

Town of Eliot

Budget Committee Meeting

March 9, 2022

Call to Order:

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

Budget Committee Members: Donna Murphy, Brad Hughes, Denny Lentz, Ed Strong, Diane Holt, Jean Hardy, and Reggie Fowler. 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 March 3, 2022 meeting were reviewed. Donna noted several required changes on lines 66 (then vs the); 69, (add "that"); 167 (motioned); and 195 (number 1 vs !). Clarification was asked for on lines 107 and 143. Denny motioned to accept the minutes, and Ed seconded the motion. Motion carried by a 7-0 roll-call vote.

Additional Budget Request for \$6,600 for Cybersecurity:

- Donna opened the discussion noting that the Town Manager had emailed a request of the Budget Committee to consider a late amendment to the budget, as suggested by one of our software vendors. This request was for \$6,600 to be added to Administration general ledger account number 01-01-10-11, Software Licenses. Donna noted that if we are to vote to recommend this, we would need to first motion to reconsider our previous vote on the Administration budget.
- Brad asked where in the Town of Eliot are there 50 computers, since the quote was \$11 per month for 50 main computers. Ed suggested that this is more than likely a minimum amount the vendor will quote, that is, up to 50 computers.
- Jean said that she did some research on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) web site, and she found no mention of increased threats that DHS is aware of. She did not understand why we should be so concerned if DHS wasn't. Donna asked if DHS was also considering non-terrorist threats, such as the type more local hackers might impose. Jean noted that herein lies the problem, we get nothing but generalities from this Town Manager, why can't he be more specific in these instances? Diane asked if anyone knew when the Town last upgraded its security software, and is our security software outdated? No one knew. Ed said that most software today has some degree of built-in security.
- Brad reminded the Committee that we have expressed concern over the last three years over the seeming lack of a community approach to this area. Each department has its own software, sometimes its own vendor, and we have asked many times why a top-down approach to these needs can't be managed. Costs seem to be skyrocketing with little or no consolidating of services being considered. We simply do not have the knowledge to support this request, and it is not being provided to us.
- Ed stated that he would not want to be the one to deny this and have an attack actually occur.

- Jean said she went to Stellar's website (Stellar is the vendor), and did not see any red alerts concerning cyber-attacks there. Here again, we are lacking information. Jean asked, are there threats to businesses, local governments and individuals we are not aware of? There is nothing concrete here, and, once again, we keep digging for support instead of being given that support up front. Brad read aloud the Town Manager's email concerning this request to insure everyone knew the information given in that email.
- ED suggested we just give them the money.
- Donna then made a motion to reconsider our previous vote on the Administration budget. Denny seconded the motion. Motion carried by a roll-call vote 7-0.
- Donna then made a motion to recommend an Administration budget of \$1,406,464, and Diane seconded the motion. There was not further discussion. The motion carried by roll-call vote 5-2, with Brad and Jean casting negative votes. Brad initially abstained, but changed his vote, citing the fact that he has not been given sufficient detail to support a \$36,600 increase in this line item for Administration, and just cannot support this latest request. Jean agreed. Donna said she is also torn, and hears Brad and Jean loudly on this matter. Other also felt the same, but this is a difficult situation.

Budget Review for Any Reconsiderations Based on Additional Information:

- The Town Manager's email concerning the cyber-security request made it clear that we had all the information we are going to get, so no further discussion on this matter ensued.

Letter to Citizens of Eliot:

- Brad had prepared a document entitled "Report from the Eliot Budget Committee", which provided some background information about the Budget Committee, its goals and objectives, the process of the budget review, and our recommendations concerning the budget presented to us by the Town Manager. Donna pointed out that her review primarily focused on statements or words that could be considered biased, but also focused on clarity of presentation.
- Donna commented on a few statements in the first three paragraphs of the report, and suggested rewording of those items. For example, the words "without hesitation" were used in one sentence, and Donna felt that was perhaps an accurate description, but one could argue it was not factual.
- Once the Committee agreed on wording changes in the first section of the report, the section on Administration needed to be modified to reflect the new recommended budget after the \$6,600 request was approved, including a description of it and the voting result of the Committee on the matter. During this discussion Ed thought that the description of the TIF assessment for wages and benefits was incorrect. Brad explained the accounting treatment so that everyone was comfortable that it was presented correctly.
- The presentation in Public Works concerning the "new line item" was thought to be confusing, and it was corrected to the satisfaction of the Committee. Also, the statement that included wording that the "Committee whole heartedly expresses gratitude to the Director" was removed in its entirety.

- The discussion in the first paragraph of Capital Improvements was unclear, and Donna felt we needed to be more specific about the monies we felt should be in the budget (concerning Community Services and Public Works). This section was reworded. Also, the section concerning the Paving budget was reworded to ensure its accuracy.
- The section that discussed the William Fogg Library was also reworded so that it was clearer to the reader what the intent of the Budget Committee is on the matter.
- Jean wanted to go back to the beginning of the report again, saying she doesn't think voters understand that the Budget Committee acts independently from the Town Manager and the Select Board. She felt we need to incorporate wording of the Town Charter in this document. Many thought what Jean proposed was too wordy, and after some discussion the Committee agreed on wording to satisfy Jean's concern.
- Donna then pointed out wording in the last paragraph of the report that claimed past budgets had "no negative effect on Town operations", and she felt this could be considered subjective, and not factual. After some discussion the wording was removed and the paragraph reworded slightly.
- Jean thanked Brad for his efforts on this report. Denny asked how do we get this out to the voters. Donna explained that some copies will be made available for attendees at the Citizens Option Meeting, and that we have in our committee budget monies for a mailing. But first the Town Manager has to review the report for any bias. This statement generated some discussion about what the Town Manager can and can't do about the report, and Donna pointed out that it has been Town practice that documents such as this must be reviewed by the Town Manager for bias before being distributed to the public.
- Brad again stated he remembers that we reworded parts of this report last year before we mailed it to the public, but after the Citizens Option Meeting. He cannot, however, locate a copy of that in his files. Both Donna and Diane felt they may have that document in their files and will try to bring it to our next meeting. There was some further discussion on the logistics and timing of this mailing.

Discussion of Budget Process, Impediments and Improvements:

- Denny has asked to have this placed on the agenda for tonight, but since it was getting late Donna asked Denny if we could postpone this until our next meeting. Denny agreed to do that.

Budget Committee Member Reports and Comments:

- No Committee members had any reports or comments.
- Donna noted that our next meeting would be a regular meeting, on April 13th. We are done with the budget and can go back to a regular schedule now.
- Donna did ask the group if we should schedule a meeting on March 23rd at 5:00 PM just to have a place holder on the date and time. We may not need to have the meeting, but it is just before the Citizens Option Meeting and we may want to meet. All agreed to lock up that date and time.
- Note – at our Special meeting of March 17, 2022 it was agreed to meet on March 23, 2022.

Adjournment:

- Motioned by Ed, seconded by Diane to adjourn at 6:39 PM. The motion carried by a 7-0 roll call vote. Our next meeting is scheduled for April 13, 2022 at 5:00 PM, unless we need to meet on March 23rd. These will be hybrid meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Murphy, Chair

Brad Hughes, Secretary

Date Approved: March 23, 2022