

**Town of Eliot  
Budget Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, July 12, 2023**

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**1. ROLL CALL**

Chair Jeff Leathe called the regular meeting of the Town of Eliot Budget Committee to order at 5:00pm. All members were in attendance in person: Jeff Leathe, chair; Reggie Fowler, vice chair; Diane Holt, secretary; and members Jim Latter, Donna Murphy, Brad Swanson, and Gene Wypyski. There were no members of the public in attendance.

**2. 10-MINUTE PUBLIC INPUT SESSION**

There was no public comment.

**3. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES**

Members reviewed and amended the June 12, 2023, meeting minutes. Donna moved and Brad seconded that the minutes be approved as amended. The motion passed unanimously by roll-call vote.

**4. BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBERS: REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS AND OTHER COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS**

The Chair reported that he had had a good meeting with the Chair of the Select Board Richard Donhauser. Jeff also reported that due to an alarm going off at his house, he met and spoke with the Fire Chief Jay Muzeroll by happenstance. Jim said he spoke with the Town Manager Mike Sullivan about upcoming contract negotiations and the Town Manager said none are anticipated. Brad talked about upcoming agenda items and passed out his letter to the Chairs asking that three items be addressed. His letter was entered into the minutes.

Members discussed and agreed all ideas are to be sent to the Chair who will then put items on the agenda. Jeff encouraged members to share their ideas for discussion and consideration by all. He said he would like to invite the auditors to an upcoming Budget Committee meeting. Members discussed whether that should be a joint meeting with the Select Board. Donna said in past years the Select Board invited Budget Committee members to attend its auditors meeting as individuals but not as the Budget Committee. She added that auditors may charge for a second meeting with the Budget Committee. Members talked about posting meetings and posting joint meetings with the Select Board and how best to do that.

Brad handed out to members an October 18, 2018, article on a sound capital investment plan for the Town of Boxford (MA) written by Ellen Guerin, Boxford town treasurer, and Christopher Wakeman, vice chair of the Boxford Finance Committee. He shared it as an example of best practices and collaboration for the betterment of the town. The article was entered into the minutes.

**5. REMOTE PARTICIPATION POLICY**

Members signed the Budget Committee's Remote Participation Policy for submission to the Town Clerk. The policy was entered into the minutes.

**6. REVIEW OF ELIOT CHARTER (11.3.2015) ARTICLE 6, FINANCIAL PROCEDURES**

For review and discussion, Jeff handed out to members printed copies of Article 6, Financial Procedures from the Town of Eliot Charter. Article 6 was entered into the minutes.

The following points were made:

6.2 Budget. Final line: "It shall begin with a clear general summary of its contents; shall show in detail all estimated revenue, and all proposed expenditures, including debt service, for the ensuing fiscal year; and be so arranged as to show comparative figures for actual and estimated revenue and expenditures of the current fiscal year, and actual revenue and expenditures of the preceding fiscal year."

Concerning 6.2 Budget, Jeff said that this is the information the Budget Committee wants and needs to receive. Jim said it's all online.

6.4 Submission of Budget, Budget Message, and Budget Schedule, opening phrase: "Not later than the first week in January." Jeff pointed out that this is the due date for when the Town Manager presents the proposed budget to the Budget Committee and that members should be mindful of the calendar for getting its work done during the budget cycle. He added that the Town Manager has five business- days to send information back to the Budget Committee and answer questions about the budget. Jeff said this can become problematic when there is a Monday holiday and with the Town Office closed on Fridays.

6.5 Budget Review Process and Schedule, fourth paragraph: "As scheduled, the Town Manager shall deliver to the Budget Committee copies of the proposed final town budget at least five (5) business days prior to the Budget Committee's prior vote. The recommendations of the Budget Committee shall be reported to the Select Board prior to final approval of the budget by the Select Board. The Budget Committee's recommendations shall be included in the Town Warrant."

Concerning 6.5, Donna said this did not happen during the past budget cycle. Jeff agreed, saying last year these procedures were compressed and out of order; he added that he is looking to better follow procedures this year. Members discussed dates and deadlines in general for the upcoming budget cycle, how best to plan meetings, and what is received from Melissa Albert in terms of the calendar and due dates.

## **7. REVIEW AND DISCUSS UPDATES TO THE BUDGET COMMITTEE BY-LAWS (Last updated: December 2016)**

Jeff opened the floor for Gene to discuss the By-laws. The Eliot Budget Committee By-laws were entered into the minutes.

Gene said his concern was that there were redundancies in the Committee's By-laws that are already defined in the Charter, specifically, #1, 7, 13, and 14. Jeff asked about #3 which members discussed. Jeff said that those - #1, 3, 7, 13, and 14 – could come out of the By-laws.

Jeff asked if members had any concerns about the other By-laws. Gene asked about item #12: "The Budget Committee shall annually hold a public hearing on final budget recommendations a minimum of thirty (30) days prior to the Referendum vote." Members discussed the annual Citizens Option Meeting, the annual joint meeting with the Select Board, as fulfilling the requirement of #12. Donna explained the history of the Citizens Option Meeting and the previous town meeting format.

Members agreed to delete #12 from the By-laws. Donna confirmed that it is on the calendar for the Budget Committee to attend as a committee.

Jeff directed members to #4, concerning the Maine Moderator's Manual, and all agreed to leave that By-law as it is.

Members discussed #5 and #6. Jim led discussion to clarify that four members in attendance created a quorum and that three of the four voting for a motion, in that situation, the motion would pass. Donna said this By-law speaks to the majority of the members present voting to pass a motion.

Jeff suggested and members agreed that By-law #8 should read that the Budget Committee's recording secretary will maintain the minutes for each meeting.

Jeff opened discussion about the Committee's maintenance of correspondence, specifically how the Committee would maintain correspondence and other documents to ensure easy access during future discussion. Members decided unanimously to have the recording secretary, under the direction of the Secretary, attach any documents presented during the Committee's meetings to the end of the minutes for that meeting. Of note, Robert's Rules of Order allows this practice under 48:5(5) which reads: "When a committee report is of great importance or should be recorded to show the legislative history of a measure, the assembly can order it 'to be entered in the minutes,' in which case the secretary copies it in full, or attaches a copy of it, to the minutes."

Jeff spoke with Wendy, the Town Clerk, to get clarification on public notices guidelines to announce upcoming Budget Committee meetings. He reported that the Town asks for seven days prior to post public notices of meetings with a required minimum of at least three days. Discussion turned to the scheduled meetings during the budget season (January to May). There was also discussion about moving monthly meetings from 5pm to 6pm to better accommodate members.

Members discussed #15 which reads: "The Budget Committee may request, through the Town Manager, the attendance of a representative or member of the Select Board, Town Manager or any Department or Agency where the Committee determines their presence is necessary." Members noted that such meetings would be beneficial to the Budget Committee's work, but the Budget Committee cannot compel the Town Manager to have individuals meet with the Budget Committee but may only request such meetings.

Donna pointed out that #17 allows the Budget Committee to "request the presence or advice of any qualified individual to aid in its decision-making process." Reggie said that the Committee would have to go through the Town Manager to invite Town employees to a meeting but would not have to go through the Town Manager to request members of other Town boards. Jim pointed out from his past experience that a City Council could compel a town employee to speak with them, without input from the Mayor. He agreed it would be good to have department heads meet with the Budget Committee, but the Committee cannot compel them to do so. Jeff said the Chair of the Select Board had no issue with the Budget Committee inviting Town employees or department heads to its meetings as long as they are treated professionally and courteously.

Following discussion, Jeff suggested re-wording of #15 to be "the Budget Committee may request, through the Town Manager, the attendance of a representative member of the Town staff or Town employee." He recommended rewriting #15 and adding a #15.5 to specify the Select Board.

Members decided there was no need for a #15.5 as By-law #15 should be rewritten to reflect that it

relates to the Town Manager and the Town staff he oversees. Jeff said he would prepare draft wording of #15 for members to review prior to the Committee's next meeting and for discussion at the next meeting. Brad said he interpreted #17 to refer to outside individuals, for instance, solar panel experts or education leaders, not Town employees or officials. Members agreed that #16, 17, 18, and 19 were fine as written.

Jeff said the Budget Committee By-laws serve to benefit the Budget Committee. Donna added that copies of the changes should be sent to the Town Manager and Town Clerk. Members talked about challenges they have had searching for documents on the Town website.

#### **8. OTHER BUSINESS**

Members discussed changing the monthly meeting time from 5:00pm to 6:00pm. Jim moved, Reggie seconded that the Committee change the time of its regular meeting time from 5:00pm to 6:00pm; the motion passed unanimously by roll-call vote.

#### **9. CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

#### **10. SET AGENDA AND DATE FOR NEXT MEETING**

Jeff said that the big item he wanted the Committee to tackle prior to the upcoming budget season was to review the calendar in detail and make sure the Town Manager, Select Board, and Budget Committee were all coordinated with the process and calendar. Members discussed the calendar in general and how the Town plans it. Diane said it would be important to have meetings with department heads planned to coincide with that department's budget as the Committee reviewed it. Jim said it is important for department heads to use their time with the Budget Committee to tell the story of their departments; members agreed. Jeff said it would be important to create a culture where the meetings year to year serve to fully inform the Committee. Brad said the meetings could become important informational meetings for the Budget Committee. Donna spoke to past meetings with department heads prior to two years ago, being beneficial and successful in the manner members hoped to see future such meetings. Members agreed it is important for the Committee to be informed on what's happening in departments and what is ahead for each department.

Members decided not to meet in August. The members did not need a motion for this decision. As such, the next meeting of the Budget Committee will be Wednesday, September 13, 2023, at 6:00pm at Town Hall.

#### **11. MOTION TO ADJOURN**

Donna motioned and Brad seconded to adjourn the meeting; the motion passed unanimously by roll-call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:33pm.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Jeffrey Leathe, Chair**

**Date Approved: September 13, 2023**

**Diane Holt, Secretary**

The following documents were entered into the minutes for July 12, 2023:

- Letter from Brad Swanson to Jeff Leathe, Chair, Budget Committee, dated July 12, 2023.
- Article presented by Brad Swanson about creating a sound capital investment plan in the Town of Boxford MA.
- The Town of Eliot Remote Participation Policy pursuant to 1 M.R.S. & 403-B Remote Participation in Public Proceedings.
- Town of Eliot Maine, Charter, Article 6, Financial Procedures.
- Town of Eliot Maine, Budget Committee By-laws.