

Advisory Budget Committee

Minutes

November 28, 2023

This meeting was at the Barrington Town Hall with remote participation available.

Members Present: Steve Saunders, Scott Shephard, John Morris, Michael Houst and Bill Irving

Alternate Members Present: Peter Royce and Dannen Mannschreck

Others Present: Amy Doherty (remote) and Conner MacIver

Steve Saunders called the meeting to order at 4:30pm.

Steve Saunders discussed the updated changes to the budget. Primex, HealthTrust, and Strafford Regional Planning rates for 2024 have been released and updated in the budget. A few items have been suggested to be removed from the operating budget. There are some one-time expenditures in the 2024 budget that are proposed to be paid from the available ARPA funds. The total of that would be \$58,722. The other suggestion is to move 100% of the ambulance revenue to the Ambulance Revolving Fund. This would take a separate warrant article. The total operating budget reduction would be \$54,925. The group discussed the uses of ARPA funds and the current \$400,000 balance. The group discussed the current ambulance revenue and billing procedures. The group discussed interest on investments. The group supports the proposed reductions to the operating budget.

Conner MacIver asked members to consider other changes to the Operating Budget. Scott Shepard suggested going through the wage and benefit impacts on the operating budget. This information can be found on the Town's website at [2024 Wages and Benefits - Master.xlsx \(nh.gov\)](#). The Building Department additional part time employee would be covered by the increased Building Fees. The group went through the list of increases for the year.

Conner MacIver discussed the default budget with the group and how that is created. The difference between the Proposed Operating Budget and the Default Budget is \$317,000. Much of the difference is paving, new positions, and wage and benefit increases. Peter Royce asked about the 2024 estimated interest on investments. Conner MacIver said that an updated Revenue estimate will be completed at the beginning of 2024 and he expects that number to increase. Bill Irving said that he thinks the increases are reasonable even though he doesn't "like" the cost of them. John Morris said that he wouldn't have supported the added Building Department Employee if there wasn't an offsetting revenue to pay for it. The group agreed by consensus that they support the need for the operating budget as adjusted and will review the final revenue projections and tax rate impact prior to taking a recommendation vote.

Steve Saunders brought up the discussion of warrant articles. The group discussed the culvert and dam capital reserve. Scott Shepard asked about the bond request for the culvert replacements. Conner MacIver said he would suggest asking for bonding authority once for all of the projects. Bill Irving asked for an update on the Richardson Pond Dam. Conner

MacIver let the group know that no decision has been made regarding reconstruction or removal. It is still estimated that removal or replacement of the dam would cost the same. Conner MacIver let the group know that their contribution to the project would be to suggest the funding commitments that they can stand behind.

Article #: Library Bond Funding: Approximately \$3 million bond Tax Rate Impact: \$0.16 - Beginning in 2025 approximately \$290,000 repayment Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$67 on a \$425,000 property

The group discussed in general that additional details are required to formulate a final opinion. They acknowledged that the final budget and bond number are in progress and will be shared as soon as they are available. For the sake of discussion, Conner MacIver suggested that the members give a sense for their level of support pending the additional information. He also suggested that members highlight what additional information they would need to make a recommendation. Peter explained that he is a 'maybe' pending the additional details which are outstanding. He would like to see a list of what the recreation department will offer versus what the library will offer for programming. John Morris does not support the project. He states that it is removing taxable property, will increase operating costs in the future, and there will be adding renovation costs to the old space for recreation. Bill Irving suggested paying another community for memberships and not having a library in Town; he supports regionalization discussions for police and fire as well. The group asked for year to date utilization data to better understand if the growth of utilization is continuing. Steve Saunders wants to ask the library how many linear feet of shelf space they currently have versus what they will have (organized by category). He also feels the library programs do not benefit the whole town and he doesn't think the town should have to pay for it (favoring user fees instead). Scott Shepard feels this is the last realistic way to get a new library and the recreation department will benefit too. Scott Shepard supports the proposal. Michael Houst needs a firm cost. There is a possibility that the ABC will not support this proposal. Conner MacIver will pass along the questions to the departments and get the answers back to the ABC.

Article #: Community Center Improvements – Refundable Loan: \$1,650,000 (\$1,000,000 grant, \$150,000 from Recreation Revolving Fund, Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$0 on a \$425,000 property

The group consensus is to remove the \$500,000 bond and they support it.

Article #: Operating Budget Funding: \$9,119,310 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.27 – Likely to be reduced with updated revenue and budget reductions Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$115 on a \$425,000 property

Article #: Establish Town Center Tax Increment Financing District Funding: \$1.3 million Tax Rate Impact: None – Tax Increment Financing; deferred tax base expansion Average Home Tax Bill Increase: N/A

The group will defer their decision until there is more information. Conner MacIver suggested doing a shorter term TIF district (~5-8 years). The group would potentially support the shorter term.

Article #: Bridge and Culvert Capital Reserve - \$300,000 Funding: \$300,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.16 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$69 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends \$50,000.

Article #: Highway Heavy Equipment Capital Reserve - \$300,000 Funding: \$300,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.16 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$69 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Old Settlers Road Bridge Project – Local 20% - \$220,000 Funding: \$220,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.12 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$21 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Richardson Pond Dam Reconstruction Funding - \$200,000 Funding: \$200,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.11 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$46 on a \$425,000 property

John Morris would suggest contributing money towards the removal of the dam and none towards reconstruction. Bill Irving would like the dam removed or to let it fail on its own. Scott Shepard prefers reconstruction. The group agrees to contribute none toward reconstruction and some towards removal.

Article #: Dam Repair/Engineering/Replacement Capital Reserve - \$200,000 Funding: \$200,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.11 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$46 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Public Safety Building Design and Impact Fee Study - \$150,000 Funding: \$150,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.08 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$35 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Paving and Related Road Work Non-Lapsing Article - \$150,000 Funding: \$150,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.08 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$35 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Fire Truck Capital Reserve - \$100,000 Funding: \$100,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.05 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$23 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Emergency Communications Upgrades Capital Reserve - \$50,000 Funding: \$50,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.03 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$12 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Police Equipment Capital Reserve - \$50,000 Funding: \$50,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.03 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$12 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Transfer Station and Recycling Center Capital Reserve - \$25,000 Funding: \$25,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.01 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$6 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Fire and Rescue Equipment Capital Reserve - \$10,000 Funding: \$10,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.01 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$2 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Library Technology Capital Reserve - \$3,000 Funding: \$3,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.01 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$1 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Article #: Highway/Transfer Collective Bargaining Agreement Funding: \$25,000 Tax Rate Impact: \$0.01 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$6 on a \$425,000 property

The group will defer their recommendation until there is more information in December.

Article #: Transfer Station and Recycling Center Special Revenue Fund Funding: Maintains \$225,000 in General Fund Revenue Tax Rate Impact: Defers additional revenue for utilization when rates double in 2027 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: N/A

The group recommends.

Article #: Fire/Ambulance Revolving Fund – Deposit 100% of Revenue Funding: Moves ~\$80,000 of revenue from General Fund to Ambulance Revolving Fund Tax Rate Impact: \$0.04 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$18 on a \$425,000 property

The group recommends.

Unassigned Fund Balance Anticipated to be Available to Buy Down Taxes in 2024 At tax rate setting in 2024, the Town is anticipated to holding \$5,340,191 in unassigned fund balance which represents 14.6% of the regular general fund operating expenditures. This is approximately \$750,000 in excess of the 12.5% midpoint of the recommended range. Consistent with utilization in 2023, the Select Board anticipates using approximately \$750,000 to reduce taxes in 2024. The following represents the impact of that contribution on the tax rate. Funding: -\$750,000 Tax Rate Impact: -\$0.41 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: -\$173 on a \$425,000 property

Tax Rate Impact if All Warrant Articles Pass Funding: \$1,453,000 (\$2,203,000 - \$750,000) Tax Rate Impact: \$0.79 Average Home Tax Bill Increase: \$335 on a \$425,000 property

The group discussed the funding sources and agreed to take the same approach as last year to put all warrant articles to the tax rate and use unassigned fund balance to buy down the tax rate.

On December 12th the Select Board has scheduled a strategic planning meeting to strategize how the Selectboard will present the budget to the community.

Meeting adjourned at 6:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Amy Doherty