

Minutes

NORTH HAMPTON BUDGET COMMITTEE Work Session Tuesday, January 4, 2005

Attendance

Attendees: (1) Robbie Robinson, Chairman; (2) Mary Pat Dolan; (3) Paul Fitzgibbons; (4) Don Gould, Selectmen Representative; (5) Henry Marsh, School Board Representative; (6) Larry Miller; (7) Sue Spencer; and (8) Amy Kane, Recording Secretary. Members Absent: (1) Terry Conklin; (2) Peter Simmons. Guests: (1) North Hampton Police Chief Brian Page; (2) North Hampton Fire Chief Thomas Lambert; (3) Laurel Pohl; (4) Rich Goeselt, Trustee, North Hampton Public Library; (5) Linda Hillier, Trustee, North Hampton Public Library.

Mr. Robinson called the meeting into session at 7:08 a.m. in the Selectmen's Conference Room in the town offices.

Items Considered

Police Dept.

The Budget Committee had received a report from the North Hampton Police Department titled Call Analysis by Time and Day of Week for 2003 vs. 2004. Mr. Robinson asked Chief Page for the number of calls for assistance from other towns, such as Rye, placed by North Hampton police between 2 and 7 a.m. Chief Page said his department did not record that information but the other towns may have it. Mr. Robinson requested that information. Chief Page said that, even if he can get that information, the number may be underreported.

Ms. Spencer asked if Chief Page had considered moving shift times; he said he had and current shifts were optimal. Mr. Gould asked how the 832 night shift calls annually compared with daytime. Chief Page said they were dwarfed by daytime figures, which average 200 or more per day.

Fire Dept.

The Budget Committee received a report from the North Hampton Fire Department detailing three years worth of call personnel responses. Ms. Dolan asked if the committee's overtime questions had been answered via e-mail; Chief Lambert said they had. Mr. Robinson asked the total amount budgeted for call men. Chief Lambert replied that it was \$8,400. Ms. Dolan asked if that amount had been brought down from this year's current budget. Chief Lambert said yes, it had been \$12,000 for 12 call men and

now was \$6,000 for 6. Mr. Miller asked if the chief expected to use 12 call men this year; the answer was no. Ms. Spencer noted that the department had not spent its budget in this area for the past few years. Mr. Miller asked Chief Lambert if he could live with a cut to \$6,000 and Chief Lambert replied that he could. Chief Lambert assured the committee that his department was sympathetic to the town's budget situation and the proposed Fire Department budget was his professional opinion of what was needed.

Town Warrant Articles

Mr. Gould introduced Ms. Pohl, who has been working with Mr. Conklin on an Excel spreadsheet for the deliberative session. Ms. Pohl said the spreadsheet will identify on a real-time basis the tax impact of individual items as well as a running total of the cumulative impact. It is the same spreadsheet the state uses to calculate town tax rates. Ms. Pohl described some of the assumptions that had been made in calculating the tax rate for next year, such as no new construction. Ms. Pohl had calculated next year's rate at 15.30, which will increase or decrease as items are adjusted.

Architectural fees: The first warrant article the committee reviewed was the proposal for \$75,000 for architectural fees. Mr. Gould said the Planning Board had originally voted not to support this article so the selectmen did not consider it. When the Planning Board reconsidered and recommended it 4-1, with the condition that a scope of work be precisely defined, the selectmen reconsidered and voted 2-0 to put the article on the ballot and let voters decide.

Mr. Gould said the selectmen believed that long range planning and a facilities upgrade was necessary, and that the longer it was delayed the more expensive it would be. The library trustees had proposed a less expensive article that would develop plans for just the library, but selectmen felt it would be more accepted by the public if it were a "global picture" not just the library.

Mr. Goeselt said he had been on two committees studying the complex. He said it is depressing that the facilities have not been better maintained. He spoke in favor of the architectural fees article so that planning can be systematic. Every year it is delayed, he said, costs and interest rates will increase. Ms. Hillier said she was concerned about space for storage of town records, as hard copies not just digitized records are required by the state.

Highway Garage Bond: Mr. Gould said a 5% "fudge factor" had been built in to the estimate and actual bids may be less. Selectmen met with the New Hampshire Municipal Bond Bank that day and viewed amortization tables. Mr. Gould said he was inclined towards a 20-year bond, as it would be more palatable from a tax impact view. In Year One it would have an 11-cent impact and gradually decline from there. The first payment would be February '06. Mr. Marsh asked if office space was included; Mr. Gould said yes and pointed out the plans in one corner of the meeting room. Ms. Spencer asked if there had been opposition to the proposed construction. Mr. Gould said some Cedar Road residents had expressed opposition and that selectmen were attempting to address

many of their concerns with “screening”, traffic amelioration and setback from road. Selectmen support the article 3-0.

Other articles: The dump truck replacement is the normal 10-year cycle of replacement, said Mr. Gould. Police cruisers are replaced once every five years; the odometer on the cruiser scheduled for replacement is 80,000+ miles and the engine a couple hundred thousand, which includes idling hours. Ms. Spencer suggested the age of the cruiser be added to the warrant article. Mr. Marsh asked if replacing the cruiser was a safety issue. Mr. Gould replied that it was more of a maintenance issue, but safety was a factor too.

Ms. Dolan noted that this was a business-as-usual replacement and, despite the tough tax year, the town cannot defer all maintenance until next year without justification for changing the cycle.

Mr. Gould said the Police Department renovations were strongly recommended by Chief Page. The fire apparatus is a safety issue; in a mutual aid situation, firefighters cannot hook into other departments’ packs now. The command center article will come out of the undesignated fund balance, said Mr. Gould.

Architectural fees: The committee returned to discussion of this article. It was agreed the Budget Committee needed more information about this article from the Municipal Facilities Advisory Committee before voting on recommendation.

Mr. Miller moved and Ms. Spencer seconded the motion that the Budget Committee ask the Planning Board for a report on the Municipal Facilities Advisory Committee’s recommendation to place the \$75,000 architectural study warrant article on the ballot.

Mr. Robinson offered an amendment to the motion, requesting that a Planning Board representative attend the January 11 public hearing on town and school budgets to present and support the \$75,000 architectural study article. *Vote was unanimous, 7-0.*

Capital reserve funds: The reserve fund for cable television will accumulate franchise fees from the cable company. The reserve fund for town building maintenance will help stabilize the tax rate, said Mr. Gould. Repairs and maintenance for town-owned property will come from this fund. Old Town Hall needs repairs, it was agreed.

Software upgrade: Mr. Gould noted the urgent need for this upgrade. Ms. Dolan offered to rewrite the article to emphasize its importance. It will be placed closer to the top of the ballot.

Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund: This fund is for “capital equipment”, to stretch out equipment purchases, said Mr. Gould. Mr. Robinson suggested it may be time to take a rest on putting more money into this fund. Mr. Miller suggested asking the Fire Chief what he wants and what is in the fund now.

Town budget: The committee agreed the recent focus has been on the fire and police items in the budget. Ms. Spencer noted that police overtime had not been reduced on line 140, page 3. She said she would like a reduction if two officers are added. Mr. Gould said both officers would not be in place and trained until September.

Outline for Public Hearing presentation: The committee reviewed the public hearing presentation. Mr. Robinson said that in the past the chairman has read aloud the bottom line of each category and paused for questions. He said he will lay the groundwork this year by explaining the committee's request for reductions below a 3% increase. Ms. Dolan asked if the chairman was required to go through each line item and the answer was no. She suggested a format used in business budget presentations, with Powerpoint displays of key points in educating the public. Ms. Dolan noted that the committee had received good information that it could copy and share.

Mr. Miller asked if department heads would present their budgets. Mr. Robinson replied that an objective person should present the budgets, but if there were questions the department heads could answer them. Ms. Spencer suggested that more information be offered about what the Budget Committee had been doing over the past weeks. Mr. Gould noted that state law said it was the Budget Committee's budget to present. Ms. Pohl suggested a voter guide or mailing to the public. It was generally agreed that would be helpful before the deliberative session.

(Ms. Dolan departed at this time.)

School Warrant Articles

Mr. Marsh reviewed the school district articles. The collective bargaining agreement with teachers calls for an estimated \$107,257 increase in salaries. Mr. Marsh said this will be a 3.1% increase and a one-year contract, if all the towns in SAU 21 vote in favor. Mr. Marsh said a one-year contract was preferable as towns would not be locked into 3-year increases and asked the committee to recommend this article. The SESP contract had not yet been ratified, but Mr. Marsh said it would most likely be a "minimal increase".

Mr. Marsh recommended the computer warrant article for \$42,320 to replace machines 5 to 7 years old. He said this article had been cut by about \$120,000.

Mr. Robinson noted that the Budget Committee was committed to supporting the school budget (\$6,422,410) because it had been reduced to under a 3% increase, as the committee had requested. Mr. Marsh noted that the insurance package was down by 10%, thanks to Mr. Englebach's negotiations. Also, teachers would be contributing 5% more than in the past.

Public Hearing Preparation

Mr. Robinson reviewed the public hearing process. He said that he will go through each item and if committee members would like to speak on an item he will introduce them. Mr. Marsh asked for confirmation that the school will be reviewed first and Mr. Robinson said it would. Mr. Robinson asked the committee to be ready to vote on recommendations afterwards.

The public hearing is January 11. The town deliberative session is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 5, at 8 a.m. School deliberative is Tuesday, Feb. 8, 7 p.m. Mr. Gould noted that RSA 32:3 was changed last year: the proposed budgets are now the Budget Committee's recommended budgets at the deliberative sessions. There will be further discussion about deliberative session presentation.

Mr. Gould asked for the committee's preliminary opinion on the police and fire budgets. Mr. Robinson said he wanted to stick with the 3% and let the fire call men go, or get the Fire Department budget under 3% some other way such as through overtime reduction. Mr. Marsh asked what control the selectmen have over the fire and police. Mr. Gould said they were their employees and the selectmen had total control, with the ability to lay off or cut budgets. Mr. Miller said he supported a reduction in overtime. The general agreement among committee members regarding the police was that at least one more officer will be recommended, but maybe not two.

Ms. Pohl ran the new numbers on her spreadsheet and estimated the tax rate would increase 5 cents. There was a suggestion to take more article money from the undesignated fund balance in that case.

Adjournment

Mr. Marsh moved and Mr. Miller seconded the motion to adjourn. *The vote was unanimous (6-0).*

The meeting adjourned at 10:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Kane
Recording Secretary

Approved by the Budget Committee 2-03-05