

Town of Eliot

Budget Committee Meeting

January 26, 2022

Call to Order:

- The meeting was called to order @ 5:00 PM by the Chair.

Budget Committee Members: Donna Murphy, Brad Hughes, Denny Lentz, Ed Strong, Diane Holt, Jean Hardy, and Reggie Fowler (joined at 5:10 PM). Ed Strong, Diane Holt, Jean Hardy and Reggie Fowler attended via Zoom.

Public Comment: No members of the public were in attendance; no one joined via Zoom during the meeting nor did anyone call in during the meeting.

Approval of Minutes:

- The minutes of the January 19, 2022 meeting were reviewed. Brad had made changes to the minutes he previously sent based on comments from Diane. Denny motioned to accept the minutes as amended, seconded by Ed. Motion carried by a 6-0 roll call vote.

Budget Review:

- Brad opened the discussion with questions he had concerning several **Capital Improvements** items in Tab 4 of the budget. First, he explained that last year he and Jim Tessier had modified the CIP worksheets, and those changes included projecting out CIP costs two years beyond the budget year. He noted that this year's budget, as projected last year, had paving costs at \$500,000, and other CIP items at \$503,410. The current Town Manager budget for this year is \$1,000,000 for paving and \$347,000 for other CIP items. The first question here is why is paving at \$1,000,000? We have had a plan in place for several years where \$500,000 each year was considered sufficient to maintain Eliot roads in very good shape. Denny also noted that we have received a listing of paving projects each year, with their expected costs, and we should ask for that for this year as well.
- Brad then noted that in last year's budgets there were several items that could be considered maintenance projects, but were in the CIP listing. CSD for example, had \$37,000 in maintenance projects budgeted for this year, but they are not in the Town Manager's plan. Nor are they showing as maintenance projects in the CSD budget (or any other budget). Another such item was labeled Records Retention, for \$10,000. This also is not addressed in the current Town Manager budget. These CSD projects are important, since avoiding maintenance on these facilities would likely prove more expensive as time passed. We need to ask the Town Manager to address this issue.
- Brad then suggested we inquire as to whether the Public Safety boat was purchased last year and whether \$132,000 was drawn from TIF funds for the new fire truck. Donna was informed the boat was purchased, but agreed we need to ask.
- The Public Works budget last year had slated \$52,000 be put in reserve this year for snow plow truck replacement, and an additional \$25,000 be put in reserve this year for pickup trucks with plow replacement. Neither item is in this budget. What is the plan for these items?
- The police cruiser purchase for this year was estimated at \$48,000, but the current budget shows \$56,000, and we should ask what caused the increase?

- The Transfer Station, in last year's budget, had a Lease/Purchase for a Kenworth Roll-Off, and the projection included \$20,100 to be spent in this year's budget, but the item is not in CIP this year. Brad believes this is an existing lease/purchase and should be in the CIP plan, but it is not. What is the resolution to this?
- And finally, there has been discussion of replacement of compactors and other equipment at the Transfer Station. There is no provision for this in the current budget. What is the long-term plan for this?
- The conversation then moved to **Public Safety** (Tab 9). Ed wanted to know why the cost of Streetlights (10-20-10-55) has not been reduced. We changed all streetlights to LED technology, and he expected the cost to decrease. The budget is actually increased by \$2,500 over last year. Donna wants to ask why the Animal Control Officer Cell Phone (no G/L number) is budgeted for \$1,200 when there has not been a budget for this in the past.
- The budget for **Public Works** (Tab 10) generated two questions. First, there is a budget for Computer Repairs/Maintenance (20-01-24-30) of \$3,600. There has been nothing budgeted for this item in the past several years. Why? Secondly, the Master Wage sheet shows a 2% increase in wages for union employees, but the department budget worksheet does not reflect any increases. An explanation will be asked for. Also, what is the status of the contract negotiations?
- There were no comments/questions of the **Winter Roads** nor of the **Roads and Bridges** budgets under Tab 10.
- Under **Summer Maintenance** (Tab 10) it was noted that the budget for Grounds Repair/Maintenance (20-10-24-95) was reduced by \$2,000. Please explain the reduction.
- There was some discussion about the **Reserves** budget (Tab 11). Included in the budget is a contribution to Wage Reserve in the amount of \$190,421. We need to ask for the detail behind this amount. Ed suggested we also request a listing of all Reserve accounts and their balances at 12/31/2021.
- No comments or questions arose from the **Stormwater** budget in Tab 12.
- Under **Town Committees** (Tab 13), Donna wants to ask for the budget requests of all Committees who requested and are budgeted monies in this budget. Brad noted that the Planning Board (05-05-50-45) has a \$5,000 increase in its budget, and wants to know what the increase is for? And lastly, he wants to know why the Bicentennial Committee has a budget when it really should be dissolved as a committee.
- The conversation then moved to **Outside Agencies** (Tab 13). Donna wants to see the detail request for all outside agencies that are budgeted to receive funds. Ed asked why the Historic Society request increased \$1,000.
- The **Transfer Station** (Tab 14) budget generated several questions. Ed focused on salary and wage increase for the union employees (20-25-01-05), which is showing a \$14,967 increase (not even considering payroll taxes and retirement costs). Included in this discussion was whether the individual who was budgeted out in last year's election is included again in this budget. Since it is unclear, and since there seems to be a discrepancy between the Master Wage and Benefit Worksheet and the department worksheets as to employees being paid in this department, we need to ask for a list of individuals who are in this budget. Donna asked if anyone had actually compared the Master Wage and Benefit Worksheet with the individual budgets to make sure everything agreed. No one had, so Donna said she was going to make that comparison. Brad wants to know what Fill-Ins (20-25-01-01) represents? Further Brad wants to know if the increase in MSW Disposal (20-25-06-55) is because of contract provisions.

- The **William Fogg Library** (Tab 15) budget was next, but it was decided to take this up under the next agenda item, the Library MOU. Jean said that she was looking at the agenda for tomorrow's Select Board meeting and looked at the minutes from their previous meeting. In those minutes she noticed that the Fogg Library was awarded \$25,000 for the addition they have planned. Jean wondered how this was possible, and asked when they receive the money approved by the voters each year. Brad explained that they get the money on July 1 of each year, in entirety. Donna went on to explain that this \$25,000 was from Federal COVID recovery monies, of which the Town received approximately \$750,000. She noted a few other awards that were being considered as well, and urged all Committee members to watch the taped Town Hall Stream of that meeting. This is something she will address later in this meeting or at another meeting. Denny voiced disappointment that the current budget amounts, by line item, were not entered in the spreadsheet so that current amounts can be compared with prior years budgets.
- Donna brought up the COVID 19 funding approved by the voters last year. \$200,000 was approved to be spent on COVID related protection at Town Hall, but Donna was wondering whether there is a time stipulation to the funding, and she also questions where this spending has been recorded. Nothing further was decided on the matter at this time. This then ends the discussion of the FY 2022-2023 budget at this time.

William Fogg Library MOU:

- After considerable discussion the Committee agreed to have Donna send to the Town Manager the following items as soon as could be done:
 1. Our July 2020 memo to the Select Board and then Town Manager Dana Lee concerning our thoughts on an MOU with the library titled "Comment and Concerns" and dated 7/27/2020.
 2. Our letter to the Town Manager and Select Board dated 12/8/2021 concerning a ballot item for the June 2022 ballot.

Budget Committee Member Reports/Comments:

- Donna opened this by saying that the Town Charter Article 6.5 addresses budget review, and on page 17 states that documents requested from the Town Manager shall be responded to in five (5) business days. Donna pointed out that the Town Manager has been less than expedient about providing answers to our questions or providing documents requested from him, and is not meeting the five-business day rule. She issued the first request to him on 1/13/22 at 9:39 PM, asking for the Current Account Status report; the Revenue and Expense Summaries as of 12/31/21; the LD1 calculation by the Tax Assessor; and a copy of the Town Manager's budget presentation dated 1/12/22, all in electronic format. The Town Manager responded to that email on 1/20/22, but provided no documents. He said his ability to respond to our requests is hindered by the lack of personnel and the fact that he has been working from home due to medical reasons. He did say the budget presentation would be posted on the Town web site. Donna has since received the LD1 calculation.
- On January 20th at 8:27 AM Donna sent our budget questions from our meeting on the 19th.
- On January 27th at 8:35 AM Donna sent our budget questions from our meeting on the 26th. The Town Manager responded to that email at 9:20 AM that same day, informing her "we will continue to gather the requested information, if available, and post the information as it becomes available". To date nothing has been received from our questions on the budget.

- Ed opined that it was apparent to him that the Town Manager does not believe in following the Town Charter. Donna thought that to be a bit harsh, but Ed reminded her that he has not heard anything about the union negotiations since October, and now we have this developing situation. Donna added that we have met our responsibility to get our questions to him timely, but she is unsure why he is having problems meeting his responsibilities in responding timely.
- Jean pointed out that Section 3.5 of the Town Charter (Page 11) talks to what should be done in the case where the Town Manager cannot perform his duties as required. We are unsure as to how serious the “medical reasons” are, and if this provision applies, but certainly it has impacted the Town Manager’s ability to respond to our inquiries within guidelines.
- There was some discussion as to what recourse we have in this matter because, as Jean pointed out, there is no recourse in the matter if someone decides not to follow the Charter. There is a State of Maine statute that does apply, but that only provides for a \$100 per day fine. Jean also noted she believes that the Town Manager is on probation for 90 days, and, if he cannot abide by the Charter, then he may not be qualified to be Town Manager. Donna said any citizen can go before the Board and lodge complaints, but this situation is reminiscent of times before we had a town manager and it was very difficult to get information about budgets. Jean felt that there is a certain level of accountability that must be present – this is not our money, it is the taxpayer’s money.
- Brad said that we, the Budget Committee, have a deadline as to when we must provide our budget recommendations to the Select Board, and, while that is still some time from now, our ability to review further budget documentation might be negatively impacted. If we cannot adequately analyze budgets so that we can make reasonable recommendations to the public in the time allotted, then, in his opinion, we must recommend the voter select the “None of the Above” option on the ballot, which reverts the budget back to last year’s approved budget. This is not what anyone wants. We need to convey the importance of this matter to the Town Manager.
- No other member had any comments or reports.

Adjournment:

- Motioned by Ed, seconded by Jean to adjourn at 6:26 PM. The motion carried by a 7-0 roll call vote. Our next meeting is scheduled for February 2, 2022 at 5:00 PM. This is a hybrid meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Murphy, Chair
Brad Hughes, Secretary

Date Approved: February 9, 2022