

Town of Eliot
Budget Committee Meeting
January 5, 2023

1. Call to Order

Chair Donna Murphy called the meeting to order at 5:00pm. In attendance in person were Jeff Leathe, Donna Murphy, and Gene Wypyski, and remotely were Reggie Fowler, Jean Hardy, Diane Holt, and Ed Strong. Also in attendance was the recording secretary, Ann Lukejord. Fifteen members of the public were in attendance in person and eight were in attendance remotely.

2. Public Comment

Eliot resident Diana Parker, 22 Bayview Drive asked the Chair if she should comment now concerning the William Fogg Library or if she should wait until that Library topic comes up in the meeting agenda. The Chair gave Ms. Parker the option of speaking at this time or when the agenda item came up. Ms. Parker decided to wait until the agenda item was brought up later in the meeting.

3. Approval of the Minutes

Members shared edits to the November and December 2022 Minutes for correction. Ed motioned and Gene seconded that the November 9, 2022, Minutes be approved as amended. The motion passed in a roll-call vote 7-0. Donna motioned and Jeff seconded that the December 14, 2022, Minutes be approved as amended. The motion passed in a roll-call vote 7-0.

4. Freedom of Access Act training

Gene asked that this topic be on the agenda. He said as a member of the Maine Municipal Association he attended a Freedom of Access Act training class on December 16. He reported on the training and noted that members of the Budget Committee must take a training class in the Freedom of Access Act within 120 days of taking office. Donna agreed and said she had given that information to both new members at their first meeting in July. She will resend the information with the link. She added that members only need to take the required Freedom of Access Act training when first elected. Jeff said he has also taken the training.

5. William Fogg Library services

Gene requested this be an item on the Committee agenda. Donna said she added the item but did not have specifics on what Gene wanted to discuss. Gene said he wanted the Fogg Library on the agenda as it has lost three-fourths of its staff in the last 60 days or so. He said he is concerned about the level of service the library will be able to provide residents with such limited staff over the next remaining six months of the fiscal year. Donna said the library is a separate organization from the Town and that the Town has no oversight of the library. She added that all questions about the library need to go through the Town Manager and that the Budget Committee would be formulating questions about the library budget as part of its budget process. Gene said he would like the library trustees to talk to the Budget Committee and proposed the Budget Committee invite the library

trustees to its next meeting to ask about funding and services over the remaining of this fiscal year for the coming fiscal year.

Gene made the motion and Donna seconded that the Budget Committee invite the trustees of the William Fogg Library to the next Budget meeting. Discussion of the motion followed.

Jean agreed that the Budget Committee has no oversight of the library and that inviting the trustees to the next meeting is a step in the correct direction. She said that her concern is the budget and pointed out that on page 10 of 30 in the last paragraph it states that the library is under fixed assessments at the suggestion of the auditors. Donna asked that they hold discussion on this topic until item six on the agenda. Jean said she just wanted to bring this to the attention of people in the room and the Committee.

Members voted on the motion on the floor, and it passed by a roll-call vote of 7-0.

The Chair asked for public comment on the topic. Diana Parker said she would reserve comment until the next meeting with the library trustees. Suzanne Wade, 8 Bayview Drive, said she supports Library services and is seeking information about the library and the issues facing the library. Donna responded to Ms. Wade and those in attendance stating that issues facing the library do not fall under the Budget Committee's purview. Discussion with the Library trustees will not be on why recent events have occurred. She said she does not know where discussion about what has occurred might take place as the library is not a town department.

Nedra Sahr, 128 Stacy Lane addressed the Committee and said that according to the Maine Library Association, town residents should elect one of the three trustees. She added that since she cannot vote for a library trustee, she is not being represented, and as such, that is taxation without representation. Donna responded saying that would be an issue to bring up with the Town Manager or Select Board, not the Budget Committee.

Jean said the library has been an area of concern for the Budget Committee for many years. Donna said the Budget Committee has tried to get an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the library, but it has never happened. She said an MOU would clarify the library's budget and the Town's expectations of the library.

Donna stated: "The Budget Committee, the former Town Manager, and the Select Board were all willing to engage in MOU conversations with the Library. And so, in fact there was a meeting scheduled that was held by Zoom. There was a conversation during that meeting where the former library director who was there expressed some displeasure with the process, and later we got an email from the Library stating that they would no longer engage in the process." Donna added that the former library director and at least one trustee were present in the Zoom meeting.

Donna said that the Budget Committee also wanted to put on the ballot a yes or no question for voters to decide if they wanted the Town to support the library or not to get a clear view of what the townspeople wanted but that the Select Board did not put the question on the ballot.

Gene said that he had read Dr. William Fogg's will in which it states that one trustee must be elected by the Town. Gene said that the library can be considered a vendor and the Town its customer, and like any vendor, the library provides services to the Town. He added that the Town should not let the library tell the Town what they are going to do, as no vendor does that. Donna said there is a bit of a difference between the library and a regular vendor. She added that members want to be careful in this area as this is not the role of the Budget Committee but is an issue for the Select Board and Town Manager.

Jan Cerabona, 1999 State Road, said she did not know the library was a private library. Donna answered that it is not part of the Town government, as is the case with the Eliot Historical Society which is also not a part of Town government. Gene said it is in the Town Charter that the library and historical society are listed as social service departments. Donna clarified that they are listed as a social service agency, not a department.

Lydia Goodwin, 80 Cedar Road said the library is a 501c3 nonprofit organization and recognized as a public library and public charity by the IRS and in the State of Maine.

Jean said the trustees are good people and that the invitation to the trustees to attend the next meeting is to improve communications. Donna added that the invitation by the Budget Committee to the trustees is to ask budget-related questions and gather that information.

6. Budget Review

Gene said he received the budget on December 29, 2022, and found it to be clear, concise, and straightforward. He commended the Town Manager and the Finance Manager for the work they did and said he likes the format. He said he is more interested in revenue lines than expense ones and that he would like to drill down on the revenue side in some areas as higher revenues would lead to ending some budgetary constraints. Donna said it is important to still remember what that means for the taxpayer, increased revenues are still coming out of the taxpayers' pockets.

Ed said he sees the proposed budget as a step backward for Eliot. He added that the Committee needs to know the costs to run each department and that this budget format takes them back to where they were ten years ago. He said he cannot tell what it costs to run the police department or fire department because their total budget is not in their budget. There is no explanation for what the cost-of-living was for employees this year. There is no over/under information from the past year's budget, none of those figures are in here.

Jean demonstrated visibly the difference in budget information provided to the Committee by holding up collated pages of the current proposed budget and the three-ring binder of past budgets. She said she agrees with Ed.

Diane said she agrees about the lack of detail in the proposed budget and that the narrative provided by the Town Manager helped but that it is difficult to decipher where everything is. Diane

added that the Committee needs to get questions together to ask the Town Manager and that some of the lumping together makes it difficult to decipher.

Reggie could not comment due to an audio issue.

Donna said that in previous years, the Committee has tackled each department individually, so the public knows when the Committee is looking at which department. She agreed with Ed and added that the lack of detail in the proposed budget will lead to more questions from the Committee. She asked if anyone had thoughts as to where to start; no members offered anything. She then asked if there was an objection to starting with the Administrative section of the proposed budget.

Jean said she would like an explanation of debt on page six of thirty. Donna asked if Jean wanted to put Debt on the next agenda to email questions to the Town Manager or did Jean want to do that now. Jean responded that she does not understand how the debt is being managed. Donna asked Jean to state her concern for the record.

Jean did so: "I would like to understand how the debt is articulated in the budget. I would like to understand the short-term category which for now will be zero. If you're going to incur debt, even if it's short-term, I don't understand how that could be at zero. So, perhaps it could be explained a little bit better. And in anticipation of our (unclear) being zero, and it's being borrowed, I would like to understand if you're going to borrow something, how can you have it at zero?"

Donna will put Debt on the agenda for the next meeting under the budget review.

Jean added she would like to discuss the library and how it appears on the budget, specifically from the auditors, where it states in the documents, why the library should be moved to the fixed assessments. Ed said the library should not be part of fixed assessments but a stand-alone item, so when voting, the residents can vote on it. Donna agreed. Donna added Fixed Assessments to the next agenda.

Donna asked what one of the following the members would also like on the agenda: DPW, Police, or Admin. No one had a preference, so Donna added Administrative as it is first alphabetically.

Donna said the items for the January 11th meeting would be Debt, Fixed Assessments, Administrative, and she would like a fourth item. She said that at this point, the Committee is just looking at the different departments, and right now, they are only setting the agenda for the upcoming meeting. She said she would like a fourth item for the agenda.

Gene recommended that Admin go last as so much is consolidated under Admin. No one disagreed. Donna suggested substituting DPW for Admin and adding Eliot Police Department as item #4 and Eliot Fire Department as item #5. She asked that members review these departments in the proposed budget ahead of the meeting. Jean asked that the Chair send this information to members. Donna said she would do so.

Donna explained the process for sending questions to and receiving answers from the Town Manager and for how the Committee will formulate their questions. Donna said during the meeting, members would work to consolidate the questions and noted that with account numbers no longer provided in the budget, the process will be difficult. Ed asked about projected cost over-age in the proposed budget if it passes compared to last and year, Donna said that would be asked. Reggie said that it will be difficult to ask reasonable questions about the proposed budget with limited information, citing that it is a summary and only 5% of the amount of information the Committee usually receives.

Jean thanked the public for attending and said it was good to see residents in the room seeing how the Budget Committee works. She added that the Budget Committee is not a subcommittee to the Select Board or the Town Manager but that the Budget Committee answers to the residents of Eliot.

7. Budget Committee member reports/comments

Ed announced his resignation from the Budget Committee effective as of tomorrow (1/6/2023) due to personal reasons. Donna said Ed's resignation would be effective January 6th and that the Town can appoint a new member to fulfill duties until the upcoming election and that she will contact Town Clerk Wendy Rawski about such an appointment. Members expressed their sorrow at Ed's leaving.

Donna moved and Jean seconded that the Chair notify Town Clerk Wendy Rawski that the Budget Committee has an open seat and is interested in appointing a member for the seat to be fulfilled until the next Town election. The motion passed with a roll-call vote of 7-0.

8. Adjournment

Ed motioned and Reggie seconded that the meeting adjourns. The motion passed with a roll-call vote of 7-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:02pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Murphy, Chair

Date Approved: January 11, 2023

Jean Hardy, Secretary