

Wakefield Budget Committee
January 3, 2024

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Bob Ouellette, School Board Rep; Denny Miller; Priscilla Colbath; Dave Mankus; Howie Knight; Marc Taliaferro; Tom Daniels; Josh Fuller; John Parker; Ken Fifield, Selectmen's Rep; Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; and Toni Bodah, Secretary.

Mr. O'Connor called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., leading all in the Pledge of Allegiance. He stated that the purpose of this meeting is to vote on Town warrant articles, most of which were discussed at length at the Committee's previous meeting. It appears as though the Planning Board will propose only one zoning amendment (regarding solar farms). Mr. Miller asked how tax exempt status would work on solar farms, noting it should not be tax exempt if excess power is sold. Mr. Fifield stated that Planning Board did not address the issue of tax exemption; however, he does not believe any portion of the property is going to be tax exempt. The article will not address small systems—only larger farms. Tax exempt status will not be included in the warrant article.

Article #8 – Operating Budget @ \$7,663,490 and Default Budget @ \$6,931,137 – **Mr. Daniels moved the article. Mr. Taliaferro second the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #9 – Highway Truck CRF @ \$85,000 – **Mr. Knight moved the article. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #10 – Highway Construction Project CRF @ \$350,000 – **Mr. Daniels moved the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. Miller referred to Article #21 (\$50,000 for Emergency Management) and asked whether that article is meant to supplement Article #10. Mr. Fifield stated that Article #21 is intended for emergencies—such as a hurricane, etc. Mr. Scala added that the intent is to build up the Emergency Management CRF, in an effort to avoid the experience with DRA earlier this year. **The motion then passed 10-1 (Mr. Taliaferro voting against).**

Article #11 – Transfer Station Trucks CRF @ \$20,000 – **Mr. Miller moved the article, Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #12 – Wastewater Treatment CRF @ \$25,000 – **Mr. Miller moved the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** This project will ultimately likely be a bond issue. **The motion then passed 11-0.**

Article #13 – Ambulance CRF @ \$60,000 – **Mr. Miller moved the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #14 – Fire Truck CRF @ \$95,000 – **Mr. Miller moved the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. Knight referred to the escalation in pricing for this equipment, noting we may need to catch up in the future. **The motion then passed 11-0.**

Article #15 – Invasive Species ETF @ \$30,775 – **Mr. Parker moved the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #16 – Police Cruiser CRF @ \$40,000 – **Mr. Daniels moved the article. Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion.** Mr. Miller noted that Committee has discussed putting this expense in the operating budget, but it continues to be a warrant article. Why?

Mr. Fifield stated the Board did discuss this; however, the intent is to keep the operating budget down. Perhaps a change will be made next year. **The motion then passed 11-0.**

Article #17 – Public Safety Building CRF @ \$55,000 – This appropriation is mainly for the floor; however, funds might also be used for other maintenance—such as the sally port. **Mr. Knight moved the article. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #18 – Town Hall Improvement CRF @ \$35,000 – **Mr. Miller moved the article. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Article #19 – Assessing Statistical Update @ \$11,000 – **Mr. Knight moved the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.** It was suggested that the words “legally mandated by the State of NH” be added to the warrant article. Mr. Scala will check to see if such language could be included. He noted the cost could also be included in the operating budget. Mr. Parker stated that this required action should be made clear to the public.

Article #20 – Establish Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus Replacement CRF @ \$81,800 – **Mr. Miller moved the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. O’Connor noted that this article now is for \$81,800, with \$45,000 to come from the undesignated fund balance, and \$36,800 to come from taxation. **The motion then passed 11-0.**

Article #21 – Emergency Management CRF @ \$50,000 – This article would be funded via the undesignated fund balance. **Mr. Parker moved the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-1 (Mr. Knight voting against).** Mr. Miller questioned the targeted balance of this CRF. Mr. Fifield estimated \$200,000. Mr. Knight does not recall ever using this fund. Mr. Fifield noted that only the Welfare and Emergency Management lines can be overspent legally. Mr. Miller questioned the Board’s latitude in identifying an emergency. Mr. Fifield referred to our Emergency Management Plan and our Emergency Management Director. The Director assesses the damage, compares it to the Plan, then makes a recommendation to the Board. If the Director does not recommend use of the Fund, the Board may still expend same; however, Mr. Fifield stressed the importance of listening to any recommendation from the Emergency Management Director.

Ms. Colbath referred to draft minutes of December 12, 2023. **Mr. Daniels moved to approve minutes of December 12, 2023. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Mr. O’Connor noted that the Committee will meet with the School at 6 p.m. on January 9, to be followed by public hearings to review both the School and Town budgets/warrant articles (all right here in the Opera House). Discussed various ways to streamline the process while still offering the public an opportunity to be informed. It was suggested that public information to social media platforms will ‘hit’ more people.

Mr. Daniels moved to adjourn at 7 p.m. Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion, to which no one objected!

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Secretary