

Board of Selectmen

Budget Hearing Minutes

March 13, 2008

Present: Andrea O'Connor, Ed Hayes, George Linkletter

The Board discussed his budget requests with Ernie Winkler, Fire Marshal. Mr. Winkler explained how each request related to his duties as Fire Marshal, particularly in relation to a structure fire.

The Board heard a presentation by Thomas Cole, a partner with Charter Oak Pension Group, indicating pension administration services available through the firm.

Eric Holub provided a review of the audit bids and made a recommendation that the current auditor be reappointed for the next three years. The award of this bid will be on the March 20, 2008 Board agenda.

The Board reviewed the Library's budget request with representatives of the Sherman Library Association. Mr. Hayes raised some questions with respect to the proposed SAT preparation course.

The Board reviewed the Board of Education budget as presented by Board Chairman Paul Mucci. It was noted that several grants routinely received by the School have been used to offset related costs. This avoids taxing residents for activities that are subsequently supported by grant funds. Mr. Mucci spoke to modest declines in enrollment that will result in two sections of both kindergarten and first grade in the coming year, as well as 10 fewer high school students attending public school next fall.

Mrs. O'Connor presented the budget request for the Selectmen's Office, focusing on the costs attributable to printing and mailing the budget as well as printing the annual report. It was agreed to mail an abbreviated form of the budget documents to residents, with full copies made available at Town Hall, the School, and the Library, as well as on the Town's website. Travel expenses related to Mrs. Ruth Byrnes attendance at recycling meetings was shifted to the Collections line of the budget.

The Treasurer presented a flat budget to the Board.

The Tax Collector reviewed her budget request with the Board.

Mrs. O'Connor presented the Town Clerk's budget in the absence of Carol Havens. She noted the additional expense incurred by the State mandate to have all indexes to the land records available via computer. She noted that the re-licensure of the BAS system is included in the MTH Technology line. Also included in this budget is a one-time request for \$2,000 for a consultant to complete our records management project.

Both Assessor Al Garzi and Assistant Assessor Kathy Retter were present to speak to the Assessor's budget, which includes increased funds for the property revaluation that will begin

this summer. Mr. Garzi and Ms. Retter indicated that field cards could be made available on the Town's website for an expenditure of \$2,500, and that many people had asked for this to be done. This item could be funded through the MTH Technology line.

Mrs. O'Connor reviewed the budget request from the Registrars, noting that the new voting technology is resulting in increased costs to the Town as well as increased work for the registrars. She suggested that consideration be given to the request for a salary raise, somewhere between the three samples provided.

General Government costs related to both postage and legal notices have increased as reflected in the proposed budget.

Mrs. O'Connor outlined anticipated legal costs in the next fiscal year, including the need to renegotiate contracts with both bargaining unions. She suggested that we maintain this budget at the same levels as last year, but switch the allocations between Land Use Counsel and other legal work.

Mrs. O'Connor reviewed costs related to maintenance of various Town-owned buildings. She suggested the possibility of lumping this costs into a Building Maintenance line in future years. She noted the inclusion of several one-time maintenance items in the Mallory Town Hall maintenance account, most notably painting of the exterior of the building. There was a discussion of the costs of pursuing clean energy. Mrs. O'Connor will explore the options and, if there isn't a significant cost differential, switch to a clean energy source.

Mrs. O'Connor reviewed the Collections/Recycling budget, noting that costs for garbage disposal have decreased with increased recycling by Town entities.

The Debt Service line was reviewed. In addition to paying down existing debt, we will have to pay interest on the bond anticipation notes issued last August. Interest earned on these funds—about \$140,000—has been applied against the debt service. Also included in this budget line are costs related to issuing long-term debt, although the Board will have to determine whether the Town will issue long-term debt in August by rolling the BANs into a long-term issue or roll-over the BANs for another year in light of the shaky municipal bond market.

Mrs. O'Connor reviewed costs related to liability insurance and employee benefits and worker's compensation insurance coverage. We are in the final year of a three-year rate freeze with CIRMA.

There was some discussion of how to fund future post-retirement benefits for long-term employees. These costs are limited to payment for accumulated sick time in certain instances as well as accumulated vacation time for two employees. Mr. Holub suggested that the Board designate a portion of the reserve fund for this purpose in June. Mr. Linkletter suggested that the Board allocate about 20% of the anticipated funding at that time.

There was a discussion of the amount to be set aside for Capital Expenses. Mrs. O'Connor had proposed setting aside \$125,000 this year. Given the number and size of capital expenditures anticipated over the coming five year period, Mr. Linkletter felt that we should try to raise this amount to \$130,000.

The Miscellaneous line was held to \$10,000.

The final decision for the Board was the level of wage increase to be granted for non-union employees. With the exception of the registrars and their deputies, it was agreed that wage increases would be held to 2.5% this year.

The Board reviewed the proposed Five-Year Capital Expenditures Plan. Mr. Holub suggested that an “undesignated” project line be added with between \$35,000-\$50,000/per year for the various projects that seem to pop up periodically.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea O’Connor

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George Linkletter

Ed Hayes