

Budget Committee
October 30, 2021

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Priscilla Colbath; Elizabeth Conner; Denny Miller; Howie Knight; Paul Romano; Ken Fifield, Selectmen's Rep; Connie Twombly; and Relf Fogg, School Board Rep. Dave Mankus joined the session in progress. Also present were Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; and Toni Bodah, Secretary. Committee representatives/Department Heads were present as indicated below.

Mr. O'Connor called the posted meeting to order at 9 a.m. and led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

General Government – Insurance (pending from October 28)

Mr. Scala discussed the increase in the Town's property liability cost with Carl Weber of Primex. This increase relates to reinsurance costs, which have increased by 45%. In addition, the number of cyber-related claims have increased. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$132,969. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 9-0.**

Public Safety – Ambulance – Chief Todd Nason

Mr. Fogg moved the section total at \$563,597. Mr. Miller seconded the motion. Chief Nason advised that estimated YTD revenues are \$139,923, which does not include some revenues. They have experienced 880 calls YTD. Chief Nason cited various statistics. Ms. Twombly is concerned that firefighters are not getting the wages they deserve, adding she believes they deserve more than a COLA. Mr. Fifield noted that payroll is the biggest issue this year. The Board revised many individual lines throughout the year, including the FF/EMT line, which did appear to be low. He certainly does not want to lose any FF/EMT staff. Mr. Fifield agrees the line was underfunded on the last wage chart. In addition to a revised wage line, all employees will also receive the COLA. If Chief Nason determines an employee also deserves a merit increase, that will likely occur. Chief Nason noted that the towns used in this year's wage comparison were more closely related to the services provided by Wakefield.

Ms. Twombly asked whether the insurance is still paid at the same percentage as other employees. Mr. Fifield noted that the overall cost of health insurance dropped for 2022; therefore, both the Town and the employee will save money. Ms. Twombly stated it is great to see that the FF/EMT rates have been addressed. Mr. Scala noted that it is very costly to train both FF/EMT's and police officers. During recent exit interviews of 2 FF/EMT's, money was not a reason for leaving. The issue was that both wanted to be busier.

In response to a question from Mr. Miller, Chief Nason advised we have 7 full-time FF/EMT's right now; however, eventually we will need to increase the number of full-time staff. He also referred to a comment made at a previous meeting of the Budget Committee regarding proposed use of a vacant bay at the Public Safety Building. He stressed that there is no vacant space. If a bay is empty, the crew is likely out on a call. A new ambulance will be coming in January, and he will have to move the trailer to Union to make space. Chief Nason referred to an EMS contract for the Town of Ossipee, which costs them about \$385,000 and only provides ambulance service. They will not respond to a fire call. Chief Nason stressed that the day of volunteers is gone. Response time using volunteers was about 20 minutes to get an ambulance out the door, compared to 4 minutes with full-time staff. Chief Nason confirmed to Mr. Fogg that moving the trailer to Union will not create a problem.

Mr. Miller referred to the need for an airboat. Chief Nason noted we may not have need for same for years, while there are currently other priorities. Mr. Miller would like to see it in place soon.

Budget Committee

October 30, 2021

Page 2

Discussion followed as to whether a capital reserve fund should be established for that specific purpose, or whether existing funds would be sufficient. Mr. Mankus referred to an incident early in the season on Great East Lake at which time not many boats had yet been put in the water for possible use by FF/EMT's. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Mr. Fifield referred to a FEMA grant just approved which will be used to update radios and pagers. Chief Nason advised they are working on another grant. Mr. Mankus referred to the waiver of outstanding ambulance bills, with the average ride costing \$1000. Mr. Scala advised the Board generally reviews/approves waivers every quarter, and he reviewed various stats. He noted we would lose the ability to waive outstanding bills were we to contract for these services.

Public Safety – East Wakefield Fire – Chief Todd Nason

Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$6811. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

Public Safety – Union Fire – Chief Todd Nason

Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$6230. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

Public Safety – Forest Fires – Chief Todd Nason

Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$2000. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

Public Safety – General Fire – Chief Todd Nason

Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$211,919. Ms. Twombly seconded the motion. Chief Nason noted that he has tried to keep the budget down; however, soon, he will have to increase it. He noted that the current 2010 command vehicle will soon be passed over to the Captain. He received verification that he can replace this vehicle out of the existing capital reserve fund. He may make that purchase in the spring.

General Government – Heritage Commission – Phil Twombly

Mr. Fogg moved the section total at \$17,191. Mr. Miller seconded the motion. Mr. Twombly noted the Commission has requested \$3000 to address the fence at Turntable Park, then requested another \$600 for the posts. The fence should be ready for next summer. Mr. Miller questioned whether there has been any progress with ownership of Turntable Park via the State. The State still owns the property and the Town's lease has expired. Status of negotiations are unclear.

Mr. Fogg noted that the Commission is tasked with maintaining buildings on the National Register and noted that the GWRC is in dire need of a new roof. Why does Heritage Commission not become involved? Mr. Twombly noted the Commission has not been asked. They currently maintain 5-6 buildings and would not be able to take on the GWRC. He stated that the Commission is not obligated to maintain every building on the National Register. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

General Government – Cemeteries – Phil Twombly

Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$35,510. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion, which passed 10-0. In response to a question from Mr. Miller, Mr. Twombly advised that they have not sold many plots at the Stonehedge Cemetery. Of those sold, not all are in use.

Mr. Fifield referred to the Adopt-a-Cemetery Program. Mr. Twombly noted there are 124 cemeteries in town, with the Cemetery Trustees maintaining 40. The remainder are considered private. Plenty are available for adoption! Adoption includes mowing, raking, trimming bushes—generally sprucing up the cemetery. In response to Mr. Mankus, Mr. Twombly advised that dealing with a tree that falls in a private cemetery would be the responsibility of whomever adopted that cemetery. Mr. Fogg questioned how to set up perpetual care. Mr. Twombly advised the Cemetery Trustees would work with the Trustees of the Trust Funds. Mr. Miller noted that only interest can be used (not capital), so it would take a considerable investment to allow for perpetual care.

Community Services – Conservation Commission

Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$5523. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion. Mr. Knight asked about camperships. Mr. Fogg noted they hope to get back to sending 8-10 youths to summer camp. He added that Donna Ackerman has taken over recruitment through the school as well as various community groups. Mr. Miller stressed the need to include home-schoolers in this opportunity. Various scenarios for publicizing this opportunity were discussed, including Ms. Colbath's Facebook page. Mr. O'Connor referred to the low YTD expenditures. Mr. Fogg hopes next year will prove more successful and will include hand-outs on Pride Day. **The motion then passed 9-0-1 (Mr. Fogg abstaining).**

Human Resources – Public Assistance – Amber Marcoux & Arlene Fogg

Mr. Fogg moved the section total at \$47,042. Mr. Romano seconded the motion. Ms. Marcoux noted that the department has been quiet this year, likely due to available government funds. Mr. Fogg noted that this budget would be higher were it not for the involvement of various outside agencies with our town. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Human Resources – Outside Agencies

Granite VNA – Brian Winslow – Mr. Winslow referred to the merger that resulted in the establishment of Granite VNA. He cited 603 home visits in Wakefield, which likely breaks down to about 30 families. This is less than ½ of the usual number of visits. Mr. Winslow referred to severe staffing issues at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, many clients refused care as they did not want staff in their homes. They are currently back to the normal volume. Mr. Winslow reviewed services provided. **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$9000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion.** Ms. Conner noted that this organization has not yet requested release of their 2021 appropriation. Mr. Miller shared his frustration when this occurs. Mr. Winslow will see to it. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Mr. Scala noted that the Board does not make a recommendation on these requests as the agencies' meeting with the Budget Committee provides the first opportunity to discuss the request with the agency. He also noted that the representative from Tri CAP is unable to attend personally, but is willing to answer questions via speakerphone.

Ossipee Concerned Citizens – Misty Ryder

Mr. Knight moved the request at \$19,845. Mr. Fogg seconded the motion. Ms. Ryder indicated that about 32 meals are provided each day to Wakefield residents, which are delivered through the GWRC. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Mr. O'Connor called for a recess at 10:05 a.m., and called the session back to order at 10:15 a.m.

Northern Human Services – This representative noted they are requesting level funding and reviewed services and stats for Wakefield. **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$4300. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Tri CAP – Any Goyette (via speakerphone) – The request from Tri CAP is \$11,500; however, the Welfare office has recommended \$10,000. Mr. Miller referred to their fuel assistance program, as well as their donation of supplies to the Wakefield Food Pantry, all of which is vital to helping Wakefield residents. **Mr. Miller moved the request at \$11,500. Mr. Fogg seconded the motion. Mr. Scala advised Ms. Goyette that the 2021 appropriation has not yet been requested for release. The motion then passed 10-0.**

Greater Wakefield Resource Center – Victor Becker and Martha Borsh – **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$26,000. Mr. Romano seconded the motion.** Mr. Becker noted they have again reduced their request for funds. He referred to receipt of some Federal funding via the State. They have made overtures to other towns—including Milton, Lebanon, Rochester and Farmington—in an effort to garner financial support, and they have received some positive results. The meals-on-wheels program, however, is made up entirely of Wakefield residents, so that request will not be reduced. The GWRC has received grant funds to help with the renovation of the 2nd and 3rd floors—namely, for office and program space, which will allow for increased rental ability. They have received a Northern Borders grant for \$245,000, which is approximately half of what is needed to restore the stage.

Ms. Borsh noted they were closed for 5 months due to COVID. In August, they began to offer take-out meals, which has become popular and has attracted many local people, as well as from surrounding towns. Numbers of participants in the meals-on-wheels program varies, but is currently at 39 people. They are *always* looking for additional drivers.

Ms. Twombly questioned why the Selectmen reduced the requested amount of \$27,500 to \$26,000. It was explained that this reduction was not made by the Selectmen, but rather GWRC reduced their request for 2022 to \$26,000 (from \$27,500 in 2021).

Mr. Knight is pleased GWRC is reaching out to other towns, having the same situation at the Food Pantry. Mr. Miller questioned whether there are prospective clients looking for rental space. Mr. Becker referred to the plan to complete pledges of funds (\$245,000). They have a grant application into L-Chip. Once this process is complete, they will move forward with a community needs assessment to determine the correct mix of programs/rental space, although they do have anecdotal support for rental space. He noted that the needs of program space are not that different than the needs of office space.

Mr. Romano asked about the in-house meals. Ms. Borsh stated approximately 30-40 meals are served Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. This is currently the only program being offered. Mr. Fogg questioned whether any funds have been earmarked to address the roof. Mr. Becker stated that is the responsibility of the Town. GWRC had expected the roof would be replaced in 2021.

Budget Committee

October 30, 2021

Page 5

Mr. Miller noted that the roof was replaced about 24 years ago, so this would be the second time the taxpayers have paid to replace the roof. Mr. Becker has had difficulty even getting an estimate for this work. **The motion then passed 9-1 (Ms. Twombly voting against).**

WPI – Victor Becker – Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$10,000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion. WPI did not have much activity in 2021. The principal objective is now the east fire stair. He was encouraged by the Board of Selectmen/Town Administrator to move forward and is working on a second draft of that proposal. He spoke to the details of the mechanical drawings and the need to refine what the package should include. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

AWWA – Jon Balanoff – Mr. Balanoff noted that AWWA works to protect water quality on our lakes. The Youth Conservation Corps provides free erosion control landscape designs for properties on the lakes to reduce pollution into the lakes. They are conducting 2 watershed surveys currently—on Pine River Pond and Great East Lake. He spoke to their grant work, educational water talks, adding he hopes to resume hands-on lessons at the schools soon. Mr. Balanoff would like to increase the size/scope of the YCC, therefore, he has increased the 2022 request by \$1000. Ms. Conner asked how much the homeowner pays for services provided by the YCC. Mr. Balanoff advised that the homeowner pays for purchase of all material. Although not charged for labor, donations are encouraged (based on the value of the labor). Given all the challenges around our lakes, including the Bonnyman Road project, Mr. Fifield is unsure that AWWA is asking for sufficient funding.

Mr. Knight spoke to the benefits of the YCC program. Mr. Fogg asked about financial support from Acton ME and the State. Mr. Balanoff advised that Acton does provide funding (although a little less than Wakefield). He added that State funding is not guaranteed but is always applied for. Mr. Miller referred to the septic system program, noting that some homeowners can afford to fix their own. How does one determine who qualifies for State funding? Mr. Balanoff stated they do not do a financial needs assessment; rather it is based on water quality needs, including the age of the existing system and its proximity to the lake. Ms. Colbath is amazed at what the group can accomplish. **Ms. Colbath moved to increase the appropriation to \$18,000. Mr. Romano seconded the motion.** Mr. Mankus referred to a program run through the school several years ago that involved underwater robotics and the Sea Perch Program. Mr. Balanoff is trying to reinstitute these programs. Mr. Mankus noted that the YCC offers an amazing opportunity for area youth. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

White Horse Addiction – Eric Moran – Mr. Moran thanks Wakefield for support and reviewed stats. **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$5000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

CASA – Mr. Miller moved to increase the appropriation to \$1000. Mr. Fogg seconded the motion. Mr. Miller spoke to the services provided by CASA. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Wakefield Food Pantry – Mr. Miller spoke to the tremendous support received from the community and firmly requested they be allotted only \$5000. **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$5000. Ms. Twombly seconded the motion.** Mr. Knight spoke to numbers served, as well as the various sources providing food. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Budget Committee

October 30, 2021

Page 6

Cross Roads House – Jessica Parker – Ms. Parker spoke to the services provided. Mr. Knight noted that we could use a similar facility in Carroll County. Ms. Marcoux confirmed to Mr. O'Connor that the Town does utilize these services (located in Portsmouth) and was impressed with her tour of the facility. **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$1500. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Children Unlimited – Ardis Yahna – Ms. Yahna spoke to the services provided to Wakefield families. **Mr. Knight moved the request at \$1500. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Cornerstone VNA – Julie Reynolds – Ms. Reynolds spoke to the services provided the Wakefield residents. She also referred to the loss of staff due to the vaccine mandate. Mr. O'Connor spoke in support of their services provided. Mr. Miller questioned why there are 2 separate organizations. Ms. Reynolds noted they provide multiple VNA services, adding it is important for patients to have a choice and not every facility provides the exact same services. She noted the choice is often based on location. Ms. Marcoux spoke to the complaints received from some residents regarding behavior of the VNA workers in their homes. She encourages those individuals to contact Cornerstone directly. Mr. Fifield questions why the State of Maine's mandate affects a NH business. Since Cornerstone has a Maine license, it must comply with Maine's regulations. **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$4000. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion.** Ms. Conner wonders whether those fired workers can collect unemployment. Mr. Knight believes they can. **The motion then passed 9-0-1 (Mr. Fifield abstaining).**

SHARE – Skip Smith – **Mr. Fogg moved the request at \$2000. Mr. Romano seconded the motion.** Mr. Smith spoke to the services provided. Ms. Marcoux noted that both she and Ms. Fogg sought a relationship with SHARE. Mr. Knight noted that the Episcopal church in Wakefield no longer supports a thrift store. They often get inquiries about such services at the Food Pantry. Wakefield residents can go directly to SHARE for clothing and diapers. If financial services are needed, Wakefield residents must start with the Wakefield welfare department. In response to Ms. Twombly, Mr. Smith advised that donations are accepted Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 9a-3p at the James Foley Center next to Spaulding High School. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Mr. Fogg moved the section total at \$118,645. Mr. Romano seconded the motion. Mr. O'Connor asked about DPW mutual aid and whether this was set up through UNH. Mr. Scala advised that this effort was spearheaded by Brock Mitchell and was recently experienced in Barnstead. Mr. O'Connor wonders whether this is a state-wide program, how a decision is made whether to provide aid, and whether any reimbursement is received for materials and/or labor. Mr. Romano noted that on the fire side, the offering town absorbs most of the costs, although there might be reimbursement from the receiving town for unusual expenditures. Mr. Miller would like information from Brock Mitchell as to when Wakefield might need assistance from another town. He would not always want to be on the giving end. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

[Note: Although another motion, second and vote occurred at this time regarding Town insurance, said vote actually had already occurred at the beginning of this session.]

Budget Committee
October 30, 2021
Page 7

Mr. O'Connor moved to adjourn at 11:45 a.m. Mr. Fogg seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Secretary