

Town of Eliot
Budget Committee Meeting
December 14, 2022

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by the Chair, Donna Murphy. Members in attendance were Donna Murphy, Diane Holt, Jeffrey Leathe, and Gene Wypyski, in person, and Reggie Fowler, Jean Hardy, and Ed Strong remotely via Zoom. Committee members welcomed Ann Lukegord as recording secretary.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Approval of Minutes

There were no minutes of the November 9, 2022, meeting as the two people who could do the minutes were absent with Covid. Ann Lukegord will complete the November minutes from the meeting video for the Committee to review, amend, and approval at the January 2023 meeting.

4. Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC):

Gene and Jeff reported that they are on the CPC Economic Development subcommittee and that the subcommittee's first meeting will be Thursday, December 22, 2022, at 1:00pm. Gene and Jeff have received from the Town Planner an outline of line items they are to review in that subcommittee meeting. They said the CPC has six subcommittees: Economic Development, Environment, Housing, Transportation, Land Use, and Parks, Recreation, and Public Facilities. Donna asked if there was a timeline for the work of the CPC. Gene said there was not a firm timeline, but they would hope to have one by the next Budget Committee meeting.

Gene shared he has reviewed the Town's last Comprehensive Plan from 2009 and found Eliot to be a different place today than it was in 2009. The 2009 Plan contains "aspirational items," he said. He found the goals and objectives in the 2009 plan to be unactionable as they were not specific enough. Also, he noted that the census data used in 2009 was old, from 2000 and therefore outdated. For the 2023 plan, the Town will be using 2020 census data which will be more accurate as it is more recent.

Discussion between members continued about the differences in population in 2000, 2009, and today. Members talked about population growth not being as robust as had been predicted in 2009, possibly due to the housing collapse. Members also spoke to unexpected changes in student population and loss of workers at the Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth over time as having significant, unanticipated effects on Eliot. Jean shared that historically the federal government had reimbursed school systems with students from families of Shipyard employees. Members discussed home values.

Donna asked about the CPC's economic piece and workforce housing. Gene said there is data in the old report. Donna asked if the goals and objectives were mandated? Gene said yes.

Jean asked to sit on the CPC's Transportation subcommittee as she is knowledgeable about where transportation is headed in the future given projected technology advances and climate concerns. Donna pointed out that Reggie is also to be appointed to the CPC by the Select Board.

5. Financial (Audit, Revenue and Expense Summary Reports):

Donna said for the Budget Committee to proceed with the review of the audit, the committee needs the Select Board minutes and that they have not been posted yet. She said they might be the minutes from the August Select Board meeting. It was noted that the Select Board meeting time for December 15th was changed to 3:00pm. Jeff asked what the Select Board was doing in terms of responding to the auditor's concerns and if they had made any progress. Jean suggested that they schedule a joint meeting. Donna said she does not see one scheduled.

Jean motioned that a request for a meeting between the Budget Committee, the Select Board, the Town Manager, and department heads be sent by the chair of the Budget Committee. Donna said that request would go through the Town Manager. Ed said including the department heads was "jumping the gun." He added that the Town Manager does not like that either and why don't we wait until we get the budget. Jean rescinded her motion.

Donna made a motion that the chair of the Budget Committee send a letter to the Town Manager to request a joint meeting with the Select Board to present the budget after the Budget Committee has received the budget. Ed seconded the motion. The motion carried by a roll call vote of 6-0. (Reggie did not vote as he had gotten disconnected on Zoom.)

Answering a question from Jeff about the procedure, Donna historically meeting with the Town Manager take place during the second week of January. Jeff appreciated the clarification.

6. Budget Committee Member Reports and Comments:

Donna shared with members the upcoming calendar for weekly January and February 2023 meetings. All meetings are at 5:00pm. Donna said she would like the meetings to not extend past two hours in length.

The dates are:

Thursday, January 5, 2023, 5:00pm
Wednesday, January 11, 2023, 5:00pm
Wednesday, January 18, 2023, 5:00pm
Wednesday, January 25, 2023, 5:00pm

Thursday, February 2, 2023, 5:00pm
Wednesday, February 8, 2023, 5:00pm
Wednesday, February 15, 2023, 5:00pm
Wednesday, February 22, 2023, 5:00pm

Donna informed members that the Budget Committee books are not ready, and they need to be for the committee's work to proceed. She added that there is currently no joint meeting scheduled with the Select Board. The members discussed inviting people to the Budget Committee meeting and to the joint meeting with the Select Board and Town Manager.

Jean said the Town Manager section on the eliotme.org website has the FY23 budget but does not have the FY24 budget. Donna said the FY24 budget is not out yet. Jean asked if there was a new standard in how to communicate with the Town Manager and would it be through the website or directly to members. Ed said by charter, the Town Manager responds directly to members. Jean asked if the members would receive the books electronically. Donna said only updates would be sent out electronically. Jean asked when that would happen; Donna said the first week of January. Jean asked if members should send emails directly to the Town Manager or to Donna. Donna said historically members have emailed their questions and comments to her and she has sent them all on in one email to the Town Manager. Donna said that the Budget Committee and Select Board take separate tracks on how they get to the budget and the joint meeting is an opportunity to reconcile their findings and line items. Diane said that prior to last year, the Select Board and Budget Committee had been in complete agreement the previous two years. Donna added that the Select Board does not go as in depth as the Budget Committee does.

Jeff asked if the Town has a policy on making charitable contributions. Discussion focused on using taxpayer funds to make contributions to organizations when not all residents may agree with making that contribution to that organization. As an Aging-In-Place (AIP) committee member, Ann shared that a non-profit organization that supports Eliot residents directly with heat, electricity, and other such needs sent a letter to AIP outlining their services specific to Eliot residents over 2022 and asked if the Town could reimburse a portion of the costs. Discussion continued on how such a request might be handled. Ann said the letter was forwarded by AIP to the Town Manager.

Diane said that on September 14, 2022, Select Board member Bill Widi spoke to the Budget Committee about the audit. Diane said that materials for the package are to be emailed to Melissa Albert with Donna cc'd on the email.

7. Adjournment:

Motion by Ed, second by Jean to adjourn. Motion carried by roll-call vote 6-0. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 5, 2023, at 5:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Murphy, Chair

Date Approved: January 5, 2023

Jean Hardy, Secretary