

**Town of Eliot
Budget Committee Meeting
Wednesday, February 8, 2023**

1. Call to Order

Chair Donna Murphy called the meeting to order at 5:00pm. In attendance in person were Denny Lentz, Donna Murphy, and Gene Wypyski, and remotely were Jean Hardy and Diane Holt. Jeff Leathe was excused as he was traveling out of state. Reggie Fowler was absent for medical reasons. Ann Lukegord was in attendance. Megan Shapiro-Ross, executive director of Footprints Food Pantry, and Emily Flinkstrom, executive director of Fair Tide were in attendance to address the Committee.

2. Approval of the Minutes

The Minutes for Thursday, February 2, 2023, were tabled for final review and approval so that complete information could be included.

3. Guest Speakers

Megan Shapiro-Ross, executive director of Footprints Food Pantry, and Emily Flinkstrom, executive director of Fair Tide, had requested this opportunity to address the Committee to share information on their respective programs and answer questions. They specifically spoke to plans to open Mainspring, a social services center for nonprofit community organizations that serve Eliot, Kittery, and York.

Ms. Shapiro-Ross provided a brief history of Footprints Food Pantry. Footprints was formed in 1992 and had its first director in 2020. She gave an overview of the organization's services which included providing clients with groceries three days a week at their location, delivering emergency food seven days a week, and creating school food pantries and an in-house food pantry for residents at Baran Place in Eliot. Ms. Flinkstrom spoke about Fair Tide and its twenty-five years of helping the area's homeless population. She said in its early years, the program was designed to provide immediate housing for people and help them move on, but now the new model provides ongoing support to people beyond housing with a thrift store and other services.

Both executive directors agreed that they are experiencing growing numbers and that food insecurity, hunger, and homelessness are invisible issues that the rest of the community does not see. Ms. Shapiro-Ross noted that poverty does not have an identifiable look as it once did, and that with food prices rising drastically by some 13%, visitors to the food pantry now look like all of us. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said Footprints is serving 782 individuals and 364 households with a noted increase in households and older residents in 2022. Ms. Flinkstrom shared that housing prices have always been on the rise, and that while wages have increased by 79%, housing is up by 112%. She noted that wages are not keeping pace with housing costs, causing people to need assistance. She also noted that mental health issues are also on the rise.

Ms. Shapiro-Ross said that it is difficult for people to navigate the system with organizations in separate locations, even though the organizations meet and share information regularly. She said the problems people are facing do not just go away with a single episode of support. For instance,

she said, someone will come into Footprints for food, but they also need housing or need support for an aging parent. These individuals end up trying to chase help from one agency to another and it creates a massive barrier to assisting those in need. Ms. Flinkstrom said that organizations are working to wrap people in support but that the current system of individual offices in varied locations is an inefficient way to deliver care. She added each organization is working in its own silo and that is not ideal for providing full support. The organizations met in 2019 and saw working together under one roof, a facility like Mainspring, would best serve the community and individuals.

Donna asked what would be housed in Mainspring. Ms. Flinkstrom said Fair Tide Thrift Store, Footprints Food Pantry, WIC and a social outreach worker from York County Community Action (YCCA), the general assistance office for the Town of Kittery, and representatives and services for mental health, legal aid and tax support, and medical and dental providers as well as internet service. She will share a one-page handout of agencies with the Committee. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said Mainspring will own the building but not the land and that county commissioners provided American Rescue Plan funds to help purchase the building. Ms. Flinkstrom said having local agencies in one location will be beneficial to those in need, and that the building is in a central location at 22 Shapleigh Road, Kittery, which is next to Walgreen's which gets a lot of local traffic including from Eliot residents.

Ms. Shapiro-Ross spoke to the efficiency of the entry of the facility where there will be one person to whom those requesting assistance can tell their story and provide information only one time, rather than over and over again as is the case now. She said through the Mainspring design, that information will be shared with all agencies who serve to help that individual rebuild his or her life. She added that one of the benefits of Mainspring will be less strain on local emergency services where people who have no support can only call 911 for assistance.

Donna asked about budgets for the two organizations and if they can be emailed to the Committee members. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said yes, and that they have individual agency budgets and the larger budget to share. Donna asked if the six or seven other agencies will be paying rent. Ms. Flinkstrom said they would but that smaller ones would not be. She identified YCCA and medical and dental services as those that would be paying rent. Donna asked her to describe medical and dental services. Ms. Flinkstrom said they envisioned a nurse being on-site for half a day, a dental care mobile unit at the site, and then in-house assistance with prescriptions and applying for Maine Care.

Donna asked how Footprints would use the \$12,000 requested from the Town of Eliot on its proposed budget under Outside Agencies. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said it will be used to cover the cost of fresh produce as produce is the first item that people eliminate from their groceries when they are facing food insecurity. She added that Eliot neighbors and Eliot Connects have supported Footprints through its Adopt A Shelf program.

Donna asked for more information about the requested \$100,000 from the Town of Eliot for the expansion of the new Mainspring building. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said the original request was for \$100,000 over two years and it is a one-time request. She said Mainspring also offered to provide space for the Eliot general assistance office.

Diane asked for the number of Eliot residents using Footprints. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said that many people do not know about Footprints as they do not drive the road it is on and if they do, they tend not to look that way. She estimated that 40% of their clients were from Eliot, an estimated 146 people a month. Jean praised the speakers for the work they do and shared her concern about rising property taxes. Denny asked who provides the organizations with guidance. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said Good Shepherd Food Bank and Feeding America. She added that she visits the different food pantries in New Hampshire and Maine to learn and share ideas. Denny asked if both organizations have boards of directors, and both do. Ms. Flinkstrom spoke about Fair Tide's Governance Committee and that while they recruit people to serve on the governance committee, people also come to them to participate. Donna asked about the make-up of board members, and Ms. Flinkstrom answered there are ten members who are a mix of Eliot and Kittery residents. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said that Footprints serves the greater Seacoast area which includes Berwick, Portsmouth, Eliot, York, Kittery, and South Berwick.

Denny asked about the process for assessing individuals. Ms. Shapiro-Ross answered with an example of a transient, disabled man who came into Footprints for assistance and left with contact information for a case manager at YCCA and phone numbers for general assistance, the social worker at Fair Tide, and others. Ms. Flinkstrom reiterated that questions about assistance are never just about food or housing assistance. Donna asked about the application for assistance, and Ms. Shapiro-Ross said currently there is a common application and when they are at Mainspring, the intake person at the door will do a full triage of the individual's situation.

Gene asked what the benefit of these services is to Eliot. Ms. Flinkstrom said if you have struggling community members, your community is struggling, and that providing services helps keep a community stable and strong. Ms. Shapiro-Ross added that it defines a town, and that typically a town's general assistance manager is not usually trained in a trauma-informed care approach as a social worker is. She pointed to the stigma of coming into a town building to ask for general assistance in an environment where people are paying tax bills and doing other such tasks. Gene followed up asking if the Town's \$50,000 was an investment. Ms. Shapiro-Ross answered that it defines how Eliot wants to care for its own.

Donna asked why someone would go on general assistance and not just go to one of their agencies. Ms. Shapiro-Ross answered that general assistance provides an answer for emergency needs and that the local agencies are working to support people before they get into an emergency situation. She added that general assistance is a band-aid and not a solution, where the local agencies aim to build people up for the long term. Donna asked if job training would be offered at Mainspring. Ms. Flinkstrom said they see a great opportunity to partner with York County Community College for job training. Donna asked what the demographics are that the organizations served, specifically who they meant by older population and homeless. The speakers answered they were a combination of people, including those aged 65 and older, those with mental illness, some living in their cars and about 10-20 living in hotels. Ms. Flinkstrom reiterated that they are invisible. Donna shared that she had been told by some voters in town that they were concerned as they observed cars with Massachusetts license plates on them at Footprints and asked Ms. Shapiro-Ross about that to clear

up the information. Ms. Shapiro-Ross said she only knew of one family that is from Massachusetts and that by law they have to serve them at the very minimum what is required by the USDA, which includes items like beans and so forth. She added that a vehicle parked at Footprints may have out of state plates but that the individual or family may be transient.

Members thanked Ms. Shapiro-Ross and Ms. Flinkstrom for coming in and speaking to them about their organizations and the local need.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Budget Review

The Chair noted that under the Town Charter, the Town Manager has five business days to respond to the Committee's questions and that she hopes he will. She added that she will continue working on the numbers. She said Jeff has done the Community Services Department numbers and sent them to everyone via email. Members said they had not yet received the email from Jeff. Donna said she will send them out to members. Donna said she has not yet received the full budget schedule with deadlines which usually includes the Select Board meeting, reconciliation meeting, and date for the Citizens Open Meeting. She will request the full budget schedule from Melissa.

Denny asked about different versions of the proposed budget and did they receive the latest version. Donna confirmed that Denny has the latest version. Denny asked if the Town Manager were to make changes to the proposed budget will the Committee receive that version, Donna did not know the answer. She said she would like a budget that follows the ordinance. Denny asked about account numbers, and Donna said they do not have account numbers, they have categories. Denny noted that the Revenue and Expense sheet has old account numbers and that members have three different sets of documents. He asked how the process can be improved. Gene asked about format and if it was by categories or the ordinance. Donna said it should be organized as the ordinance lays it out and directed Gene to the list in the ordinance. As an example, Donna pointed to Public Safety where the Harbormaster and Animal Control have been moved to Police in violation of the ordinance which states that they should be under Public Safety. She added that the Budget Committee should see the details the voters will see. As another example, Donna pointed out that the William Fogg Library should be a stand-alone item per the Town ordinance and not under Fixed Assessments. She directed members to look at how the items appear on the ballot. Jean pointed out that Section 274 in Ordinances says that Hearing and Elections are separate.

6. Budget Committee member reports/comments

Donna said she received a notice from Wendy, the Town Clerk, that all members need to sign. Donna and Gene signed it. Donna will speak to Reggie and Jeff about signing it.

Donna said trustees of the William Fogg Library will be in attendance at the meeting next week and asked that questions for them be emailed to her ahead of time. She reminded members that the discussion with the Library trustees is about the budget numbers and nothing else. All agreed.

Gene said he would be travelling next week and will attend the meeting remotely. Donna said she will be away the week of February 19 and plans to attend the meeting remotely. She will ask Reggie to oversee the meeting in her place and in his role as vice-chair.

7. Adjournment

Diane motioned and Jean seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion passed with a roll-call vote of 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:21pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Murphy, Chair

Date Approved: February 22, 2023

Jean Hardy, Secretary