

Minutes

NORTH HAMPTON BUDGET COMMITTEE

Meeting

Monday, February 14, 2005

Attendance

Attendees: (1) Robbie Robinson, Chairman; (2) Terry Conklin; (3) Mary Pat Dolan; (4) Paul Fitzgibbons; (5) Chuck Gordon, Little Boar's Head; (6) Don Gould, Selectmen Representative; (7) Larry Miller; (8) Susan Spencer; (9) Amy Kane, Recording Secretary. Members Absent: (1) Henry Marsh, School Board Representative (2) Peter Simmons.

Mr. Robinson called the meeting into session at 5:41 p.m. in the Mary Herbert Conference Room.

Items Considered

Minutes of the February 3, 2005 meeting

Mr. Gould moved and Mr. Conklin seconded the motion to approve the minutes as amended. The vote was 6-0, with Mr. Gordon and Mr. Miller not voting.

Discussion of default budget warrant articles

Mr. Robinson said that, as a result of the School Deliberative Session, he wanted to get more information to the public regarding the warrant articles giving the power to set the default budget to the Budget Committee. He shared copies of a letter several committee members had drafted. He proposed sending the letters to all North Hampton residents, paid for privately by members of the committee.

Ms. Spencer asked if the letter was urging the passage of one or both warrant articles (one appears on the School Warrant and one on the Town Warrant). Mr. Robinson said only one, the School, but people who read it would probably understand it as necessary for both. Mr. Miller said he wished the Selectmen would reconsider endorsing the article on their ballot as he felt Budget Committee oversight was a good "check and balance".

Mr. Fitzgibbons said he was surprised at the letter. The first three paragraphs did not address the issue of the default budgets but focused on School Board spending. He said he was not in favor of bashing the School Board; he thought the issue was whether the Budget Committee should have a say in the default or not and information about the increase in the budget and drop in enrollment was not pertinent.

Mr. Conklin said that when he mentions the article to people he talks about checks and balances; there should be a third party entity looking at the budgets. He said he had asked for information from the school as to how the default budget is calculated but never

received that information. He said someone ought to do a better job of reviewing how the default gets built.

Ms. Dolan asked that, if it was not clear how the default budget was calculated, if there was a “gray area”, then which was the best group to evaluate the needs of the school? She said the 5-member School Board had been given oversight responsibility including financial management. She said she felt the letter was inflammatory. Ms. Spencer agreed. If the committee intended to discuss the default article, said Ms. Dolan, it should consider telling taxpayers what they need to know, such as what value the budget committee can bring to control of the default.

Mr. Miller read the state legislation authorizing towns to empower their Budget Committees to set default budgets. Mr. Gordon said a majority of the Budget Committee would have to feel comfortable sending a letter that would serve a useful purpose. Mr. Fitzgibbons said the draft of the letter served as a platform to control school spending overall rather than tell what good the Budget Committee can do by controlling the default budget. He noted that the majority of the public does not know what a default budget is.

Mr. Conklin said he would focus the letter on why the committee thinks this is good in general. Mr. Gordon suggested it should not be limited, but should include both town and school. Mr. Miller said he was in favor of sending a letter though he might disagree with some of the wording of this one.

Mr. Conklin said the committee does not have a lot of power because at the Deliberative Session 20 people can get what they want. He said the goal for next year should be to get more people to show up through improved communication.

Mr. Gould said the default was a large gray area with a lot of discretion. He gave an example of a question regarding the town default that was referred to the DRA. Mr. Gordon suggested that the letter be modified to include that there was discretion in setting the default budget. Ms. Dolan suggested that the definition of the default budget be included in the letter. She noted that there may be less discretion in the school budget as there are a greater percentage of employees under contract, plus fixed utility expenses, and mandated SPED costs.

Mr. Fitzgibbons suggested noting that this year’s school default is higher than the proposed budget. The payback for citizens if Article V. and VI. are passed is the committee’s ability to negotiate the default at the table. Mr. Robinson suggested paragraph 2 in the letter be eliminated. Mr. Conklin said the definition should be in there.

Mr. Fitzgibbons noted that the committee would need the cooperation of town and school to come up with a meaningful default budget. Mr. Conklin agreed that the committee could not build the default from the ground up. Mr. Fitzgibbons said the default would go under the examining process like the rest of the budget.

Ms. Dolan asked if a letter should be sent at all. She asked why, after a deliberative session where voters added \$20,000 into a \$6 million budget, two days later the committee was here. She said she felt the committee had treated the School Board poorly. Mr. Robinson said the committee had an agreement with the School Board and they did nothing to support their own budget. There was general discussion of the December 9 meeting.

Mr. Robinson said the agreement that arose in that meeting, that the budget would not rise above 3%, was violated when the money was added back in at the Deliberative Session so the committee recommendation of the budget was automatically changed to "Not Recommended" which was how it was allowed to go on the ballot.

Ms. Dolan noted that the town also exceeded 3% but an exception was made for them. There was discussion of who voted for and against the amendment at the School Deliberative, and whether or not the Budget Committee should revote the recommendation.

Mr. Fitzgibbons moved and Mr. Miller seconded the motion to revote on School Warrant Article VI. After discussion, Mr. Gould called the question. The vote was 7-0, with Mr. Robinson abstaining.

Mr. Gould moved and Mr. Gordon seconded the motion to vote to recommend School Warrant Article VI as amended, which includes an additional \$20,000. The vote was 4-2-2. For: MD, CG, DG, LM. Against: PF, RR. Abstain: TC, SS.

Mr. Miller moved and Mr. Conklin seconded the motion that a letter be sent to town residents explaining why the Budget Committee by a majority vote recommends Town Warrant Article V and School Warrant Article VI. Ms. Dolan moved and Ms. Spencer seconded to amend Mr. Miller's motion to include showing the vote numbers of the majority. The vote was 6-2, with Ms. Dolan and Mr. Gould opposed.

Adjournment

Mr. Gould moved and Mr. Gordon seconded the motion to adjourn. *The vote was unanimous (8-0).*

The meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Kane
Recording Secretary

These minutes were approved by the Budget Committee 4/19/05.