

**Town of Eliot
Budget Committee Meeting
Wednesday, February 14, 2024**

1. ROLL CALL

In attendance in person were Jeff Leathe, Chair; Brad Swanson; and Gene Wypyski, and remotely via zoom were Reggie Fowler, Vice Chair; Diane Holt, Secretary; Jim Latter; and Donna Murphy. The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

2. 10-MINUTE PUBLIC INPUT SESSION (Community Participation is Encouraged)

The Chair opened the floor to public input. There was no public input.

3. CONTINUED REVIEW of TOWN MANAGER'S FY2025 BUDGET

The Chair directed members to the responses from the Town Manager to Budget Committee questions members had from the January 31 meeting.

Mr. Leathe reported that the Town Manager declined the Committee's request for dated print copies of the proposed budget with page numbers as the proposed budget undergoes changes during the budget review process. The Town Manager said changes to the proposed budget will be available to Committee members on the Town website throughout the review process.

Members reviewed the Town Manager's responses to the nine questions they had for him from the January 31st meeting and review of the proposed budget. Mr. Leathe said the Committee still needs information in response to its first question which requested a full information concerning the full-time equivalents (FTEs) in employees for each department. He said the Committee has received some information about employment but not complete information.

Mr. Latter put the Town Manager's PowerPoint presentation of the proposed budget on the screen for members to refer to for information and clarity during their discussion.

Mr. Leathe noted that while the Committee received some information from the Town Manager about wages in response to question three, the information provided was not comprehensive and did not provide a rationale for the proposed 10.5% increase in wages.

The Chair asked if Mr. Wypyski or any member had received an answer to question number four concerning unfunded liability or post-employee benefits in the budget. Mr. Wypyski said that his understanding is that the Town has nothing beyond COBRA, which is required.

Mr. Latter said he was disappointed in not getting complete answers to the straightforward, reasonable questions the Committee was asking the Town Manager. Mr. Swanson suggested inviting the Town Manager to the meeting to answer the questions. Ms. Holt agreed that it might be easier to invite the Town Manager to the meeting and added that the Committee should not have to dig through materials to find answers.

Mr. Swanson motioned, and Mr. Wypyski seconded, to have the Town Manager attend the Budget Committee February 28 meeting in person or remotely to address questions the Budget Committee has for Administrative, Police, and Fire portions of the proposed budget. The motion passed unanimously by a roll-call vote of 7-0.

Members began their review of the proposed budget for the Police Department. Mr. Leathe read from the Area of Focus for the Police from the Town Manager's initial presentation of the proposed budget. He noted that the proposed budget aims to increase Town police officers by two people and that the significant reduction in the Police budget of \$57,000 is due to the cost of seasonal staff at the Boat Basin being moved to the Community Services Department (CSD). The Chair noted that uniforms and dispatch costs were up a bit. Mr. Swanson had a question about communications, which has gone up 45%. Members agreed to ask the Town Manager for clarification and more information concerning the two communication costs under Community Relations, service fees for Communications versus under 24-Hour Answering Service, Utilities – Communications.

Mr. Wypyski said he was unclear on the \$314,000 increase from the current Police budget to the proposed Police budget. He understood that a large portion of that increase was due to the hiring of two police officers. Members reviewed the proposed Police budget and agreed the increases were related to general wage increases, the addition of two new police officers, over time, and associated costs with expansion of the department. Members conclude they had no other questions concerning the proposed Police budget.

The Committee turned to reviewing the Fire Department and fire hydrants budgets. Mr. Leathe said that the rate of pay for volunteer firefighters would increase to \$20.00. Mr. Swanson and Ms. Holt noted that new people were being trained by the Fire Department. Mr. Leathe said, and members agreed, that the proposed increase of \$17,000 for the Fire Department was fine.

Mr. Latter said post-budget season, the Town should look at the long-term liability of an all-volunteer force and consider hiring paid firefighters at least on business days and the effect of doing so on future budgets. Mr. Wypyski said the Town should plan for Fire Chief Jay Muzeroll's future retirement and the cost of hiring an equally invested replacement. Mr. Swanson agreed that the current trend for municipalities is to go to paid full-time departments.

Mr. Fowler asked about the difference between a Fire Department call and alarm and how the costs for each are figured in the budget. Mr. Latter said that he understands that when the alarm sounds, the department may answer multiple calls, and that hypothetically there could be two calls in a day that handled three alarms. Mr. Fowler said he wanted to make sure the Fire Department is funded appropriately. Ms. Holt said the information exists as the time "they are on station" and that even if there are multiple calls when firefighters are called in, it is the time that "they are on station." Mr. Fowler suggested, and members agreed, that the Committee ask the Town Manager for the number of calls the Fire Department receives in a year. The Committee ended its review of the proposed 2025 Fire Department and fire hydrants budget.

4. BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBER INPUT: REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS AND/OR ANY OTHER COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS/QUESTIONS

There was no member input.

5. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES

Members reviewed, edit, and approved or approved as amended the minutes for Budget Committee meetings on September 6, 2023; October 11, 2023; December 4, 2023; and January 31, 2024. (Of note, the Committee did not meet in November 2023.)

Mr. Latter motioned, and Mr. Wypyski seconded, that the minutes for the September 6, 2023, Budget Committee meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously with a roll-call vote.

Mr. Swanson motioned, and Mr. Latter seconded, that the minutes for the October 11, 2023, Budget Committee meeting be approved as amended. The motion passed with a roll-call vote of 6-0-1 with Mr. Latter abstaining as he was not in attendance at the meeting.

Mr. Swanson motioned, and Mr. Wypyski seconded, that the minutes for the December 4, 2023, Budget Committee meeting be approved as amended. The motion passed unanimously with a roll-call vote.

Mr. Swanson motioned, and Mr. Wypyski seconded, that the minutes for the January 31, 2024, Budget Committee meeting be approved as amended. The motion passed with a roll-call vote of 6-0-1 with Mr. Fowler abstaining as he was not in attendance at the meeting.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

8. SET AGENDA AND DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

- a. Continue FY25 Budget Review, Highway Department and its six subdepartments.
- b. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, February 28, 2024 @ 6:00pm

Mr. Leathe said he will ask the Town Manager to be present in person or remotely at the February 28 meeting to answer questions. Mr. Leathe said he will work on obtaining a document that informs the Committee on revenues for the next meeting. The recording secretary agreed to email the Town Manager the following questions:

1. Under Police, the Budget Committee is asking for more information as to what two communication fees cover: Under Community Relations, service fees for Communications and under 24-Hour Answering Service, Utilities - Communications.
2. Concerning the Fire Department, how many calls does the department get a year?

The Chair asked for any further discussion on topics from members and there was none.

9. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Mr. Latter motioned, and Mr. Swanson seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:58pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Leathe, Chair

Date Approved: March 13, 2024

Diane Holt, Secretary