factors. He said what is recommended in the budget is what needs to be raised from taxes. Wes said the estimate for grinding and paving McDowell Road is \$240,000 so the entire road may not be done this year, or a portion may be ground and paved and the rest paved. Don said while it is not in the purview of the Budget Committee, he would like to see McDowell Road posted with a weight limit if it is paved in the hope it will cut down on heavy truck traffic.

Kathy made a motion to recommend \$462,774 for Maintenance of Town Roads, Deb seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Dave made a motion to recommend \$2,000 for General Assistance, Kathy seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Dave asked about the balance owed for fire trucks, which falls under the Public Safety line. Mary referenced last year's audit report for the figures. Jesse made a motion to recommend \$83,465 for Public Safety, Peg seconded.

Dave asked about hose testing, which increased, and how often it must be done. Tom said it must be done every 12 months.

All in favor of the motion.

Tom explained the increase to Utilities and Building Maintenance is because the generator room at the Fire Department needs a new roof, and other roof sections also will need to be replaced in the next few years. He said there was money leftover from last year's budget, and that, combined with the increase, should cover it.

Don said the town streetlights are all LEDs now, and wondered if that line could be reduced by \$500. Mitch noted CMP costs are rising. Deb asked if the proposed funding for Utilities and Building Maintenance is enough. Wes said you can't always predict maintenance costs. Dave asked about snow removal at the Town Office/Library complex. Wes said it is per storm and has been the same person for years (who is also the only bidder for the job).

Kathy made a motion to recommend \$50,500 for Utilities and Building Maintenance, Deb seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Boards and Committees is recommended at \$600 following a motion by Don, seconded by Dave; all in favor, motion passes.

Budget Committee members concurred with the Select Board recommendation of \$45,000 for roll-over accounts. Kathy made the motion, Deb seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Some adjustments were made to requests by local organizations and social services. Jesse made the motion to recommend \$30,712, Kathy seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Moving on to revenue lines, Mary said the town can only charge 4 percent interest on unpaid taxes this year based on state maximums.

Don spoke about money from two solar projects totaling about \$130,000. Jesse asked if that was all the money the town would get from the projects. Tom said the town can tax the ground, office buildings and fences but not the panels themselves. He said he has talked with Becky (assessor's agent) about proposals at the state level to reimburse towns for solar project tax revenue loss. Don said he assumed the \$130,000 will not be used to reduce taxes this year and asked Select Board members what they intended to do with that money.

Tom said they are looking at purchasing an excavator. He has two estimates, one for new and one for used (a former rental). Dave suggested looking further than local dealers. Tom said the used one – estimate provided by Kirkpatrick's Sales and Service in Union – has all of the features sought, and it's available immediately. He said going with new through a dealer would mean at least a six-month wait and the estimate he has currently does not include a trailer. The used estimate is \$80,000 including a trailer; the new estimate is \$107,000 without a trailer. Wes said he'd rather purchase a used trailer than a used excavator. Dave asked how much is spent yearly on a rented excavator currently and Tom said \$8,500. Mitch noted the new excavator includes a maintenance agreement as well.

Tom said the town is running on minimal reserves and Deb asked what the reserves are used for. Tom said to offset taxes and for emergencies during the year as needed. Peg asked what he meant by minimal and Tom said it's a percentage recommended by the auditors. For example, Tom said if the budget is \$1million, the reserve would be in the neighborhood of \$120,000.

Dave asked if there are any other articles being considered. Wes said he would like to propose taking leftover Road Maintenance funds and transferring to a Road Maintenance Equipment account.

Returning to the discussion about an excavator purchase, Kathy asked if Select Board members are considering financing or an outright purchase. Tom said there have been no direct discussions at this time. Kathy asked if the \$8,500 per year in rental costs would reduce the Road Maintenance line but Wes said that money often is taken from the LRAP funds. Tom said not renting an excavator would allow for LRAP funding to be spent on other things. Don said he would like to have some apples-to-apples

comparisons for an excavator purchase before the budget recommendations are finalized. Dave said he would like Select Board members to expand the search outside the local area.

Tom asked if he should inform the businesses that already gave him quotes that the town is looking elsewhere; and said he is concerned that the used excavator will be sold. Wes said Frank looked at the used excavator and said the rental unit probably isn't ideal for the town's planned uses.

Don suggested putting the "extra" revenues into a reserve account or something similar until a decision is made on spending it. He asked when the Budget Committee should meet again to tie up the loose ends. Wes suggested after the annual town audit is complete; Mary said auditors haven't given a firm date but she thinks they will be here around mid-February. She suggested meeting the week after the audit is done so everything is ready for the town report. Don said the budget looks to be in pretty good shape but there are still gray areas to cover. Tom said he doesn't recommend using extra revenues to cut taxes.

Don suggested putting into the Select Board write-up in the town report what the plans are for ARPA funds. He said other towns are distributing ARPA funds to employees and toward broadband projects.

Kathy asked about solar panels, which Mitch has been investigating. Mitch said Select Board members are still working on it. Tom said the plan is for that project to be net-zero in regard to the budget.

Don asked for a show of hands from those who received a phone call, text or email about the meeting from DialMyCalls (an emergency alert system being considered for purchase by the Select Board). He said there is money available in the EMA account to cover the purchase.

There was some discussion about the final budget meeting, after the annual audit is complete. Tentatively, the Budget Committee will meet again Wednesday, Feb. 23, at 7 p.m. Mary said she would let Committee members know if the audit is complete sooner and the meeting could be moved up. The town meeting is March 26.

Dave made a motion to adjourn, Peg seconded; all in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell