

**Town of Boscawen
Select Board
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, February 2, 2023 at 6:00 PM**

In Attendance: Lorrie Carey, Matt Burdick, Paul Dickey, Kate Merrill, Katie Phelps, Nicole Hoyt, Sarah Gerlack, Kearsten O'Brien, Kellee Easler, Gary Moore, Dean Hollins, Jason Killary, Kevin Wyman, Tim Kenney & Shawn Brechtel

Roll Call: completed and guests introduced.

Chairwoman Carey called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Chairwoman Carey motioned to enter a nonpublic session at 6:00pm under RSA 91-A:3 II (a). Seconded by Selectman Matt Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

Public meeting reopened at 6:07pm.

Chairwoman Carey motioned to close a nonpublic session at 6:07pm under RSA 91-A:3 II (a). Seconded by Selectman Paul Dickey. All in favor. None opposed.

Selectman Dickey motioned to seal the nonpublic minutes for 1 year under RSA 91-A:3 II (a). Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

Selectman Dickey motioned to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

Department Head Updates: Town Clerk Nicole Hoyt presented two sewer abatements for approval. One abatement was for the second quarter in 2022 and the other was for fourth quarter of 2022. Town Clerk Hoyt said the new owners were issued a regular bill after the properties had a final sewer bill. Each abatement was \$51.84, the minimum charge.

Selectman Dickey motioned to allow Town Clerk Hoyt to abate \$51.84 for sewer warrant 183C123 located at 28 Sweat St. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

Selectman Burdick motioned to allow Town Clerk Hoyt to abate \$51.84 for sewer warrant 183D67 located at 43 Jackson St. Seconded by Selectman Dickey. All in favor. None opposed.

Town Clerk Hoyt presented a refund request for the permit fee amount of \$116 for resident Gail Moody. When someone registers their motor vehicle incorrectly, they petition the state for a refund. Town Clerk Hoyt noted Ms. Moody asked for a refund in August 2022 for a camper that was registered and sold in the same weekend. The town received paperwork this week showing the state refunded their portion.

Selectman Dickey motioned to approve refunding \$116 for a motor vehicle town portion refund to Gail Moody. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

Town Administrator Katie Phelps presented an update on the 2023 Facilities Budget based on the revised Unitil projections for 2023. There was a reduction of \$7,100 for utilities. Chairwoman Carey asked for the total savings amount in utilities for the town. TA Phelps noted the total savings in utilities would be \$16,980.

TA Phelps presented an update to the 2023 Public Works Budget based on the Unitil projections. Street lighting decreased \$6,480 and solid waste utilities decreased \$1,500.

TA Phelps presented an update to the 2023 Emergency Management Budget. They received a late bill and were unable to pay it in 2022. An additional \$1,050 will be added to the budget in 2023. Emergency Management Director Jason Killary noted it was budgeted for in 2022 but the invoice wasn't received until after the books closed.

Selectman Dickey noted his last meeting as a Select Board member will be next Thursday, February 9. He will no longer be a resident of Boscawen. Chairwoman Carey asked if there was a recommendation for someone to serve in the interim until they have elections. Selectman Dickey will bring a recommendation next week.

TA Phelps presented the revised draft warrant with changes for review and approval.

Town Bond Counsel revised language in Article 5, *To Authorize Long Term Borrowing for Sewer Project*.

Selectman Dickey motioned to reapprove the recommendation for Article 5, *To Authorize Long Term Borrowing for Sewer Project* with the new language. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps noted new language added to Article 8, *To Establish King St Improvements CRF*. The language added was '...and other streetscape improvements to King Street...'

Selectman Dickey motioned to reapprove the recommendation for Article 8, *To Establish King St Improvements CRF* with the amended language. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps said the Board did not vote on Article 14, *Sale of Cemetery Lots per RSA 289:2-a*. It was approved by the Cemetery Trustees and Trustees of the Trust Funds on February 1st in a joint meeting. RSA 289:2-a dates back to 2014. The town never voted to adopt it. The article is to see if the town would vote to deposit the funds from the sale of cemetery lots into the General Fund of the Town as sale of town property. TA Phelps noted it is currently divided by the sale of the lot which goes to the General Fund. Perpetual care goes to the Trustees of the Trust Fund.

Selectman Burdick motioned to approve the language of Article 14, *Sale of Cemetery Lots per RSA 289:2-a* and recommend the article. Seconded by Selectman Dickey. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps presented a change to Article 15, *To Change Purpose of Municipal Buildings CRF*. DRA requested to add the last sentence, '*Further, to name the Select Board as agents to expend from said fund. (Two-thirds vote required)*'.

Selectman Dickey motioned to reapprove the recommendation for Article 15, *To Change Purpose of Municipal Buildings CRF* with the amended language. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps presented a change to Article 16, *To Change Purpose of Fire Station CRF*. DRA requested to add the last sentence, '*Further, to name the Select Board as agents to expend from said fund. (Two-thirds vote required)*'.

Selectman Burdick motioned to reapprove the recommendation for Article 16, *To Change Purpose of Fire Station CRF* with the amended language. Seconded by Selectman Dickey. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps presented Article 17, *To Transfer Interest in the Boscawen Town Hall* for approval.

To see if the Town will vote to authorize to transfer its interest in the Boscawen Town Hall, Map 81D, Lot 21, with a physical address of 14 High St, Boscawen NH, on such terms and conditions as the Select Board determine are in the best interest of the Town, such authority to transfer shall continue to be in effect indefinitely, until rescinded. (Majority vote required)

Selectman Dickey motioned to approve the language of Article 17, *To Transfer Interest in the Boscawen Town Hall*. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps presented a change to Article 18, *To Complete a Town Hall Assessment Study*. The change added was '*This is a contingent warrant article, if warrant article seventeen (17) is not approved. If warrant article seventeen (17) is approved, this warrant article shall be void. (Majority vote required)*'.

Selectman Dickey motioned to approve the language for Article 18, *To Complete a Town Hall Assessment Study*. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

TA Phelps noted with all the changes made to the budgets for utilities, the Article 6 Operating Budget has been updated to \$5,039,707.

Selectman Dickey motioned to recess the Select Board meeting at 6:18pm in order to hold the Advisory Budget Committee public hearing. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None opposed.

Chairwoman Carey reconvened the Select Board meeting at 9:19pm.

Chairwoman Carey opened discussion about the public feedback and strategic recommendations received at the Budget Advisory Committee public hearing. Recommendations included: no merit increases this year, reduce the cost of living adjustment (COLA) from 6% to 2% and leave longevity as is, remove \$2,000 from miscellaneous in HR, no COLA increase for Select Board, revise the CRF to 40% increase, take \$10,500 out of Administration budget, and take \$2,000 out of Old Home Day budget for fireworks. Chairwoman Carey asked the department heads to share their opinions on the feedback and suggestions.

Planning and Community Development Director Kellee Easler recommended reducing the Health budget by \$10,000. She noted the septic failure procedure would have to remain the same. PCD Director Easler does not want to reduce merit increases for her department.

Chief Tim Kenney recommended taking out the \$1,800 projected for electricity increases in the Fire Department budget.

Chief Kevin Wyman would like to think that the Police Department offers enough for people to stay but he doesn't think that will be the case with decreases in pay. He noted that he could likely justify a decrease from 6% to 4% COLA with his staff.

Selectman Burdick asked department heads if they would rather have merit increases for the work they do or a COLA for everyone. Chief Wyman would rather merit increases because it is based on the employee's accomplishments and hard work. PCD Director Easler and TA Phelps concurred.

Public Works Director Dean Hollins has already cut as much as he could in his budget. He noted that when he's cutting his equipment maintenance lower than what he expects to pay it's a problem. Chief Wyman felt similarly amount cruiser maintenance. Discussion ensued. PWD Hollins recommended the 4% merit increase with no COLA.

Finance Director Kate Merrill suggested taking out the \$2,000 miscellaneous line in the Personnel Budget, as recommended by the public. She will review the budget with backup documents and present a couple more line reductions next week. FD Merrill noted multiple residents stated the national COLA average was 4.6%.

Town Clerk Nicole Hoyt stated she does not want to lose her department staff. For the record, Town Clerk Hoyt is responsible for two different departments and their budgets. Town Clerk Hoyt noted that the town is getting their money's worth by having one person run two departments at the price of 1 set of benefits. Town Clerk Hoyt is already taking a reduction in her pay this year because she reduced the budget as much as she could. The COLA increase was supposed to help the offset increases to goods and services. The last time she was awarded a merit increase was in 2016 and she did not receive 5-year longevity. Community Services Director Sarah Gerlack and Ms. Norma Caporale were awarded their 1-year increase. Ms. Karyn Chagnon has not been with the town for a year, but Town Clerk Hoyt requested a 2% increase for her at one year. Town Clerk Hoyt noted she would give up her COLA and merit increase if it would save her employees from being impacted.

Community Services Director Gerlack recommended cutting \$7,500 from the Community Service budget. The department was able to use ARPA funds and grant money for general assistance last year and this year. CS Director Gerlack said next year she will be making increases to the budget to get it back to \$45,000. She noted the Community Services Department is the one department that is allowed to go over budget and request more. The town is legally liable for residents in town who are unable to support themselves. There are federally funded programs that are ending. CS Director Gerlack has shown responsible spending for the department and has also saved the town more money than she would make in two years. CS Director Gerlack noted it is not about short staffing anymore. She would like to see policy changes such as removing vacation buyouts, rather than taking away from staff's income. Right now, employees can buy back vacation time that is unused. CS Director Gerlack suggested revising the policy to not allow vacation buyout, which would save the town money. Overall, CS Director Gerlack stated all employees deserves merit, COLA and longevity increases because they work hard and diligently to save taxpayers money where they can. Most employees are residents which means they too understand being a taxpayer in Boscawen.

TA Phelps agreed with TC Hoyt. She would rather cut her COLA and step increase to ensure her staff receive their merit and COLA increases. She recommended decreasing office supplies by \$1,000. She noted they could pay for legal books and supplies through regular town counsel budget which would save \$2,000. TA Phelps recommended putting off the Commercial St. Historical Exhibit by a year to save \$7,500 for 2023.

Selectman Burdick recommended no COLA increases for Select Board members. He also suggested removing or reducing COLA to 2% with 4% merit increases and longevity.

Parks and Recreation Coordinator Kearsten O'Brien recommended keeping COLA increases for the Parks and Recreation program counselors. They will only be receiving the COLA increases and will not be receiving Merit or Longevity. Counselors are one of the lowest paid town employees and it is a seasonal summer job. Parks and Recreation Coordinator O'Brien recommended reducing the overtime budget by \$500. She received more than \$700 in donations and plans to continue to fundraise throughout the year. Selectman Burdick suggested instead of a COLA increase, to adjust the counselor's hourly rate.

Deputy EMD Director Mr. Shawn Brechtel recommended standing by the budget, if the Select Board agrees that department heads reduced their budgets as much as they could. He noted two weeks ago the Select Board agreed to move the budget forward because it was in the town's best interest. Mr. Brechtel applauded the public that showed up for the budget hearing but also noted that it was only 2% of the population. For 15 years, Mr. Brechtel has listened to the public's feedback and has always stood by the budget because it's right for the town. Mr. Brechtel said department heads deserve their increases just as much as any employee because they work hard and have to manage people. Selectman Dickey stated the people that showed up will be at town meeting to vote. If they don't vote for the budget, it could go to a default budget. Chief Wyman noted if they had a default budget, the police department would have to lay someone off.

The public's main concern with the budget was salary increases. Chairwoman Carey noted everyone can relate to their personal experiences but that doesn't negate the fact that there are

needs and costs that are going up. If the town goes to a default budget, people will be laid off. Mr. Brechtel asked FD Merrill if she could do a rough assessment on how the budget will be affected by removing COLA or reducing increases. FD Merrill said she does not have budgeting software, so it would be a time-consuming process through excel spreadsheets. She will put together an assessment with 4% COLA and merit increases. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien clarified that the pay study was created for the Select Board so they could create reasonable increases for merit and COLA, Selectman Dickey said the Select Board works for the town and they are listening to the public's concerns. He is concerned that if they don't change it, the budget will get voted down and go to default. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien stated she understood the public's concerns, but the town should stay competitive with pay so they don't lose employees, which could cost the town more in the long run with having to hire new staff and retrain for positions. TA Phelps noted that the Town of Boscawen doesn't have a default budget. If the budget were defeated they would need to stay there until a decision could be reached.

Chief Kenney said employees are paying for residents to live in town and receive services. He said if they lower their raise, they will never catch up. He noted that the public never complains about how they are paying for other people's services such as solar and land use exemptions.

Chairwoman Carey stated the suggested cuts would be \$40,000, not including COLA. For the record, the \$40,000 is deferrals which will be added back to future budgets. CS Director Gerlack asked what the \$50,000 cut in Capital Reserves was. Chairwoman Carey said those cuts can be voted down and it won't impact employees. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien recommended to cut the Town Wide Safety contribution for safety equipment. It is currently at \$15,000. Chairwoman Carey stated the Budget Advisory Committee recommended to cut the Municipal Building budget to \$50,000. PCD Director Easler suggested cutting the \$50,000 King St project. Chairwoman Carey said the Advisory Committee unanimously voted to recommend the King St warrant article. The Board doesn't need to follow their recommendation. Chairwoman Carey suggested cutting Municipal Buildings to \$49,000, \$50,000 from the Fire Station and \$65,000 for the Fire Truck. The cuts would reduce the Capital Reserves budget to \$399,000. All concurred.

Chairwoman Carey and Selectman Dickey suggested taking the \$40,000 in deferrals and moving forward with the budget for Town Meeting. Selectman Burdick was concerned that it won't be passed. FD Merrill suggested making a small reduction in salary increases because it will also reduce retirement, life insurance and taxes. Selectman Dickey noted the pay study brought employees to where they should be in terms of salary. If they reduce salary raises, it still won't make a significant impact on the overall budget. Selectman Burdick noted the pay study was based off of a 6% COLA increase and merit and longevity were not included. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien noted that the Town pays 100% for retiree health insurance which costs \$54,876 a year and the employees have increased their portions of insurance by 5%, doubling their contributions. Discussion ensued. Chief Wyman suggested reviewing the pay scale yearly.

Chairwoman Carey motioned to recommend taking the \$40,000 in proposed deferrals from the budget. Furthermore, to amend the warrant under Article 7 to be a total of \$399,000: Fire Truck reduced to \$65,000, Fire Station reduced to \$50,000, Municipal Building reduced to \$49,000 and remove Town Wide Safety. No second.

Selectman Dickey suggested a 4% merit increase and longevity corrections with no COLA. Chairwoman Carey asked how it would affect their wage scale. FD Merrill said they would multiply the starting rate 3 times by 4%. The public presented that all employees were getting merit increases and longevity. Selectman Burdick noted when they did the pay study, they didn't know the percentages for longevity and merit. FD Merrill stated all employees received an increase other than COLA for 2023. Chairwoman Carey said employees are now paying 10% for benefits and the cost of living has gone up. The COLA increase was to offset the overall impact of the cost of living. Selectman Burdick suggested a 4% COLA with longevity and no merit increases. Discussion ensued. FD Merrill suggested the public's recommendation of 4.6% COLA. There was a recommendation to do 2% COLA, merit, and longevity.

Selectman Dickey motioned to recommend reducing COLA from 6% to 4.6%, keep longevity adjustments and to eliminate merit increases. Furthermore, to take \$40,000 in proposed deferments from the budget which includes no COLA for Select Board and reducing Capital Reserves to \$399,000. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. Chairwoman Carey was opposed. Two in favor. One opposed. The motion passed.

Next Meeting: Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 6:00 PM.

Chairwoman Carey motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Selectman Burdick. All in favor. None Opposed.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15pm.

Respectfully submitted by Hannah Gardner