

Budget Committee
October 29, 2022

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Priscilla Colbath; Tom Daniels; Bob Ouellette, School Board Rep; Marc Taliaferro; Dave Mankus; Denny Miller; Howie Knight; Ken Fifield, Selectmen's Rep; John Parker; Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; and Toni Bodah, Secretary. Fire Chief Todd Nason, Phil Twombly; Amber Marcoux; and Arlene Fogg were also present, as were representatives from outside agencies as noted below.

Mr. O'Connor opened the posted meeting at 9 a.m., leading all present in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. O'Connor then asked if any Committee member had any follow-up from the previous session. Mr. Daniels referred to the pay study done by the Town. He questioned whether any consideration was included regarding cost-sharing for health insurance. Mr. Scala advised this was part of the study, with the lowest split being 85%/15% (town/employee share). The Town of Wakefield is currently at 88%/12%. Most towns use a 90/10 split (town/employee) or even 100% town-paid; however, those co-pays/deductibles tend to be higher. Wakefield is fairly 'typical'.

Public Safety – Ambulance – Chief Todd Nason – Chief Nason confirmed to Mr. Knight that he has budgeted for 2 additional fulltime positions, beginning as of June 2023. This would result in 3 people on each shift. They are experiencing many back-to-back calls, and the 3rd person could respond to the second call. Mr. Miller noted that the number of calls certainly justifies this addition. Mr. O'Connor noted that yearly revenues are ±\$200,000 YTD. Mr. Fifield indicated that the pay scale for this department was reviewed with Chief Nason and was found to be pretty decent. Additional staff would be more beneficial than increased wages. The employees will get an increase when/if the Selectmen set a COLA. Mr. Scala stated that our year-round population has definitely increased since Covid.

Mr. Daniels noted that the majority of the budget is driven by personnel. He referred to the number of full-time staff being increased at the same time as putting a new pay scale into effect, resulting in a significant impact. Chief Nason referred to several recent scenarios affected by insufficient staff. Surrounding towns are experiencing the same difficulties. He is actually concerned that we may not get applicants should these positions be approved. Mr. Knight referred to commercial payers (insurance companies, etc.) delaying payments, which may affect our YTD revenues. Chief Nason confirmed we have no contracted services other than Mutual Aid. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$610,039. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Public Safety – General Fire – Chief Todd Nason – Mr. Daniels questioned the low YTD expenditures for salaries. Chief Nason explained this section reflects pay for call personnel, who are only paid if they respond to a call. It also includes stipends that are not paid out until near the end of the year. Mr. Scala referred to the overtime line for the Ambulance (previous section) which is over-expended. This line helps to offset that over-expenditure. It is hoped that the overtime line will go down if additional personnel are hired. Mr. Fifield noted that the rate for call personnel was slightly increased to encourage them to respond to calls. We are also looking at the same issue for paramedics. Perhaps we will develop a contract where the Town pays for training if the individual commits to working for Wakefield.

Mr. Miller referred to the request for diesel at \$5500 (01-42201-636); however, the price is going up, as is the cost for new equipment (01-42201-740). Mr. Miller believes both of these lines should be increased. Chief Nason noted that 2 ambulances now run on gas.

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Regarding new equipment, the \$300,000 grant for air packs is still pending. He will want to encumber about \$18,000 to put towards the Town's match. If we lose that grant, then we will need to come up with \$300,000 and will need to address that in the next budget cycle. Chief Nason confirmed to Mr. Miller that we use the State's diesel; however, the vendor supplying the State will not provide a set price. **Mr. Miller moved to increase the diesel line (01-42201-636) by \$3000 (to \$8500). Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 8-2 (Mr. Daniels and Mr. Taliaferro voting against).**

Mr. Knight moved the revised section total at \$227,649. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

Mr. O'Connor referred to Wakefield having responded to a call recently in Rochester. Chief Nason advised that Rochester has established a mutual aid task force, similar to the one in Carroll County. Our crew assisted North Conway earlier this year. Rochester has assisted us in the past as well. This is what every town around us is doing. Mr. Fifield stressed that the Town does not pay the tax on diesel (\$0.42/gallon). Same with gasoline.

Public Safety – E Wakefield Fire – Chief Todd Nason – Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$8203. Mr. Miller seconded the motion. It was noted that the line for electricity will be reviewed. The motion then passed 10-0.

Public Safety – Union Fire – Chief Todd Nason – Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$9948. 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.

Mr. Knight noted that the budget for the E Wakefield station will eventually have to go up. Chief Nason advised that he will be seeking to establish a CRF to address the roof and overhead doors at the Union Station. In response to Mr. Miller, Chief Nason advised he will likely ask to start a CRF for air packs next year. Mr. Scala asked about the need to reseal the floor on the fire side at the PSB. Chief Nason has discussed with Chief Fenton but they have not determined a number yet.

Community Services – Wakefield Library – Mr. knight advised that the original request was for \$14,975; however, the Selectmen increased this budget to \$15,175 because of the increase in utility costs. Mr. Knight moved the line at \$15,175. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

Community Services – Gafney Library and Adult Literacy Program– Dick DesRoches – The Gafney is prepping to re-open! Mr. DesRoches referred to the increase relating to utility costs, in addition to having additional space. If they have over-estimated, the funds will be rolled over into next year's budget. There will also be additional cleaning required. The budget includes a part-time position (15 hours) to coordinate new programs in the community room. The Hi-Set program is now operating in this space, as is the AARP tax program.

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Mr. DesRoches confirmed to Ms. Colbath that the literacy program is back up and running, and there is no change in this budget. He spoke to the benefit of this program for Wakefield residents. Most of the participants in the non-testing portion are Wakefield residents; however, because the testing is State funded, the program must include anyone. Many are from small northern towns, as well as Milton and Middleton. Other towns have been approached for funding without success. **Mt. Knight moved the lines for Gafney Library at \$162,600 and the Literacy Program at \$25,000. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Gen'l Gov't - Heritage Commission – Phil Twombly – Mr. Daniels referred to the significant increase in the Historic Site Renovation line (01-41913-820). He questioned why some of those expenses listed do not come from Fund 04, which has a balance of over \$80,000. Mr. Twombly stated that \$3500 of the cost of the fence at Turntable Park would come from Fund 04; however, the Selectmen agreed to pay the balance of that cost from this operating budget. The property is still owned by the State. Mr. Scala advised that Jeb Bradley has agreed to assist with obtaining a new lease. The Town is assisting with the cost since it is really a town issue, being adjacent to the annex/railroad. Mr. Daniels does not understand why the entire amount would not come from Fund 04, along with some of the other expenses listed in that line. Mr. Fifield noted that a good portion of that fence is actually protecting the municipal parking lot from the railroad tracks. The Town would need to accomplish this even if the Heritage Commission did not participate in the cost. Mr. O'Connor stated that if the railroad requires a fence, it should install one. He questioned what Fund 04 is being saved for. Mr. Twombly advised Fund 04 is used to maintain current properties for which the Commission is responsible—such as, East Wakefield School, Spinney Meeting House, Railroad Station, etc. Some portion of the balance in Fund 04 is 'designated' per the giver. Mr. Miller believes that taxpayers will pay for the fence in any event. Mr. Knight stated that the \$7000 for the mini-split should come out of Fund 04. This budget will be tabled until additional information regarding the availability of funds in Fund 04 is known.

Gen'l Gov't – Cemeteries – Phil Twombly – Mr. O'Connor advised that \$2700 from the Cemetery Trust Funds was returned to the General Fund for the first 2 quarters of 2022. Mr. Twombly noted that the only increase in this budget relates to a \$1000 increase for the maintenance contract. **Mr. Daniels moved the section total AT \$36,510. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Community Services – Conservation Commission – Mr. Miller noted that the Commission's Fund 03 is funded by the land use change tax (with a designated purpose). Years ago the percentage of this contribution was limited; however, currently 100% of it goes to Fund 03. He suggested it may be time to cap this as the Fund has grown to \$269,000. He suggested the Budget Committee recommend to the Selectmen at a cap be established, with the remainder to go to the General Fund. Discussion followed regarding whether fund balance should be capped or whether the percentage of land use change tax contributed to it should be changed. Mr. Mankus believes the percentage could be changed, adding there is actually grant money available for the designated purpose. He would be comfortable with a fund balance at \$150,000. Mr. Daniels believes a balance should be higher; however, he likes the idea of changing the percentage. Mr. Mankus noted that if the percentage were changed to zero now, it could be revisited later if necessary. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$5950. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-1 (Mr. Daniels voting against; Mr. Fifield out of the room).**

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Human Services – Public Assistance – Amber Marcoux – Ms. Marcoux advised that the office is busy. Mr. Knight commended that office for doing a great job of utilizing services of outside agencies to reduce the cost to the taxpayers. The kerosene shortage was discussed. Mr. Daniels referred to the increase in the Assistant Director's line (01-44411-120). Ms. Marcoux advised this relates to an increase in weekly hours. Mr. Knight stated that since June 1, the Food Pantry serves 2-3 new families each week, which ultimately trickles down to the Welfare office. In response to Mr. Miller, Ms. Marcoux advised the Fuel Assistance Program begins December 1 (other than for emergency situations). Mr. Scala referred to the danger in people seeking alternative methods to heat their homes. Ms. Marcoux also advised that they have recouped nearly \$1700 used to assist homeowners. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$55,532. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Mr. O'Connor called for a recess at 10:16 a.m., and called the session back to order at 10:26 a.m.

Human Services – Outside Agencies

Granite State VNA – Maureen Paul – Ms. Paul advised they have merged with Concord to become Granite VNA. She reviewed services provided. Mr. Miller questioned why we fund 2 VNA's and who determines which organization is used. Ms. Paul advised they get referrals from the hospitals; however, the recipient is able to choose which organization to use. **Mr. Knight moved the request at \$9000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Ossipee Concerned Citizens – Misty Ryder – Ms. Ryder confirmed that the number of meals being served is increasing, as people often need to make a decision between obtain heating fuel or food. The numbers served in Wakefield had been decreasing; however, that is no longer the case. **Mr. Daniels moved the line at \$18,240. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion. Both motions were withdrawn.**

Mr. Miller moved the line at \$21,000. Mr. Knight seconded the motion. Discussion followed regarding the challenges involved in finding volunteers drivers. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Starting Point – No representative was present. This organization did not seek payment in 2021, and no request for funding was received in 2022. Mr. Fifield spoke to the critical services provided by this organization. Perhaps they experienced a change in management. Mr. Scala will attempt to make contact. This request was tabled.

Northern Human Services – No representative was present. Mr. Miller referred to the time taken by this Committee to consider these requests. Each organization should take the time to request release of funds approved. **Mr. Miller moved to zero the line. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Tri-County CAP – No representative was present. Mr. Miller noted this organization is used constantly by the Town of Wakefield. **Mr. Miller moved the line at \$11,702. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Greater Wakefield Resource Center – Victor Becker – Mr. Becker noted they have been steadily decreasing their yearly request for support in the spirit of the original agreement to not be a burden on the taxpayers. However, due to COVID they experienced decreased revenues and increased expenses. In addition, the bi-annual BEAS contract was not renewed, which assisted with the senior meals program. They cannot reapply for those funds until 2024. However, the need for these meals is going up. They are currently involved with Ossipee Concerned Citizens to see if they can support this program (in addition to coordination of the Meals on Wheels program). Therefore, it has become necessary for the GWRC to increase its request to the Town. They did receive funding from other towns last year, but they have not been able to rely on yearly contributions.

Ms. Colbath referred to the loss of revenue from the Literacy Program moving. Mr. Becker is unsure of the exact amount, but they do have 2 other leases generating between \$4000 to \$5000 per year. In response to Mr. Miller, Mr. Becker indicated that there are several other senior meal programs in the area. **Mr. Knight moved the line at \$30,000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Wakefield Projects Inc – Victor Becker – The 2022 request has not yet been expended. Expenses for the fire stair addition to the east side of Town Hall would have come from this appropriation. However, March 2022 voting suggested that major capital campaigns should occur orderly and not in multiple numbers. If the Parks & Rec project passes in 2023, the fire stair project will be moved to 2024 at the earliest. Therefore, WPI did not need to spend the \$10,000 appropriation in 2022, but we did not want to zero the line in case it would be difficult to re-establish the pattern of financial support. This \$1000 request is just to help cover the cost of liability insurance, filing fees, etc. **Mr. Knight moved the line at \$1000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Acton Wakefield Watershed Alliance – Joh Balanoff – This request has increased from \$18,000 in 2022 to \$40,000 for 2023. Mr. Balanoff explained they help the community maintain water quality via 4 programs: Middle School Science; Septic Cost Sharing; Camp Road Improvement; and General Water Quality Outreach. The middle school program was adversely affected by COVID; however, he has personally restarted the program. He would like to see it expanded to 3 courses for 6, 7 & 8 graders in Wakefield and Acton. The camp road improvement and septic cost sharing help prevent sediment and phosphorus from getting into the lakes. They are only funded through the EPA which are very restrictive. Additional funding of AWWA would allow for identifying other grants which may be less restrictive. He would like to host workshops year-round to promote the importance of water quality and how it affects our lives and property. He is seeking half the cost of this expense and will seek the other half elsewhere.

In response to Mr. Miller, Mr. Balanoff indicated he has not yet approached Acton for funding as their fiscal year is different. Mr. Miller asked how permission to work on private camp roads is received when it is often difficult to determine ownership. Mr. Balanoff works with the various road associations. Sometimes on smaller roads he works with individual homeowners who agree to the project. He would not work when ownership is unknown. Mr. Miller was advised that the cost is generally split 60/40 with the homeowners; however, this can be adjusted case by case.

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When asked how he would move forward should financial support not be forthcoming from Acton, Mr. Balanoff indicated he would try to find funding elsewhere—perhaps via private foundations. Ms. Colbath questioned whether this is the year for this increase. Mr. Balanoff referred to record income from individual donors in 2021, noting he has been approached from a number of individuals to expand some of these programs. He is currently at his personal capacity and needs another individual. He referred to the erosion assessment conducted as part of the recent watershed survey, the results of which justifies an additional staff member by itself. Mr. Daniels spoke to the importance of working together for the benefit of the community and stressed his support for this increased request. Ms. Colbath agreed that AWWA does a great job. Mr. Knight referred to a number of projects on Pine River Pond. The applications for additional grants will require more of Mr. Balanoff's time; therefore, he needs another individual to continue with established programs. This is a win-win for the Town.

Mr. Mankus referred to erosion control projects accomplished on Great East Lake. AWWA is not running out of things to do, and he heartily endorses the increased request. Mr. Miller noted that he originally did not anticipate supporting this request. However, over 75% of tax revenue comes from the lakes, and we must protect that tax base. He would now support this request.

Mr. O'Connor is not sure this is the time to put this extra burden on the taxpayers. He spoke to the increased expenses facing residents this year. Mr. Mankus predicted that sale prices on lake-front property will continue to increase and will ultimately represent more than 75% of our tax base. The largest tax burden is carried by the property owners and they are not worried about heating their homes. Ms. Colbath is not critical of AWWA's efforts. She questioned whether expansion of these programs would take away time from AWWA's efforts on the lakes. Mr. Balanoff stated that with the additional staff member, he would be able to expand all programs, including camp roads and septic.

Mr. Knight moved the line at \$40,000. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 7-3 (Mr. O'Connor, Mr. Parker and Mr. Taliaferro voting against).

White Horse Addiction Center – No request received.

CASA – No representative present. **Mr. Miller moved to zero the line. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 9-0 (Mr. Fifield out of the room).**

Wakefield Food Pantry – Howie Knight & Denny Miller – Mr. Knight noted they are seeking level funding. They also receive funding from Milton, Brookfield and Newfield. Mr. Miller added that they do receive some grants. The number of those served will continue to increase. Mr. Knight advised they are giving out more food than normal to accommodate their needs. Mr. Miller added that the Town's funding goes to food 100%. **Ms. Colbath moved the line at \$5000. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.** Mr. Knight added that they currently have over 75 volunteers.

Cross Roads House – Will Arvelo – Ms. Marcous confirmed that she refers individuals to this facility. Mr. Knight noted this is a critical facility. **Mr. Knight moved the line at \$1500. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion.** Mr. Arvelo advised this is the second largest homeless shelter in the State of NH. They serve the entire state, as well as York County, Maine. They take families, males and females. **The motion then passed 10-0.**

Cornerstone VNA – Janice Howard – In response to Mr. Miller, Ms. Howard stated they do not compete with Granite VNA. They get referrals from Huggins, Frisbie and Wentworth Douglas. Patients have the choice of which organization to use and make this decision based on patient experience, word of mouth, etc. Although it might make sense to consolidate, it has not been proposed. Ms. Howard stressed they receive many calls from this area. **Mr. Miller moved the line at \$4000. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

Children Unlimited – Barbara Campbell – Ms. Campbell advised that 7 Wakefield families were served last year, and she spoke to the types of services provided. **Mr. Knight moved the line at \$1500. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.**

SHARE Fund – No request received.

Minutes – Mr. Knight moved to approve the minutes of September 7, 2022, as presented. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

The next meeting will occur on November 2 at 6:30 p.m. Mr. Scala recapped the following outstanding issues: Capping Fund 03; balance of Fund 04 (designated vs. available; cost of mini-split); Starting Point request; and lines relating to electricity.

Mr. Knight moved to adjourn at 11:38 p.m. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed without objection!

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Secretary