

**Town of Eliot
Budget Committee Meeting
August 10, 2022**

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by the Chair, Donna Murphy.

It is noted there were technical difficulties with the videotaping.

Budget Committee Members: Donna Murphy, Ed Strong, Diane Holt, Jean Hardy, Reggie Fowler, Jeffrey Leathe, and Gene Wypyski.

Public Comment:

- None

Approval of Minutes, July 13, 2022:

- Minutes of the July 13, 2022, regular meeting were reviewed. Motion by Ed, second by Diane to approve as amended. The motion carried by a 7-0 roll call vote.

Use of non-public LISTSERVs to discuss Budget Committee business.

- Mr. Wypyski expressed concerns with the Budget Committee conducting meetings and business on list servs such as Eliot Online. Mr. Wypyski expressed concerns about the perception the Budget Committee members are posting on a list serve and there is a public perception with the Budget Committee conducting business in a public forum.
- Ms. Murphy explained there is no violation and that posting online is not a public meeting.

Town of Eliot Assessor

- Mr. Brent Martin, Town of Eliot Assessor, gave a briefing to the Budget Committee on the recently passed State of Maine Legislation on the Property Tax Stabilization for Senior Citizens. Mr. Martin explained the State program is being offered to certain senior citizen permanent residents, aged 65 and older, allowing a Town to stabilize, or fix, the property tax amount on their primary homestead. Mr. Martin stated the correct term is stabilization and not frozen property tax as a resident going to a new municipality the new tax is lower than the stabilized tax and that is the new stabilized tax. Mr. Martin explained whatever property tax bill a person receives this year, older seniors deferred maintenance on a home is potentially a different value in prior years, going into next April, he is trying to get the lower tax bill stabilized so seniors can take full advantage of this program. Mr. Martin stated this is a long-term program. Mr. Martin stressed the owner of a property must have owned a Maine homestead for at least ten years anywhere throughout Maine. Mr. Martin stated if the property has a homestead exemption with joint ownership, only one owner needs to qualify for the program to participate. No income or asset limitations are needed to qualify.

Mr. Martin stressed this is a new program, and in the future this program can change. As of now, Mr. Martin stated the program requires senior citizens to fill out a form every year. For now, Mr. Martin stated, when in doubt, fill it out.

Ms. Murphy asked if the Town of Eliot is reaching out to older seniors who may not have internet connections. Mr. Martin responded and stated the Town expects to add a message in tax bills to reach as many people as possible.

Ms. Hardy asked general questions and also asked if the state sees this as a shared exemption with the towns. Mr. Martin stated no, the state is picking up the difference right now and it is not a waiver. Mr. Martin explained exemption and his thoughts of why it is not an exemption. Ms. Hardy also asked about filing every year, considering this program is for the elderly. Mr. Martin explained how the Town can make efforts to assist the elderly. He also explained if one person is 68 and the other 63, and the 68 year old dies, the 63 year now get taxed at the higher rate until they turn 65.

Mr. Wypyski asked what were the Stabilization program requirements. Mr. Martin gave the example of age 65, no income, current homestead. There are some gray areas. The applicant must be 65. Mr. Wypyski, asked about long term project. Mr. Martin explained the program further. Mr. Martin FY 24 tax bill is when the program begins. The tax bill for November 23 is the baseline for the stabilization. Mr. Strong asked if the homestead exemption has to have been held for ten years. Mr. Martin explained if you had one year in Eliot 7 years in Sanford, and 7 years in Acton, it is the cumulative homestead exemption, not sequential 10 years that count. Mr. Strong asked if he goes to Florida in the winter but claims a homestead in Eliot and pays taxes in Maine would this affect this program. Mr. Martin stated if file income here, permanent resident then you are ok.

Budget Committee Member Reports and Comments:

- Mr. Strong no report or comments.
- Mr. Fowler no report or comments
- Ms. Hardy had a comment concerning what the final Town meeting results were or what money was approved.
- Ms. Murphy stated she would be seeking income and expense reports as the Budget Committee had been receiving these.
- Ms. Holt stated she had attended the Select Board meeting in the 14th, and the Town Manager had arranged for \$1200.00 training with a college for professional development. She also stated the Town Manager is moving to performance-based appraisals/There was a discussion on performance-based appraisals with incentives for employees. She talked about the new Town hall. She stated the estimate is four million dollars for the design.
- Mr. Wypyski made a presentation and commented on last meeting concerning unions and pay raises. Mr. Wypyski went through each department that has union membership. He stated there are not 95% of employees in the union. Ms. Hardy asked how does this information apply to the Budget Committee? Mr. Wypyski stated there are a lot of employees not in the union and that impacts salary increases. Number 2, he stated, the salary impacts are greatly felt, we don't have the ability to impact salaries in the Town. Ms. Murphy explained the Budget Committee does not set salaries, that it is up to the Town Manager and the Select Board, and the Budget Committee has historically supported the increase in salaries. Mr. Strong asked what the percentage is in the bargaining unit. Ms. Murphy stated employees in the union are not under the scope of the Budget Committee. Mr. Wypyski reiterated 50% of employees are in a union. Mr. Strong stated Mr. Wypyski was counting part time employees who do not have the right to join a union. Mr. Leathe made a comment concerning bargaining unit pay and is this still under the purview of the Budget Committee? Ms. Murphy explained the Charter states that one member of the Budget Committee is a member of the negotiating team. Once the negotiations

are concluded the Budget Committee has no further responsibility on the contracts. Ms. Murphy further explained there were two contracts that did not have the required Budget Committee participation. Ms. Murphy stated the Budget committee has zero control. Mr. Murphy brought up the summit meetings and the dates and times of the meetings.

- Next meeting is September 14, 2022 at 5:00 pm.

Adjournment

- Motioned by Ed, seconded by Jean to adjourn at 6:26 PM. The motion carried by a 7-0 roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Murphy, Chair

Date Approved: September 14,2022

Jean Hardy, Secretary