

Minutes
NORTH HAMPTON BUDGET COMMITTEE
Meeting
Thursday, May 19, 2005

Attendance

Attendees: (1) Mary Pat Dolan, Chairman; (2) Terry Conklin; (3) Don Gould, Selectmen Representative; (4) Andrew Hart, School Board Representative; (6) Larry Miller; (7) Robbie Robinson; (8) Peter Simmons, LBH Representative; (9) Sue Spencer; (10) Amy Kane, Recording Secretary. Absent: Paul Marston. Audience: (1) Dr. Robert O'Kane; (2) Cynthia Swank

Ms. Dolan called the meeting into session at 7:04 p.m., in the Mary Herbert Conference Room.

Items Considered

Review minutes of the April 19, 2005 meeting

Mr. Simmons said he wanted the minutes to more accurately reflect the opinion, expressed during the April 19th meeting, that the School Board Chair Kim Kisner did not support the school budget at the Deliberative Session. After discussion, Mr. Gould offered an addition to the minutes: "Mr. Simmons said he was disappointed at the conduct of the School Board Chair which he believed was inconsistent with a commitment which she had made to the entire Budget Committee."

Mr. Robinson requested an addition to the minutes regarding his request for more information from Town Administrator Mike Pardue on ambulance fees, which was not honored. Mr. Gould said the issue of ambulance fees was being addressed at Selectmen's meetings. Mr. Robinson said the Budget Committee should also review it.

Regarding the last meeting, Ms. Spencer said she had made herself available by telephone that evening but had not been contacted.

Mr. Robinson noted that many school budget questions that had arisen at the April 19th meeting had been answered by Mr. Hart by e-mail, but he still would like the total amount of grants, and a forecast of future amounts. Mr. Conklin asked if grant activity could be forecast. Mr. Hart replied that it was not part of the budget process. Ms. Dolan suggested it be addressed in a summer work session.

Mr. Gould moved to accept the minutes as amended and Mr. Conklin seconded the motion. The vote was 7-0 (TC, MD, DG, AH, LM, RR, PS), with Ms. Spencer not voting.

Discussion: Role of Budget Committee; Fiscal challenges for the town; Long term forecasting and planning; Quarterly financial review and format; Priorities and goals 2005-06; Meeting schedule and protocol

Ms. Dolan said she was hoping for a collaborative and open discussion about what the Budget Committee would focus on over the next fiscal year. She offered to assemble a handbook that would create and preserve budgeting knowledge that could be passed on. She suggested the Committee discuss the best way to conduct quarterly reviews, collaborate with the Town Administrator and Selectmen in terms of communicating priorities and challenges, and establish more common language and understanding with the School Board. Members glanced over the definition of the function of the Budget Committee, in Chapter 32 of the RSAs. According to 32:1, said Mr. Conklin, the Committee can set budgets.

The Committee discussed a more proactive role and involvement in town department budgeting, giving guidance to the departments and school early in the process. Mr. Hart warned that the guidance should be strictly budgetary, and not seek to alter policy. Mr. Conklin noted that policy can lead to spending. He said the Committee could set the budget amount and allow the school to allocate resources as they choose. The Committee agreed on a need for good data regarding school numbers such as student-teacher ratio.

Mr. Miller noted that, in recent years, the school has been funded well whereas the town has not. The Highway Department is an area of particular need. Mr. Hart said he did not support a shift of assets from school to town, but thought it would be fair to grow the town budget at a higher rate than the school budget. Mr. Miller noted that the town currently has the lowest quality of assets it has ever had. Ms. Spencer asked if it was a budgeting issue or a marketing issue. Mr. Gould suggested first figuring out what the town can accept and afford, and then selling a tax increase of a certain amount, working backwards in allocating increases. Ms. Dolan suggested the Committee spend time getting educated, reviewing, for example, the tax rate analysis Mr. Conklin was working on, then determine priorities.

Mr. Simmons noted that the School Board recently voted to fund two employees' insurance 100%, while Highway Department employees were working in the rain. He said he felt a couple hundred thousand dollars should come out of the school and go into the maintenance shed. Mr. Hart noted that cutting \$200,000 from the school budget could have unanticipated consequences with voters. Mr. Hart suggested Mr. Simmons attend a School Board meeting if he wished further information on the insurance decision. Mr. Gould noted that the school has strong support; and if it seemed that the Budget Committee was trying to undermine the school, Mr. Gould felt it could have a negative impact on the town. He urged the Committee to remain business-like, professional and non-confrontational.

Mr. Hart said that he liked the idea of fiscal boundaries offered by the Budget Committee to the School Board ahead of time. He suggested the Budget Committee not vote at the Deliberative Session because it was their budget. Mr. Gould said his concern last year

was that the chair failed to defend the budget she agreed to defend. Ms. Dolan said that there was a new Board chair and composition, and that opinions about the Deliberative Session have been said and documented; it was time to look towards the future and to build a good working relationship.

Ms. Dolan asked the Committee to summarize priorities. Mr. Conklin suggested quarterly reviews be presented with highlights and summaries of financial impacts by Mr. Gould for the town and Mr. Hart for the school. Mr. Conklin and Ms. Dolan are working to make the expenditure report printout user-friendly. Mr. Gould suggested beginning the budget review process earlier, in summer, by asking departments what they are going to want rather than wait till November. Mr. Conklin suggested asking for evaluations from department heads and figuring out what is mandated at the school. Ms. Dolan asked Mr. Miller to put together a summary of Winnacunnet budget information.

In the audience, Dr. Robert O'Kane asked to comment. He spoke about the separation between school and town and suggested a centralized committee, created at large and community-oriented, in which resources were treated equitably for everyone.

Mr. Gould said the Selectmen's highest priority this year would be finding a location for the Highway garage. Ms. Dolan suggested the Committee could help the public understand the real costs. There was discussion concerning possible locations of the Highway garage.

Mr. Conklin said he is working on three-year projections, getting department heads to think ahead. Ms. Dolan said that this will also be a history that can be passed on. Mr. Miller emphasized the importance of keeping the tax rate stable. Mr. Hart asked if information requested at a meeting and delivered later by e-mail should be attached to the minutes. It was suggested that a motion can be made at the following meeting to attach e-mail correspondence as an amendment to the minutes. (A copy should be brought to the meeting.)

Mr. Simmons asked for copies of minutes to be sent to him at 74 Lafayette Rd. Ms. Spencer asked that a future agenda item address phone conferencing policy. The next meeting of the Budget Committee will be Thursday, June 23, at 6:30 p.m. Regular work sessions will be scheduled throughout the summer.

Adjournment

Mr. Robinson moved and Mr. Hart seconded the motion to adjourn. *The vote was unanimous (8-0).* The meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Kane
Recording Secretary

These minutes were approved by the Budget Committee at the June 20, 2005 meeting.