

**Budget Committee**

**December 13, 2022 D**

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

Also present were Brock Mitchell, DPW Director; and Police Chief Mike Fenton. The Budget Committee first met with representatives of the SAU/School, minutes for which were taken by Ms. Colbath. Ms. Bodah took up the gauntlet at 7:31 p.m.

A representative from the Union Village Community Association drew the Committee's attention to information previously distributed by Richard House regarding the UVCA's progress/plans for the Drew Mill Dam in Union.

Mr. O'Connor directed to the Committee members to the Town's draft warrant. Mr. Miller referred to Article 2, a zoning article related to junkyards. He asked for a definition of a junkyard and questioned who would enforce such a regulation. Mr. Fifield advised that the current regulation mirrors that State's regulation, which would mean the Town would need to update this regulation each time the State did so. The revised regulation would refer to the State's regulation rather than merely use the same language. A junkyard is defined as having 2 or more unregistered vehicles, or equivalent, as seen from the road. This would exclude collectibles in a barn or a garage. The Police Department used to conduct an audit once or twice each year and advise the Code Enforcement office of findings, who would enforce the regulation. Mr. Scala added that anyone may file a complaint; however, anonymous complaints are discouraged. He noted that during his tenure, the Town has had success with 4 properties, 3 of which were long-time offenders.

Mr. O'Connor read aloud each article as follows:

**Article 7 - \$4.9 million bond for Multi-Generational Facility** – The Selectmen have not yet voted on this article as they are awaiting a firmer number, which may be adjusted depending upon anticipated donations/grants. Mr. O'Connor stated that the project will involve a design-build contract, according to videos he has watched. In addition, some areas of the project may be postponed if adequate funds are ultimately unavailable. Mr. Fifield noted that the project does not include a contingency. Therefore, some areas of the project could be sacrificed if the \$4.9 bond proves insufficient. There is a potential for a grant, up to \$1 million. Perhaps the undesignated fund balance will be used. The actual bond amount is still in flux. Mr. Scala referred to some serious personal financial commitments, as well as some specific grant opportunities. He added that there is no guarantee that the individual overseeing the DPW project will be working on the Parks & Rec project.

Ms. Colbath questioned whether this could be a similar situation to the Public Safety Building and the sally port. Mr. Fifield confirmed the PSB was a design-build. Now, less funds are being directed to the contingency. Therefore, if some portion of the project over-runs, we may have to cut back in other areas. Mr. O'Connor received confirmation that the Town cannot go over the amount listed in the warrant article. Bond counsel will review the language and may advise use of the phrase 'up to'. Mr. Mankus asked whether the article must be approved prior to seeking a bond. Mr. Scala advised that is not the case. If the article fails, no application for a bond will be made. Mr. Fifield indicated there is some homework to be done to determine exactly what we will be asking for.

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No private donations have yet been received. Mr. Daniels advised they are in the process of establishing a 501.c.3 organization in order to accept donations. This article will be reviewed on January 10, 2023.

**Article 8 - \$38,500 for Parks & Rec Field Maintenance CRF** – Mr. Knight noted there is an issue between the Ballfield CRF and the Parks & Rec Field Maintenance CRF. Several years ago, the Ballfield balance was \$0, with the Parks & Rec Field Maintenance being around +\$2,000. Now, the Field Maintenance has been dropped from TD Bank's list, and the Ballfield balance is around +\$2,000. The Trustees will need to address this with TD Bank.

Mr. Scala advised that one existing field stays wet all season. Stumps were buried in the outfield of the second field and are now creating a safety issue. The requested funds will not cover both issues. Mr. Daniels noted that \$1.5 million is being proposed in warrant articles, while the average has been closer to \$800,000 to \$900,000. Approval of all these articles would result in an increased tax rate. Mr. Fifield noted the total includes \$500,000 for Bonnyman Road, which skews the total. **Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Ms. Conner seconded the motion, which failed by a vote of 2-9.** [The notation in the article will refer to 'not recommended by a vote of 9-2'.]

**Article 9 - \$10,000 to Establish an Expendable Trust Fund for Town Owned Boat Launches** –

Considerable discussion ensued as to why this would be an expendable trust fund rather than a capital reserve fund. Mr. Scala advised that the Lovell Lake site would be a priority, adding that he has found a grant for this specific situation (75/25 match). Mr. Fifield is in favor of improving these sites so that those without lakefront property can still go fishing, etc. The language of the article may be revised to refer to Town-owned launches.

Reference was made to the work done by the Highway Department to create the boat-trailer parking area. Mr. Mitchell noted that working on the launches would require State permitting. Discussion followed as to whether permits would be required if only hand tools were used rather than equipment. Mr. Mankus referred to Weeks Park, which is not often used for boat launching. Such use would require monitoring for milfoil. The site is often used for ice fishing. He does not believe there would be much cost involved, as the AWWA YCC could likely accomplish the little that would be required. Mr. Mitchell stressed that work necessary at Great East Lake could not be done with hand tools. No vote was taken at this time, as the Board of Selectmen will revisit this article.

**Article 10 - \$125,000 Bridge CRF** – Mr. Scala advised we expect receipt of \$100,000 from the State, specifically for bridge work. We currently have 2 bridges that require work—one on Acton Ridge Road, the other in Union. Mr. Daniels referred to the HEB report from several years ago, which did not list a bridge on Acton Ridge. Mr. Mitchell stated this is actually a culvert that was installed about 8 years ago—60' long x 8' in diameter. He has prices for both bridges—Union @ \$700,000; Acton Ridge at \$312,000. Mr. Miller stated that we have spent much money this year bringing salaries of Town employees to where they should be, which will result in a big hit to the taxpayers. He would prefer to be more conservative on this year's articles to offset that increase. He agrees we should continue to put funds away, but not this much. Mr. Mitchell noted he is working to fix 2 bridges, not just one. Mr. O'Connor pointed out that the bridge in Union has another access.

Mr. Daniels agreed we should continue to put money aside for bridge construction, but this is not the year to increase this ask by \$50,000. It was agreed that the Selectmen will revisit this article.

**Article 11 - \$25,000 Highway Heavy Equipment CRF – Mr. Miller moved to recommend the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. Daniels received confirmation that no purchase is yet planned. The account has a balance of \$44,000. It might be the year to refrain from funding this particular CRF. Mr. Mitchell would like to avoid the situation of having to purchase 2 pieces of equipment in one year. He spoke to the number of hours on the existing equipment. Next in line to be replaced would be the loader, with a life-span of 8-10 years. He prefers to move them out before they become worthless. **The motion then failed by a vote of 5-6.** [Not recommended by a vote of 6-5.]

**Article 12 - \$75,000 Highway Trust CRF – Mr. Daniels referred to the age of the existing trucks and the forecast, noting this request may be a little low. Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 13 - \$275,000 Highway Construction CRF – Mr. Mitchell anticipates working on the end of Canal Road out to the bridge, Oak Hill Road and Brackett Road. The current balance is \$130,000. In addition to this appropriation, Highway Block Grant funds would be used. Mr. Daniels moved to recommend the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 14 - \$500,000 to establish a Road Renovation CRF – Mr. Knight suggested this is not the year for this article. Mr. Scala explained it is ear-marked for Bonnyman Road; however, that project will likely wind up in Court. If that occurs, the Board does not want taxpayers' money tied up during that time; therefore, the article does not specifically mention Bonnyman Road. Mr. Miller stated that it is ludicrous for the Town to spend this much money to benefit such a small percentage of residents. Mr. Fifield stated that the Selectmen do not disagree; however, it would be willing to spend this money on Bonnyman Road if it were the will of the people. This article will advise the voters as to the cost to fix Bonnyman Road. Safety and erosion issues have been cited. If this article is defeated, the Board can then pursue other options. Mr. Mitchell added that the road must be maintained as it is a Town road. Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Ms. Conner seconded the motion, which failed 0-11. [Not recommended by a vote of 11-0.]**

**Article 15 – \$25,000 Transfer Station Heavy Equipment CRF – Mr. Mitchell indicated he is just replenishing this CRF. Mr. O'Connor believes this CRF was specific to 3 pieces of equipment, not to include a compactor. Perhaps this would come under the CRF for the facility. Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 10-1.**

**Article 16 - \$25,000 Transfer Station Facility CRF – The balance is \$33,000 and is earmarked for the current building project. Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 17 - \$5000 to Establish a Transfer Station Trucks CRF – Mr. O'Connor suggested that Transfer Station trucks would come under the DPW. The Transfer Station currently has 1 pick-up truck and 2 roll-off Macks. Discussion followed regarding having DPW CRF's to cover both Highway and Transfer Station.**

Mr. Daniels noted we will need \$42,000 in 2025 to buyout the current lease. We should think about whether to change names/purposes of Highway and Transfer Station CRF's. Mr. Mankus noted that the Town has a history of contributing to little buckets of money, which is more palatable to the voters. He stated we should keep the CRF's separate as combining them will make contributions bigger and harder to sell. Ms. Colbath expressed her agreement. **Mr. Miller moved to recommend the article. Ms. Conner seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 18 - \$25,000 Wastewater Treatment CRF** – Mr. Mitchell advised this would be for plans when the time comes to build a treatment facility. **Mr. Miller moved to recommend the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 19 - \$60,000 Ambulance CRF** – **Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 20 - \$95,000 Fire Truck CRF** – Mr. Scala noted that the Chief is working towards a fire truck and replacement of the command vehicle. Mr. Fifield noted that replacement costs are increasing. **Ms. Conner moved to recommend the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 21 - \$23,000 to Establish a Union Station Roof/Overhead Doors CRF** – It was suggested that this should be in the operating budget rather than establishing a CRF; or we could establish a CRF for both the East Wakefield Station and the Union Station. The Selectmen will revisit this article.

**Article 22 - \$34,525 Invasive Species ETF** – **Mr. Miller moved to recommend the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Article 23 - \$44,000 Police Cruiser CRF** – **Mr. Daniels moved to recommend the article. Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion.** Mr. Miller stated this purchase used to be in the operating budget and suggested that might be easier. The Selectmen may consider putting this in the operating budget next year. **The motion then passed 11-0.**

**Article 24 - \$35,000 Public Safety Building CRF** – Mr. Fifield stated this appropriation will be needed for 2 years in order to address the sally port. Mr. Scala stated there has been some discussion regarding combining this article with Article 25, which is for the floor on the Fire side. Both articles may be too specific. The original purpose of the CRF should be checked. The Selectmen will revisit these articles.

**Article 26 - \$2500 Technology CRF** – **Mr. Miller moved to recommend the article. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. Daniels suggested these costs should be moved to the operating budget in the future. The Selectmen will reconsider this article. **No vote was taken.**

**Article 27 - \$50,000 Town Hall Improvements CRF** – **Mr. Daniels moved to recommend the article. Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion.** Mr. Scala stated we need to address the roof, perhaps with metal shingles. Projected target date: 2024. **The motion then passed 11-0.**

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**Article 28 - \$12,000 Assessing Statistical Update CRF** – Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.

**Article 29 - \$10,000 GWRC Building CRF** – Mr. Daniels noted that the lowest quote was for \$42,275, so this appropriation would leave us a little short for addressing the roof. We would need \$13,000. The Selectmen will revisit this article.

**Article 30 - \$8,000 Cemetery Maintenance CRF** – Mr. Knight moved to recommend the article. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.

**Article 31 - \$7,000 Mini-Split Railroad Museum** – It was suggested that this cost should be paid via the Heritage Commission fund. **Mr. Knight moved to not recommend the article. Ms. Conner seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

The Operating Budget article cannot be reviewed at this time, as there are several outstanding issues within the that budget. Reference was made to an article to change the amount of Land Use Change Tax to be placed in the Conservation Fund. The Committee was in consensus that this money should go to the General Fund until such time as another conservation project exists.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 10, 2023, beginning at 5:30 p.m. to review outstanding Town issues; at 6:15 the Committee will review outstanding School issues; with the public hearing to be scheduled for 6:30 p.m. **All agreed by consensus to approve the minutes of October 29, November 2 and November 29, 2022, as presented.**

**Mr. Miller moved to adjourn at 9:45 p.m. Mr. Knight seconded the motion and everyone was too tired to disagree.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Toni Bodah, Secretary