

**Budget Committee  
November 1, 2023**

**Present:** Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Dave Mankus; Tom Daniels; Josh Fuller; Howie Knight; Marc Taliaferro; Bob Ouellette, School Board Rep; John Parker; Priscilla Colbath; Peter Kasprzyk, Sanbornville Water Precinct Rep; Ken Fifield, BoS Rep; Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; and Toni Bodah, Secretary.

Those also present included: Police Chief Michael Fenton; Angie Nichols, Tax Collector; Peter Gosselin, Building/Code; Valerie Ward, Town Clerk; Relf Fogg; and Officer Tim Thompson.

Mr. O'Connor called the posted meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., leading all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Police Department – Chief Michael Fenton**

Chief Fenton clarified to Mr. Knight that he is trying to get the number of staff back to the pre-default level. Ms. Colbath referred to the SRO. Chief Fenton explained his effort to fix where we are falling short; he does not want to use this position to fill other vacancies.

Mr. Kasprzyk noted that the Office Equipment (01-42101-631) and Department Supplies (01-42101-680) lines seem to cover similar needs. Chief Fenton agreed they sometimes are interchangeable and suggested perhaps more clarity in the Explanation column would be helpful. A brief discussion followed regarding the SRO position. Mr. Knight noted that SRO position would also affect the NHRS line. Mr. Daniels asked whether the overtime line would be reduced in this case. Chief Fenton noted that would not be the case. Last year this expense came from the Salary line; however, he has now separated this part-time position. Mr. Daniels referred to the \$53,000 increase in the salary line (between the fulltime line and the new SRO line). Chief Fenton stated that there have been changes in salaries. Mr. Fifield noted that the Selectmen adjusted the wage lines by a 5% COLA. The SRO will be part-time. He stated that the overtime line actually includes fewer hours because the rates are higher.

Mr. Kasprzyk stated that the Training Line (01-42101-330) appears to be similar to the Ammunition Line (01-42101-681). Chief Fenton explained that the Ammunition line is used specifically for those going to the Academy. **Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$1,217,342. Mr. Kasprzyk seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Civil Defense – Chief Fenton**

**Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$3500. Mr. Knight seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Public Safety Building – Chief Fenton**

**Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$130,651. Mr. Kasprzyk seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Animal Control – Chief Fenton**

**Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$13,290. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion, which passed 10-1.**

**Capital Outlay – PD Grants – Chief Fenton**

Mr. Daniels asked about the status of the generator for the PSB. Chief Fenton anticipates a mid-December installation. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$10,200. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Financial Administration – Angie Nichols**

Mr. Scala advised Mr. Knight that the auditing contract runs for 3 years. Mr. Daniels referred to the Wage line (01-41504-130). The hourly rate in the 2023 budget was \$28.34. It now begins at \$29.75, then increases to \$30.49. Mr. Scala noted that as an elected official, the Tax Collector prepares her own budget. As an elected official, the Tax Collector couldn't be held to the same standard as a Town employee. Mr. Scala confirmed that Ms. Nichols did not receive a COLA or merit increase in 2023; however, her wage line/chart was adjusted in the fall of 2022. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$121,280. Mr. Taliaferro seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Land Use – Peter Gosselin**

Mr. Scala stated that the relatively large increase in this budget is primarily found in the Clerical Wage line (01-41911-110), with a corresponding decrease in the Building/Code budget. Mr. Gosselin referred to the departure of a former employee who did much of the Land use work. We now have hired a part-time individual to cover that deficit. In addition, the Building Inspector line was increased to allow for his handling 3 positions. Mr. Daniels stated that in the past, one employee attended Planning Board, while Strafford Regional Planning Commission has been used in that regard lately. What is the plan for the future? Mr. Gosselin stated that the new employee is still in training, adding that we are still saving money by using SRPC. In response to Mr. Daniel's question as to whether the SRPC line will eventually be reduced, Mr. Scala stated that the Town has a contract with SRPC. If we go over the contracted amount, SRPC will charge by the hour. We should see a reduction if they are no longer required to attend our meetings. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$39,509. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 10-0-1 (Mr. Kasprzyk abstaining).**

**Building/Code – Peter Gosselin**

Mr. Knight asked whether the number of building permit applications has increased. Mr. Gosselin advised it is pretty stable—not really climbing. They have issued over 600 permits this year. Mr. O'Connor asked whether he is still using the pickup truck from the Highway Department. Mr. Gosselin advised we have just traded that pickup and the old Toyota 4Runner for a 2016 Toyota 4Runner with lower mileage, at no cost to the Town. This 'new' vehicle will eventually be decorated with the Town seal and will result in much lower gas consumption. Mr. Scala added that we purchased the red pickup truck for \$23,000; its trade-in value was \$24,000.

Mr. Kasprzyk sees no provision for the provision of safety equipment, such as OSHA might require—i.e., hard hats, steel toed boots, protective eyewear, etc. Mr. Gosselin does not believe any of the sites he has visited would require this type of equipment. Mr. Kasprzyk is not so sure.

Mr. Daniels questioned the GPS/911 Maps line (01-42401-840). Mr. Scala noted that historically we have spent a considerable amount from this line each year. Some confusion ensued with Victor Vinagro's departure about the State being involved in this process. The State does assign 911 numbers; however, the Town must pay CAI to have the building outline printed on our tax maps (for structures over 200 square feet). Mr. Scala would like to see this line increased to \$2000, equal to the 2022 appropriation.

Mr. Kasprzyk questioned whether the legal line (01-42401-320) is sufficient. Mr. Scala advised that the Land Use legal line was increased, as were other legal lines throughout the budget.

**Mr. Knight moved to increase the GPS/911 line (01-42401-840) to \$2000, and to approve the new section total at \$143,068. Mr. Daniels seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**GWRC – Mr. Taliaferro moved the section total at \$300. Mr. Ouellette seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Patriotic Purposes – Mr. Daniels moved the section total at \$3000. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

**Personnel Benefits – Dino Scala**

HealthTrust has advised us of a 15.6% rate increase. Since our total number of fulltime employees is down, we have been able to reduce this line (01-41551-210). Mr. Daniels noted that the Explanation column for Dental should refer to 33 employees rather than 3 [corrected—tb]. He questioned whether there has been any movement to offering employees a buy-out option. Or have we looked at a plan with a higher deductible with a HSA option? Unlike an FSA, and HSA does not expire at year-end. Mr. Knight believes we should put provision of health insurance out to bid. Mr. Kasprzyk stated we could table this discussion to be revisited at a meeting to be scheduled for December.

Mr. Daniels noted that the Merit/Sick line (01-41551-190) has been \$60,000 for years. During that time employees with banked time have been encouraged to utilize that time. Why is the line still so high? Mr. Scala advised that we have 2 individuals that fall into this category, one of whom is working the hours down. He agreed \$60,000 may be a little high. Mr. Fifield noted that pay rates have increased, so we could potentially fall a little short. Some amount of that \$20,000 could be used for merit increases if necessary. However, he understands if the Budget Committee chooses to reduce this line. Discussion as to whether new employees were taken into consideration in calculating health insurance costs. Mr. Scala believes we may have considered this for the Police Department, but otherwise, no.

Mr. Kasprzyk has an issue with awarding both a COLA and a merit increase because people living in this community on fixed incomes do not get that. This could make a difference in buying oil or paying a light bill. People on Social Security received a 3.2% COLA, so the Town COLA for 2024 should be 3.2%. Mr. Fifield lives on a fixed income and sees no adjustments; however, he understands that we must retain employees. His retirement check is not reflective of today's dollar. We must pay employees. If we are going to give a COLA based on Social Security, then it should be 8.7% for last year, plus 3.2% for 2024, which is much higher than 5%. We are not sneaking anything in—we are actually cutting the COLA in half. It is a cost of living adjustment and employees will not get more than those on Social Security. Mr. Kasprzyk expressed appreciation for the explanation. However, last year was an anomaly—it has never been so high. Employees were also getting merit increases, which more than makes up for the COLA not received. Mr. Fifield stressed that not all employees receive merit increases. Employees must bring more to the table.

Mr. Scala understands Mr. Kasprzyk's concern regarding residents on fixed incomes, as his parents fall into that category. However, he is also a supervisor of staff who did not get any COLA or merit increase over the past year. They also have bills, expenses and families to support.

We are fighting to keep employees, and we are not sneaking in anything. We are trying to be fair. **Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$1,644,422. Mr. Parker seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Mr. O'Connor noted we have several outstanding issues: Elections, Registrations, etc., and several outside agencies. Mr. Scala expected to receive a written request from GWRC, but has not done so. This will be reviewed at the meeting to review warrant articles. Mr. Knight anticipates this request will include an explanation of how the funds would be spent, if approved.

**Elections, Registrations, etc., - Valerie Ward**

**Mr. Knight moved the section total at \$148,180. Mr. Ouellette seconded the motion.** Mr. Kasprzyk referred to the wage study information provided by Mr. Scala, adding that he also conducted his own study. For many of the salaries listed, the Town Clerk was also the Tax Collector, none of which come close to what is being asked by our Town Clerk's office. He believes we really need to look at this. The highest rate he sees is \$70,000, for a combined Town Clerk/Tax Collector. In Farmington, the salary is \$67,500, based on a specific number of hours. That Town Clerk also does bill collecting for several departments, as well as tax collection. Mr. Kasprzyk hopes everyone has looked at these numbers, as he does not believe this request is reasonable.

Mr. Daniels referred to last year's pay study showing a range of \$25.09 to \$32.17 per hour for Town Clerk, with the average being \$28.63. However, in April 2024, this position will be paid over \$34/hour, \$2 more than last year's pay study. This employee is off the chart in 1 year. Mr. Fifield stressed that at a minimum, 5% should be applied to the pay study. If we had applied the 8.7% COLA from last year, we would have increased rates. Mr. Kasprzyk stressed that we are getting a single service from our Town Clerk which 80-90% of Town Clerks in other towns provide multiple services. He calculates the average pay for this position to be about \$55,000. He would agree to a higher rate for a dual position. Mr. Scala noted that the Board has some control over rates for deputies; however, elected officials are under the purview of the voters.

Mr. Fifield referred to Wolfeboro, a town of similar size/population, where the Town Clerk makes \$39.01/hour. Discussion followed regarding contributing factors found in various towns. Mr. Fifield noted that one could selectively pick towns that match what you are looking for. He believes our wage study is a better comparison, but it is also dated. What drives up this proposed wage is the application of the COLA. Mr. Kasprzyk stressed that this department is asking for substantially more than towns within 40 miles. Ms. Ward stated that this amount is used because the Board increased her wage line—she did not ask for this. She also referred to the busyness of her office, especially in the summer. Mr. O'Connor added that one can find information to support any position you want with wage studies. We should pay someone who does this job and continues to seek training. We need to retain good employees. Mr. Kasprzyk noted this position is voted in. One used to have to produce a warrant article with pay included.

Mr. Mankus stated that the wage study includes figures set several years ago. He sees many instances of increasing Town Clerk pay rates, as with other expenses we pay every day. The wage study reflects the past. Several years ago, our Town Clerk entered the private sector, where he believes she makes more money and is quite happy. The Town Clerk has many topics to understand, along with many RSA's.

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He does not agree with reducing this line. Mr. Kasprzyk added that the Town's wage study may reflect the past, but his study reflects yesterday's information. Mr. Kasprzyk advised Ms. Colbath that some of the Town Clerks in his study have considerable longevity. **The motion then passed 8-2-1 (Mr. Fuller abstaining).**

Mr. O'Connor reminded all that the Committee will meet with the School on November 20 and 28, at 6:30 p.m. at the School library.

The minutes of October 26, 2023, were briefly discussed. A typo will be corrected, and a comment added that Mr. Kasprzyk eventually acknowledged that Mr. Miller was correct in his statement regarding benefits for elected officials.

**Mr. Knight moved to adjourn at 7:50 p.m. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion, which passed 11-0.**

Respectfully submitted  
Toni Bodah, Acting Secretary