

Budget Committee September 12, 2023

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Howie Knight; Denny Miller; Tom Daniels; John Parker; Brennan Peaslee, School Board Rep; Marc Taliferro; Josh Fuller; and Ken Fifield, Selectmen's Rep.

Also present were Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; Anne Kebler, Asst Superintendent SAU #101; Frank Markiewicz, SAU #101 Business Administrator; Douglas Soares; Priscilla Colbath; Relf Fogg; Natalie Kelley; and Valerie Ward, Town Clerk.

Mr. O'Connor opened the posted meeting at 6:32 p.m., leading all present in the Pledge of Allegiance. He stated the purpose of this session is to review YTD budget information for the Town, as well as the School budget for the last fiscal year. The first issue, however, is to consider filling the vacancy on the Budget Committee. Two letters of interest were received from Douglas Soares and Priscilla Colbath. At this point Mr. Fogg addressed the Committee. Mr. Fogg did not utilize a microphone and could not be heard on the video from which these minutes were transcribed. It is understood, however, that Mr. Fogg was interested in being considered for the vacancy on the Committee and that he believed the wording of the solicitation was not clear that he needed to submit a letter of interest prior to this meeting. Mr. O'Connor noted that the usual process is to accept letters of interest via email, similar to job applications. If the wording of the solicitation was ambiguous, Mr. O'Connor will ensure in the future that all is done appropriately.

Mr. Miller would like to hear from the 2 candidates who have expressed interest. Mr. Soares provided a brief background of his time in Wakefield, having moved here in 2018. He volunteers at the Food Pantry and belongs to the local Lions Club. Mr. Soares is eager to learn and has spent 40 years in the hospitality industry.

Mr. Miller noted that there is currently only one position available, with 2 interested parties. However, at the end of this season, there will actually be several positions available, including a 2-year term created by Ms. Conner's resignation, as well as his own seat, for which there will still be one year left. In addition, 3 3-year seats will also be available. So, if one is not appointed to the Committee this evening, there will be plenty of opportunity to participate in March.

Ms. Colbath asked that Mr. O'Connor read aloud her letter of interest, which he did (and which is attached as part of these minutes). Mr. Fogg (again not utilizing a microphone) appeared to question the parliamentary procedures used by this Committee. Mr. O'Connor invited the Committee members to ask questions of the candidates. Mr. Miller clarified that although this meeting is open to the public, it is not a public meeting. It is a meeting of the Budget Committee. The public can be present, but it may not speak unless invited to do so by the Committee. Mr. O'Connor then read aloud an email from Peter Kasprzyk, Sanbornville Water Precinct Rep, in which he supports the appointment of Ms. Colbath.

Mr. Taliaferro suggested that Mr. Fogg be given an opportunity to speak. Mr. O'Connor invited Committee members to share their thoughts. It was noted that the situation between Mr. Fogg and Ms. Colbath has been publicly discussed, and most members appeared inclined to move on. **Mr. Parker moved to appoint Priscilla Colbath to the vacant position on the Budget Committee. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 6-2-1 (Mr. Fifield abstaining).** Mr. Fifield explained that he is present to vote on money issues but felt it was up to elected members of the Committee to determine how best to fill the vacancy.

Ms. Ward was present and swore in Ms. Colbath to the Budget Committee, and Ms. Colbath joined the Committee at the table. Again, Mr. Fogg spoke without a microphone and could not be heard on the recorded video.

Mr. Knight moved to appoint Priscilla Colbath as Vice Chair of the Budget Committee. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 10-0.

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Mr. Miller questioned the status of the Town's request to DRA for use of \$350,000 from the undesignated fund balance, as approved by the Budget Committee. Mr. Scala advised that DRA has approved use of \$242,000 for bridge repair, which they deem was an emergency. However, DRA determined that the accompanying roadwork was not an emergency. The Town will submit an additional request with assistance of Town Counsel. Mr. Fifield stressed that we will be appealing DRA's decision in order to utilize all funds requested. Mr. Scala explained that all expenses have been paid; however, we are trying to backfill accounts from which funds were spent. Mr. Fifield noted that the Town had received 2 Highway Safety Grants which were earmarked for other projects. Those funds were utilized to address emergency situations, and now we are trying to replenish them.

Mr. Knight questioned the status of the Carroll County FEMA application. Mr. Scala reaches out to FEMA every 3-4 days. Carroll County has met the threshold, and we look to be in a good position; however, we are still waiting for confirmation that Wakefield will receive funding.

Mr. O'Connor questioned the status of the new DPW building. Mr. Scala advised that a punch list is being developed for the Board's review. No grand opening has been held as yet.

Mr. Daniels referred to the \$1.7 million variance in the YTD budget. The Town spends an average of \$618,000 each month, which would require \$2.8 million. He is concerned about spending for the next 4 months. Mr. Scala noted that the bond payment, including interest, has been made. Some lines will be overspent, including overtime, legal, and maintenance lines. Mr. Scala is a little worried about the health insurance line; however, we have savings in several other departments (police, code and transfer station). The ship is being run tightly. Mr. Fifield stated the situation will look better once the lines are replenished by use of undesignated fund balance. Mr. Scala has confirmed with Chief Nason that his wages/salaries should come in lower, although overtime will be over-expended.

Mr. Miller referred to the need for new air packs, for which a grant was not received. Will these necessary funds be in the operating budget or a warrant article? Mr. Miller stressed this is a necessary expense. Mr. Daniels noted that there are funds to purchase 3 this year. The plan is to purchase 5 over the next 3 years. Mr. Fifield stressed the need to establish incentives to attract call personnel.

Mr. Scala stressed that the main goal in 2024 is to take care of Town employees and get the budget passed. Department Heads have been directed to leave 2024 wage lines as is.

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Mr. Scala referred to dates for the Budget Committee to review the proposed 2024 Town budget. The Committee agreed to the following dates: Thursday, October 26, Saturday October 28 and Wednesday November 1. A follow up meeting will be scheduled for December, with the public hearing to be held on Tuesday, January 9, 2024. The Committee will review the proposed School budget in mid/late November.

Mr. Miller noted that there could be up to 5 new members on the Budget Committee after the March election. Perhaps the Committee should consider an orientation. Mr. Miller and Mr. Knight would be willing to conduct Budget 101 if there is any interest. Mr. O'Connor does provide new members with various information; however, he agrees it would be a great idea to provide an orientation.

Review of the Town's 2023 YTD budget was complete at approximately 7:15 p.m. The Committee proceeded to review the School's information, minutes for which will be provided by Ms. Colbath [thanks, Priscilla!].

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Secretary
(transcribed from Clearview Community TV video]