

**Budget Committee**  
**October 28, 2023**

**Present:** Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Tom Daniels; John Parker; Howie Knight; Marc Taliaferro; Priscilla Colbath; Denny Miller; Josh Fuller; Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; and Toni Bodah, Secretary. Charlie Edwards, BoS Rep, joined the session in progress.

Those also present included Beryl Donovan; Jennifer Rich; Sharon Theiling; Penny Voyles; Dick DeRoches; Barbara Wadleigh; Phil Twombly; Nancy Bancroft; Relf Fogg and Amber Marcoux, as well as representatives from outside agencies as indicated below. Mr. O'Connor called the session to order at 9 a.m. and led all present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Bodah referred to an error in the previous version of the proposed 2024 budget. The information in the columns headed '2023 Request' should have reflected the 2023 budget as approved by the Budget Committee (which it now does). Unfortunately, it reflected the original 2023 Department Head requests. This amplified the concern regarding the increase in the Town Clerk's wage line. Mr. Daniels would like to see the history of the Town Clerk's wages over the past 3 years. This will be provided at the next meeting.

Mr. Daniels noted that Public Works had added an employee in 2023, bringing the total to 6. He asked whether any other employees have been added to any other department—specifically, whether our head count increased, or any part-time positions become fulltime. Mr. Scala advised there were some wage line/chart changes; however, there were no new additions. In fact, DPW filled a vacancy but did not add a position. There were changes in the wage line/chart for summer camp counselors, 2 of whom are moving to the operating budget from Fund 5 (as proposed in this budget).

Mr. O'Connor stated that if 67% of the budget relates to employment, as indicated by Mr. Daniels, this does not seem out of line for a service-oriented organization.

**Ambulance – Chief Todd Nason (via telephone)**

Mr. Daniels noted that we appear to get back slightly less than ½ our costs back in revenue. Chief Nason agreed that is likely accurate. Mr. Scala noted there is a maximum that the Town can get back. Chief Nason noted that situation has been improving over the past several years. Mr. Miller noted it often takes 6-8 months to get revenue after such an expense has been incurred.

Mr. Daniels noted that the first 3 lines (Wages, Overtime and Holidays) reflect a substantial increase over the past several years. Chief Nason confirmed that the lines include step increases (that were lost during the default budget), a COLA plus 2 additional staff members. He is having difficulty retaining current staff. The 2 new staff would be added beginning in June 2024. Mr. Scala noted that nearly 2 years ago, Chief Nason tried to get 2 new staff members. At that time he opted to not adjust the relevant wage line/chart in order to soften the impact of 2 new staff members.

Mr. Daniels asked why 2 additional staff members are necessary. Chief Nason explained that he would like to have 3 on shift so that 1 would remain on site to coordinate call people in the event of a second concurrent call for service. Mr. Daniels asked whether calls for service are decreasing after the spike during Covid. Chief Nason advised the number of calls has slightly decreased; however, we are still matching the 5-year average. Chief Nason cited various stats for this year. He noted there have not been many storm-related calls, other than some flooding issues.

## **Budget Committee**

**October 28, 2023**

**Page 2**

Mr. Knight stated we have had a problem attracting volunteers for years. Now requirements are so onerous, it is even more difficult. This forces us to cover the shifts with fulltime employees. **Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$675,183. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 7-1.**

### **General Fire – Chief Todd Nason**

Chief Nason pointed out the increase in vehicle maintenance (01-42201-660) and medical supplies (01-42201-810). We have had a lot of equipment issues this year. It will cost \$8000 to replace the rear of Engine #2, which is currently on the back burner. Mr. Daniels referred to the significant increase in the salary line (01-42201-120). In 2022 it was \$55,409.87; Selectmen are now seeking \$88,600. Why the increase? Chief Nason stated that the stipends have not changed in years. The remainder is based on an estimate of the number of calls coming in and the number of call people to respond. The pay scale was adjusted to keep call people involved. Mr. Scala noted that the lack of call personnel affects the Ambulance overtime line.

Mr. O'Connor sees regular increases in this line from 2022, 2023 and the default budget. Mr. Scala noted that the COLA impacts the wages in this line (not the stipends). Mr. Miller stated that the Committee approved a similar increase in 2023, adding this is really almost a flat increase to 2024's request. Mr. Daniels noted that it looks as though we are overbudgeting but under-expending. It was pointed out that none of the stipends in this line have been paid out for 2023—this will be done in November.

Mr. Knight stressed that we need to consider the \$37,000 increase in the Ambulance overtime line. **Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$232,116. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

### **East Wakefield Fire – Chief Todd Nason**

**Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$7300. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

### **Union Fire – Chief Todd Nason**

**Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$8914. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

### **Forest Fires – Chief Todd Nason**

**Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$2000. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

### **Community Services – Gafney Library – Dick DesRoches and Beryl Donovan**

Mr. DesRoches referred to fearing they would need to close because of the default budget; however, funds were forthcoming. Hours of operation were reduced, and an emergency appeal was sent out. All at the Gafney are very grateful for the support received. The Gafney opened nearly 100 years ago and is a public library by statute. As such, its services must be free. They are also a non-profit, and the Town does not own the building. The Town could, at any time, absorb the Gafney Library and make it a Town-owned building. However, this has not occurred. Mr. DesRoches believes the Gafney provides the Town with the best of all worlds. The Town does not need to maintain the building. Mr. DesRoches referred to the recent extensive expansion/renovation, none of which was paid for by the Town. Ms. Donovan noted that the taxpayers requested the expansion/renovation. Mr. DesRoches referred to the major stone culvert which ran under the property next door, which property was purchased by the Gafney. The culvert has been completely rebuilt by the Gafney.

## **Budget Committee**

**October 28, 2023**

**Page 3**

Mr. DesRoches referred to various costs of operating the facility, payroll being the highest expense. The budget request is based on actual costs. Ms. Donovan will be retiring in 2024 and the Gafney will need to attract her replacement. He compared their payroll costs to other libraries of similar size and population, finding that Gafney's rates were too low and adjusting same. The Literacy Program is no longer separate and a version of that program is now rolled into the Gafney.

Mr. Daniels asked about the increase from \$187,000 (the 2023 request) and \$199,250 (the 2024 request). Mr. DesRoches indicated it mostly relates to the increase in hours of operation. The Director works 40 hours/week, while the 2 assistants work 31 hour/week.

Mr. Miller stated that the addition is beautiful and everyone should be proud. Mr. Scala advised that he met with the Gafney prior to their meeting with the Selectmen. They discussed the need to review wages via a study, which information they had when they met with the Selectmen.

**Mr. Miller moved the Gafney line (01-45501-011) at \$199,250. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. DesRoches advised Mr. Daniels that there are 3 hourly rates: Assistant Director @ \$23/hour; Youth Librarian @ \$20/hour; Director at \$30.70/hour (although it is a salary position). The Library Trustees are working to put a wage step system together, adding that they need a consistent budget for the benefit of the staff. **The motion then passed 9-0.**

### **Wakefield Library – Nancy Bancroft**

**Mr. Knight moved the Wakefield Library line (01-45501-012) at \$15,175. Mr. Taliferro seconded the motion.** Ms. Bancroft provided a brief history of the Wakefield Library, the materials of which tend to be more of a historical nature. Mr. Scala noted it is a beautiful building, but he never sees any maintenance activity. Ms. Bancroft advised they have done a number of things and expect the front to be painted soon. Mr. Miller asked whether their limited hours would be expanded due to the Town's anniversary in 2024. Ms. Bancroft indicated they have not planned to do so. Mr. Miller personally believes it should be open more just for this anniversary year. Mr. Scala advised that planning has started for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary/birthday for the Town, with the kick off to be held at Pride Day, to continue through the summer. Perhaps more hours during the summer at the Wakefield Library would be a good idea. Mr. Miller suggested adding \$1500 to this budget in order to keep it open more hours. **Mr. Knight withdrew his motion; Mr. Taliaferro withdrew his second.**

**Mr. Miller moved to add \$1500 to the Wakefield Library line (01-45502-012) for a total of \$16,675. Mr. Fuller seconded the motion, which passed 9-0.**

### **Heritage Commission – Phil Twombly**

**Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$16,600. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. Twombly advised that the Heritage Commission is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. They have been doing considerable maintenance at Union Station, and they had a fair tourist season. **The motion then passed 9-0.**

**Cemeteries – Phil Twombly**

**Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$36,615. Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion.** Mr. Scala noted that Mr. Twombly does an amazing job as Cemetery Trustee, but he eventually will decide not to run for this elected position. We are seeking his clone! Mr. Twombly advised he has 2 more years on his term, at which point he will not re-run. We currently have 124 identified cemeteries, most of which are private. We maintain 40 of those, with the major ones being the Lovell Lake Cemetery and Stonehedge Cemetery. Briefly discussed income, with Mr. Twombly stating it has been a slow season. He advised that there are about 70 cremation lots available at Lovell Lake Cemetery. At Stonehedge, people actually purchase a right-to-inter rather than a plot. **The motion then passed 9-0.**

**Conservation Commission – Relf Fogg**

Mr. Fuller questioned why the Training line (01-46111-330) is only at \$1 when each training session costs \$60. Mr. Fogg stated that expense would come from the Membership line (01-46111-560). If all 5 members attend training, that line could be over-expended, but another line would likely cover such an over-expenditure. Mr. Fogg believes it will be hard to sell any increased lines this coming year. Mr. Knight stated that training expenses should really come from the Training line, as opposed to the Membership line. Mr. Fuller suggested increasing the Training line for the 5 members to receive training. Mr. Fogg stated the Commission had been conscious of keeping the lines at the 2023 request level. Mr. Fuller suggested adding \$300 to the Training line. Mr. Scala suggested that such a motion should come from someone other than a member of the Commission. **Mr. Knight moved to increase the Training line to \$300. No second, motion fails.**

Discussion followed to move \$300 from the Wage line (01-46111-120), since there have been no expenditures from the Wage line. Ms. Colbath noted that the previous clerk resigned the position; however, the Commission is trying to attract a replacement. Mr. Fogg advised that the Commission is looking at this position being paid by a stipend, which would allow an elected official to fill the position. Ms. Colbath is not sure that a stipend can be paid for this position, noting that the Selectmen are the hiring authority. Mr. Scala advised that a draft proposal has come from the Commission, but no decision has been made by the Selectmen. He cautioned moving funds out of the Wage line if the line is expected to be used. **Mr. Miller moved to increase the Training line (01-46111-330) to \$240.** Ms. Colbath asked how many members have attended training over the past couple of years. Mr. Fogg stated that several have participated in webinars and/or seminars, most of which had no cost. He also agrees with the importance of training. Mr. Scala clarified that departments were asked to draft budgets with wage lines to match the previous year's request; however, department heads were also expected to come in with their needs. Mr. Edwards added that training was not discussed with the Board during the review of this budget request. **Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 7-2.**

Mr. Daniels referred to the sponsoring program for camperships and asked what criteria is used to determine assistance. Mr. Fogg advised that the Commission wants to encourage as many campers as possible. Therefore, the appropriation is divided by the number of campers. Mr. Daniels noted that the Committee heard last Thursday that the taxpayers do not pay for participation in Parks & Rec programs. However, the taxpayers are being asked to pay for campers. Mr. Daniels commended the efforts of the Commission. He then referred to the current balance in the Conservation Fund 3, \$44,000 of which is undesignated and which could/should be used for the campership program.

## Budget Committee

October 28, 2023

Page 5

Mr. Fogg confirmed that we have been paying for camperships out of Fund 3. However, if this use continues, the Fund could quickly be diminished. He added that the undesignated fund should be used for various events, purchase of easements, etc. **Mr. Daniels moved to remove \$3500 from this budget under the Education Sponsor line (01-46111-810). Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion.** Mr. Miller noted that about 5 years ago, this line was reduced to \$0 because it was not used. A Commission members addressed Deliberative Session asking for it to be reinstated, which was approved. Mr. O'Connor noted this situation is similar to a previous issue with the Heritage Commission's purchase of a mini-split. **The motion then passed 8-0-1 (Mr. Fuller abstaining).** Mr. Fogg stated his belief that the Budget Committee is targeting the Conservation Commission based on its membership.

Mr. Miller referred to last year's discussion regarding the possibility of changing the percentage of land use change tax being directed to the Conservation Fund. He believes it should be reduced if not being used, which would need to be done via a warrant article. Mr. O'Connor asked whether the Selectmen are considering such an article this year. Mr. Miller stressed that revenue could be used to lower the tax rate, if found to be necessary. Mr. Scala stated that this has not been on his radar, but could be. He would not want to hamstring the Conservation Commission in the event appropriate parcels become available. Mr. Daniels has attended several Conservation Commission meetings and feels that the Commission is taking some concrete steps to bring more land into conservation. There has certainly been more activity in this area over the past 5-6 months.

Discussion followed regarding the history of percentages contributed to the Conservation Fund as well as historical use of this fund. Although Mr. Miller is a huge proponent of conservation property, he believes we should not continue to contribute to this fund if it is not used—rather the money should go back to the taxpayers. Mr. Fogg stated the Commission has discussed several properties over the past few months and briefly provided information on all 3. He stressed that the balance (\$248,000) could evaporate rapidly if an appropriate property becomes available. Mr. O'Connor referred to the need to provide a balance to the taxpayers. Mr. Fogg confirmed that the Commission can set public meetings for discussion, do outreach, but cannot expend funds without participation of the Board of Selectmen.

### **Public Assistance – Amber Marcoux**

**Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$49,120. Mr. Knight seconded the motion.** Mr. Knight noted that the Food Pantry has a great relationship with the Welfare Office. Ms. Marcoux sends individuals to the Food Pantry, which ultimately saves the Town money. Mr. Edwards stressed that Ms. Marcoux does a great job for the Town. Mr. Scala has had an opportunity to work closely with Ms. Marcoux on a case this year and sees her documentation and preparation—great job! She now has the added duties of Land Use Clerk. **The motion then passed 9-0.**

Mr. O'Connor called for a recess at 10:45 p.m., calling the session back to order at 10:58 a.m. Mr. Scala noted that historically, the Board of Selectmen does not meet with outside agencies; therefore, Mr. Edwards has left the session to go back to work. Mr. Miller noted that the Budget Committee worked hard to support outside agencies; however, the voters handed the Town a default budget, which tied the hands of the Town.

**Budget Committee**

**October 28, 2023**

**Page 6**

**Outside Agencies (as follows):**

Granite VNA – Julie Sloane – Ms. Sloane stated they are seeking level-funding, although the number of services has increased over the past year. She briefly described their services. **Ms. Colbath moved to approve the request of \$9000 for Granite VNA. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Ossipee Concerned Citizens – Mr. Daniels occasionally delivers meals and noted this contact is often the only contact some of these participants receive. Briefly discussed GWRC's involvement with this program. **Mr. Knight moved the request for Ossipee Concerned Citizens at \$24,978. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Starting Point – Deb Weinstein – Ms. Weinstein briefly described the services they offer, noting that there has been an increase in the numbers served over the past year. **Mr. Knight moved the request for Starting Point at \$6775. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Northern Human Services – **Mr. Miller moved the request for Northern Human Services at \$4300. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Tri-County CAP – Jeanne Robillard – Ms. Robillard presented their annual report, noting they now have 1 telephone number for all locations. They are seeking \$11,702. This request is based on a formula involving the census, so the amount of the request will not change until the next census. Ms. Robillard briefly described the services provided, noting Wakefield residents received \$368,177.87 worth of benefits. They also provided emergency rental assistance for Wakefield residents, for a grand total of \$469,497.21. This does not include the USDA number. Mr. Miller asked whether they have a number for fuel assistance from the Federal Government. Ms. Robillard has not received that number but expects it will be slightly higher than last year. **Mr. Taliaferro moved the request for Tri-County CAP at \$11,702. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

GWRC – Mr. Scala noted that we did not receive a request due to the changes in personnel at GWRC; however, he has confirmed that the intent is to seek funding for the meals program held at the facility. Mr. Scala will attempt to obtain a written request for consideration at the November 1 meeting.

AWWA – Jon Balanoff – Mr. Balanoff advised they are seeking level funding compared to the 2023 request. He briefly described the efforts of this organization, including the Youth Conservation Corps and programs at local schools. They have hired a program coordinator, hence the increase in their request for funding. Mr. Balanoff advised Mr. O'Connor that the Town of Acton ME does contribute and actually increased their 2023 contribution due to the lack of funding from Wakefield. Mr. Knight stated that the Pine River Pond water project identified a number of septic systems that might adversely affect the quality of the lake. **Mr. Daniels moved the request at \$40,000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 7-1.**

CASA – Joannie Van Gelder – All agreed that CASA provides a tremendous service. Ms. Van Gelder is one of more than 600 volunteers. She briefly described the services provided. Sadly, they sometimes do not have staff to support each child in need. In those cases, an individual is hired to support the child. Ms. Van Gelder reviewed the services provided to Wakefield. Funding is used for training and outreach. **Mr. Knight moved the request of CASA at \$1000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Cornerstone VNA – Julie Reynolds – Ms. Reynolds described the services provided, as well as stats for services to Wakefield residents. Mr. Miller asked whether it is common to have 2 VNA's in one area. Ms. Reynolds stated it is not necessarily the case; however, residents have the option of what organization to use. This organization has begun to serve more Wakefield residents in recent years and has a good relationship with Huggins Hospital. **Mr. Knight moved the request of Cornerstone VNA at \$4000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Wakefield Food Pantry – Denny Miller – Mr. Miller noted that Howie Knight has just retired as President of the WFP – round of applause! He cited a drastic increase in food costs. The WFP has served over 1 million meals since it has been in the new building. The new building has worked out wonderfully, and the Food Pantry does receive funding from several other communities. **Ms. Colbath moved the request of the Wakefield Food Pantry at \$7000. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 7-0-1 (Mr. Miller abstaining).** Mr. Scala noted that when the default budget came into effect, the then-President of the Food Pantry volunteered to have their funding eliminated.

Ms. Bodah confirmed that letters were sent to all agencies that had requested funding in 2023; however, not all submitted requests for appropriations. Ms. Marcoux spoke to the value of Cross Roads House for emergency housing needs. She will contact them to encourage them to request funding. The Committee can address such request on November 1. Ms. Marcoux advised that the SHARE Fund Director indicated that they assisted only a few Wakefield residents so did not require an appropriation from the Town. However, Ms. Marcoux still acquires and delivers donated items for the SHARE thrift shop.

**Mr. Knight moved to adjourn at 11:46 a.m. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, to which no one objected.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Toni Bodah, Acting Secretary