

# Town of Eliot

## Budget Committee Meeting

### March 23, 2022

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#### **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. Ed Strong, Diane Holt, Jean Hardy and Reggie Fowler attended via Zoom.

**Public Comment:** No members of the public were in attendance at the beginning of the meeting; no one joined via Zoom during the meeting nor did anyone call in during the meeting. One person did join the meeting at Town Hall for a short time, near the end of our discussion about difficulties we encountered this year, but had no comments to make to the Committee while in attendance.

#### **Approval of Minutes:**

- The minutes of the March 9, 2022 regular meeting were reviewed. Donna noted two items that needed clarification. The first was on Line 99 concerning the statement about “negative affect” on operations; and the second was on Line 105 about the Town Manager review being policy. As to the first on Line 99, nothing was reworded as the intent was understood. The second on Line 105 Donna said it is not written policy, but seems to be standard procedure. Ed pointed out that it certainly is not required by Town Charter. Donna is not sure it is a Town requirement, but we have given our report to the Town Manager for review of bias. Denny motioned to accept the minutes as amended, and Ed seconded the motion. Motion carried by roll-call vote 7-0.
- The minutes of the special meeting on March 17, 2022 were reviewed. Line 14 was reworded to be more grammatically correct. Additionally, Line 18 was amended to be “no” versus “not”. Ed motioned to accept the minutes as amended, and Jean seconded the motion. The motion carried by roll-call vote 7-0.

#### **Letter to Citizens of Eliot for Mailing:**

- Donna opened the discussion noting that Wendy Rawski, Town Clerk, informed her that we did a combined mailing last year, that is, the Town Manager’s letter and the Budget Committee’s letter were mailed to the voters in one mailing. Brad had thought perhaps they were mailed separately, and was still unsure about when we had done one separately. Ed said he was certain that they were in a combined mailing last year. Brad acquiesced. Donna felt that it is beneficial to send the Town Manager letter and the Budget Committee letter to voters at the same time. Brad asked if it is preferable this year, given that we had serious issues with the budget process this year and we have said we want to communicate that to the voters. Denny agreed. Brad asked if it is wise to include our letter with the Town Manager’s letter in the same mailing? Ed said he would rather do a separate mailing, and Diane and Jean agreed. Donna asked for roll-call consensus on this matter. Reggie asked if there had been any problems with combined mailings in the past. Ed said no, and explained to Reggie that last year, for example, there was only one difference between the Select Board’s and the Budget Committee’s recommendations. This year we have several differences. Roll-call consensus was 7-0 to mail separately.

- Brad said that in his mind this is not being done out of spite, but because it seems appropriate to do so. Donna said she would contact Melissa Albert, Administrative Assistant, for specifics surrounding this (logistics, costs, etc.). Donna asked if we should make this a formal motion versus consensus. Brad motioned that the Budget Committee send its comments and recommendations surrounding this year's budget to the voters in a separate mailing from the Town Manager or the Select Board. Ed seconded the motion.
- Denny asked to have a discussion about this before we voted on the motion. He believed we should discuss what we are going to say in this letter to the voters because in his opinion it is important. Brad agreed, saying he would have already drafted a letter, but did not because we have not specifically agreed to what points we want to make.
- Jean voiced her opinion that the letter for the Citizens Option Meeting is well written, to the point, and very understandable. She thought maybe we could pare it down just a little. Denny agreed that the letter is excellent, but is it addressing the point? Brad said it does not address the point in his opinion. Denny agreed, saying there is something missing.
- Brad asked the group should we stir the pot, or do we leave it alone and mail the COM letter to the voters and see what happens at the polls, or do we incorporate specifics about the cumbersome process we were subjected to this year. It did not have to be this way. The Town Manager did not want to share some critical information about his budget with us, and made our job much more difficult than necessary. Brad thought we need to say something about it.
- Diane agreed that the citizens need to know how difficult this was for us. Brad reminded Diane that she has said on a couple of occasions that she does not feel as comfortable about this budget as we have in the past budgets, that sometimes it seemed we were acting on gut feeling. Jean said no, not gut feeling. This group is the Town brain trust, and its knowledge of Town matters and finances goes back years, and that was invaluable this year. The Town Manager does not have that, in her opinion, and if he had met with the Budget Committee early on, he might have seen things differently. Brad noted that he said he met with department heads, the library and school officials, and many of the other Town committees. But he did not meet with the Budget Committee. The Town Manager seemingly had formed a negative opinion of the Budget Committee without having met with it. He was twice invited to our meetings. Ed and Diane agreed. Jean asked if there were department heads that had a negative view of the Budget Committee. Brad said there are those that do because they feel we never approve anything. Donna said, yes, in spite of the fact that it was the Budget Committee that recommended our police cruiser purchasing system, and recommended increased stipends for firemen, and recommended doing the annual Town book in house, for example. Given the facts surrounding budget requests we largely support what is requested. This year we did not support budget requests because the Town Manager refused to give us information. Jean said she was annoyed that we had to read responses to our questions on line. Donna agreed, saying that he did not give us the courtesy of sending his answers directly to us, and that speaks to his character. Ed noted that he has worked for as many as 15 different town managers, and this one has an attitude like no other he has seen. Ed said further that after his conversation with the Town Manager about the union negotiation status, that he formed an opinion the Town Manager does not want anyone telling him what to do, and does not want input from anyone. Donna asked if he (the TM) understands the Town Manager/Select Board form of government. Ed believes the Town Manager thinks he runs the show and does not want to be questioned. Jean said in her world lives are saved by asking questions, and Donna said it is the same in hers.

- Donna then asked Brad if he could have a draft letter available for our next meeting on April 13<sup>th</sup>. Brad said he could, and would incorporate our comments tonight into that letter.
- Denny asked to summarize, noting the following:
  1. The overall budget process was fractured this year.
  2. Consideration of budget items was difficult because information was withheld.
  3. Detailed questions about budget items were answered in general terms, or not at all.
  4. Jean added the lack of participation in the contract negotiations with the Fire Department, that the Negotiation Committee was shut out of the process. She felt we need to tie in the Town Charter, Chapter 6 wording in our letter.
  5. Denny added the fact that we were not allowed to meet with department heads or the Town Manager directly.
- This ended the discussion of the letter for the time being. Brad will have a draft for our next meeting.

#### **Letter for the Town Book:**

- Donna had one correction to the letter, that being in the second to last paragraph, third line. The amount has too many characters (\$73,5690 should be \$73,590). Ed motioned to accept the letter as amended, and Jean seconded the motion. The motion carried by roll-call vote 7-0.

#### **Letter to Citizens of Eliot for Mailing (revisited):**

- Denny asked to be heard before the next topic was addressed. He said that we failed to vote on the motion made concerning the separate mailing of the letter to the citizens about the budget. He was correct. Donna conducted a roll-call vote, and the motion carried 7-0.

#### **Discussion of Budget Process - Improvements/Impediments:**

- Ed said that we should postpone this discussion until this plays out and then address the topic. Jean said she was not sure what this is all about, and after Donna explained Jean agreed. All agreed to push this to a later meeting, perhaps June.

#### **Budget Committee Member Reports and Comments:**

- Donna noted that the Citizens Option Meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 23, 2022 at 6:00 at the Marshwood Middle School. She is not certain we have been invited, nor is she certain we will have a separate table as we have had in past years. Donna has asked for clarification of these matters from Wendy and will let us know when she is informed.
- Denny asked if the Select Board has voted on the budget. Brad said they had and agreed with the Town Manager's proposed budget in its entirety. Denny said that this is another point for our letter – we were not scheduled to meet with the Select Board to go over our recommendations as is customary.
- Brad asked Donna if she has heard from anyone about our request to have an exploratory question put on the June ballot concerning the library MOU. She has not, and Brad said this is another item for our letter.
- Jean wanted to also add the fact that the Town Manager referred to this committee as a “sub-committee” and it served in “an advisory capacity”, while the Town Charter says differently. Brad said this point has been

#### **Adjournment:**

- Motioned by Ed, seconded by Brad to adjourn at 5:43 PM. The motion carried by a 7-0 roll call vote. Our next meeting is scheduled for April 13, 2022 at 5:00 PM. This will be a hybrid meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

*Donna Murphy*, Chair  
*Brad Hughes*, Secretary

Date Approved: April 13, 2022