

ELIOT BUDGET COMMITTEE MINUTES  
SEPTEMBER 24, 2013

PRESENT: Rebecca Davis, William Jacques, Phil Lytle, Donna Murphy, Edward Strong  
ABSENT: Rosanne Adams, Robert Fisher

Meeting opened at 6:37 PM.

BUSINESS

Approval of minutes was postponed until the next Budget Committee meeting.

This meeting was originally called to allow Budget Committee discussion of the 2014-2015 Budget Request letter to department heads. This annual letter is normally signed by the chairman of the Board of Selectmen and the chairman of the Budget Committee. The chairman of the Budget Committee elected not to sign the letter until it had been reviewed and approved by the Budget Committee, primarily because there were instructions in the letter that did not match goals that the Budget Committee had set during its meeting on September 10, 2013. The letter was sent to department heads without the signature of the Budget Committee chairman.

A draft letter, from the Budget Committee to department heads, was presented which outlined Budget Committee goals and expectations for the budget year. The committee was requested to review and revise the letter so it could be submitted at the Board of Selectmen's meeting on the upcoming Thursday. All agreed on this course of action. Department heads will be requested to start with last year's budget, after LD1 cuts, and justify all increases over that amount. They must also provide more detail on budget line items. No more than three budget revisions should be submitted during the budget season.

The following topics were also discussed during the evening:

1. The new report the Budget Committee has been receiving, A/P Warrant, is helpful, because it shows the checks issued for a given period. However, more detail is desirable. The chairman will ask if there is another report that contains more detail about what was purchased with each check.
2. Concern was expressed that taxpayers will lose control of a major portion of the budget because of union contracts. It was determined that the bottom-line total for wages and fringe benefits will still be voted on and can be reduced. The result could mean shorter work weeks or possible layoffs.
3. It was suggested that the Town Charter could be written to allow taxpayers to vote approval of union contracts.
4. Although the first department budgets will not be ready by November 1, 2013, the Budget Committee will schedule meetings with department heads in November and December in order to discuss preliminary budget questions prior to joint meetings with the Board of Selectmen.
5. Some members of the Budget Committee believe that joint meetings with the Board of Selectmen are better than separate meetings so that both groups hear the same information from department heads. This concern can be reduced by the fact that (1) meetings are video taped and can be referred to if there is a question or conflict, and (2) members of the Board of Selectmen are always welcome to attend meetings held by the Budget Committee. The Board of Selectmen work more closely with department heads throughout the year; the Budget Committee would like the opportunity to talk with department heads about their budgets.
6. It was agreed that joint meetings with the Board of Selectmen are not entirely comfortable for the Budget

Committee. Discussion is directed by the chairman of the Board of Selectmen, and Budget Committee seats are necessarily arranged at a lower level table in the audience area. It demonstrates unequal footing.

7. A comment was made that the number of written questions and meetings with department heads could be reduced if department heads provided more detail with their budget requests. This issue arises every year. A sample Kittery Highway Department budget was provided last year as a good example of budget detail, but it was largely ignored.
8. It is very important that the Budget Committee document all questions, answers and research throughout the budget season so that recommendations can be substantiated at the Annual Town Meeting.
9. The Budget Committee Handout at the last Town Meeting has been praised by many of the residents who attended.
10. One member expressed concern that \$55,000 would have been appropriated for the ambulance contract even though the amount was reduced to \$0 by the new ambulance company. The new ambulance contract had been signed prior to the Town Meeting, and the amount for the service should have been reduced by the Board of Selectmen.
11. Discussion ensued over the possibility of presenting budgets on a referendum (secret ballot) instead of holding a vote on the open floor of Town Meeting. A Town Charter could make it possible to give voters a choice between two budgets on a referendum: one developed by the Board of Selectmen and one developed by the Budget Committee. It is likely that more residents would turn out for a referendum vote, rather than a five-hour Town Meeting in June, when many are away at graduations and weddings.
12. The fact that Eliot's property taxes have doubled in the past decade is a matter of concern.
13. One member expressed a desire to have Budget Committee meetings start at 6:00 pm instead of 6:30 pm. It will be discussed at a future meeting.

The next Budget Committee meeting will be held on October 8, 2013.

Meeting closed at 7:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Davis

Rebecca Davis, Secretary

Approved by,

Rebecca Davis

Rebecca Davis, Chairman

10/29/13

Date