

OFFICIAL MINUTES – approved 2-1-10
 North Hampton Budget Committee Meeting
 Thursday, January 28, 2010
 Mary Herbert Conference Room

Call to order: Chairman Jim Maggiore called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m. (The meeting was filmed for Channel 22.)

Budget committee members in attendance: Robert Copp (North Hampton School Board), Michael Golden, Robert Hamilton (Little Boar's Head), Jim Maggiore, Paul Martino, Larry Miller, David Peck, Jon Rineman (Select Board)

Absent: Jennifer Simmons

1. Review proposed Library budget

Library Trustee Emily Creighton introduced trustees Alison Robie (Treasurer) and Peter Parker (Secretary), Library Director Susan Grant, and Assistant Director Loreen Keating.

Overview. Ms. Creighton said libraries are one of the few institutions that guarantee unfettered ability to get information. The North Hampton Library has well-documented space constraints and trustees continue to prepare for future expansion, including placing a warrant article on the ballot seeking funds for capital improvement. The amount in the fund is now \$318,996.18. The proposed Library budget of \$331,000.85 is a decrease of 5% over the current year and makes up 6% of the overall Town budget. An error on last year's warrant gave the Library more money than requested and trustees returned it to the General Fund.

Budget highlights. Ms. Robie said costs were kept level with no major increases. Bringing payroll in house saved 50% on that line.

Services and collaboration. Ms. Grant reported a 6% increase in circulation, and more demand for programs indicative of our economic times such as career services, computer use, DVD borrowing, museum passes and free entertainment programs. The Library collaborates with the Recreation Dept., Agricultural Commission, school, Heritage Commission and Historical Society to offer programs and meeting space.

Mr. Hamilton congratulated the Library on increased usage and asked for an explanation of the museum pass program for the benefit of Channel 22 viewers. Mr. Maggiore referred the committee to a handout on the value of library services, saying the average taxpayer funded \$93 of the Library budget. Ms. Grant said patrons can visit the Library website and use the calculator to determine the value of their personal library use, averaging over \$800 per patron.

Mr. Golden asked for more information about space issues, noting that book circulation had remained flat. The current Library was built in 1973 and expansion has been discussed since 1993; Ms. Grant said the size could double at least. She did not anticipate the community wishing to go completely digital. Mr. Martino asked about a 3.7% overall salary increase. Ms. Grant said two of the five part-time employees had not had an increase in a long time; the three salaried employees received a 2% increase. The Other Income line item, which comes from donations, book sales copier fees and charitable foundations, with \$22,514 anticipated, received 75% of that. The Library does not keep all funds in one bank, to maintain FDIC and attractive rates. Mr. Peck praised the Library as role models of public service, for providing more services at a virtually flat budget for three years.

Motion by David Peck that the Budget Committee approve the proposed Library budget. Second by Robert Copp. Motion passed 8-0.

2. Review proposed Cemetery budget

Chairman of the Cemetery Trustees George Chauncey introduced trustees Peggy Brown (treasurer) and Mary Lambert (secretary). The Cemetery budget is level-funded, with a total of \$45,000 proposed for FY11. Interest from Perpetual Care was \$9,961 last year and less than \$3,000 this year. The building still needs a septic system and running water. Last year old stones were repaired in the South Road cemetery. Planned repairs for Center Cemetery and Little River will likely be put on hold due to the decrease in Perpetual Care interest. Cemetery staff mows 982 sites in 4 cemeteries; 587 are under Perpetual Care. Mr. Rineman and Mr. Peck have visited the new facility. The heating system was salvaged from the Highway Department. Progress has been made on documenting personal records and integrating accounting with the Town. Mr. Chauncey makes and repairs many tools and Kendall Chevalier, Cemetery Superintendent, salvaged and repaired furniture for the new facility. Mr. Rineman asked for a septic tank cost estimate. Mr. Chauncey said approximately \$3,000. The portapotty rental is \$800 annually. Budget Committee members suggested a warrant article for the septic system be added to the ballot this year, with cost estimates presented to the committee before their Feb. 11 meeting. Mr. Fournier said he would bring it to the Select Board, which has the authority to write the warrant.

Motion by David Peck to approve the proposed Cemetery budget. Second by Robert Copp. The motion passed 8-0.

3. Review proposed Fire Department budget

Acting Fire Chief Dennis Cote said the proposed budget for Fire & Rescue (\$1,389,035) was a limited but necessary increase (3%) over the current year, with maintenance accounting for the majority of the increase. Mr. Cote reviewed budget highlights and major impacts, available on p. 39 of the proposed town budget.

Handouts included further information. The town's responsibility for accident and rescue calls on I-95 can generate overtime, but the ambulance brings in revenue. Comparing mutual aid calls, North Hampton utilizes Exeter's Advanced Life Support service. The dispatcher and firefighters are trained to recognize accidents and illness that will require ALS, which was called 69 times in 2009. Budget cuts in the mutual aid region have resulted in North Hampton assisting Hampton and Stratham more frequently; ambulance revenues usually offset this. Fuel expense usage was based on gallonage used; the previous year's prices were unstable so Mr. Cote budgeted at the highest rate. Mr. Peck noted that \$9,775 was proposed but only \$3,900 was spent. Mr. Martino, the Budget Committee liaison to the Fire Department, said the bill for Nov/ Dec had not yet been entered into the 6-month numbers. Mr. Peck asked about a \$1,700 credit. The federal government reimbursed funds because the ice storm had been declared a natural disaster. Mr. Golden noted that gas usage was 871 gallons in 08/09, and 558 so far this year, yet was 1,500 in the proposed budget. Mr. Cote said the number was taken from last year's budget. The 3-year actual data had not been available when the budget was prepared, said Mr. Cote.

Reviewing overtime overage, the department was short three positions in September after the Fire Chief's retirement, one work-related injury, and one firefighter quit but later returned. A non-work-related injury resulted in the use of sick leave. Staff savings occurred when Mr. Cote worked as a shift officer in spring, before the Chief's retirement. Mr. Cote said a second staff person was critical for Monday-through-Friday administrative operations and inspections. Mr. Hamilton suggested department services could be improved if a paramedic who could also serve as a floater to reduce overtimes were hired rather than another staff person. Comparable towns have one chief and many have certified paramedics. Mr. Hamilton said two firefighters had expressed interest in paramedic certification at last year's Deliberative Session, when money was added to fund training. Mr. Cote said floaters had a high turnover rate due to lack of a consistent schedule. Mr. Maggiore said scheduling was not the Budget Committee's role. Mr. Golden said this was an opportunity to combine the Chief and Assistant Chief positions. Mr. Fournier said the Chief position was vacant and the Town was waiting until a new Chief was hired to address staffing

alignment. Mr. Peck said this was the fourth year the Budget Committee had been noting the fact that surrounding communities were getting by without Assistant Fire Chiefs, and with lower costs. Mr. Fournier said some were staffed with volunteers and part-time firefighters. Mr. Hamilton said Rye was comparable and did not have an Assistant Chief and relied on call men to boost staffing from 2 to 3 per shift. Mr. Maggiore asked if a stipend could be offered to compensate firefighters who covered Assistant Chief duties. Mr. Cote said crews are on a rotating schedule so all would have to receive stipends and updated training for codes and inspections. Mr. Martino said having overtime mitigated by an Assistant Chief as well as stable staffing was beneficial. Mr. Miller said the Town needs another paramedic but not a new pumper truck because there are far more medical calls than fires. Mr. Rineman reminded the committee that voters at the Deliberative Session had approved an additional 4 firefighters to boost coverage from 2 to 3 per shift. Mr. Miller and Mr. Peck said that low attendance at Deliberative Sessions allows a small number of people to authorize costly changes. The committee discussed a recent survey in which taxpayers were happy with the level of service provided by Fire & Rescue and unhappy with the amount of taxes they were paying. There was discussion about paramedic capabilities vs. intermediate EMT. Mr. Cote said there were no guarantees an employee would pass the paramedic course; Mr. Hamilton said it would still add experience and knowledge to the department.

The Budget Committee commenced a line item review of the proposed Fire & Rescue budget. The spike in the current year's salary line item was due to accrued vacation at the Chief's retirement. Mr. Peck noticed a 9% difference in the rolling vs. budgeted water usage item. Call men duties were reviewed; they are paid in June and December. Vehicle repairs and regular maintenance schedules were reviewed. Mr. Miller questioned if the proposed overtime budget - constructed with expected vacation, training and callback loads but not including injuries - was sufficient when large overages were occurring. Mr. Cote noted that ice storm numbers were pulled out in constructing the proposed budget.

***Motion by Michael Golden to reduce the gasoline line item by \$1,854 to \$7,881.
Second by Larry Miller. The motion passed 8-0.***

Mr. Peck said that, when the 53rd week was removed, the Fire & Rescue budget increase was closer to 1.5 or 2% - a reasonable and well-prepared budget. He said the challenge was the staff position. The committee discussed approving the budget if the line item for Assistant Chief were removed, but the committee does not have the authority to remove a line. The committee also requests more information on the proposed vehicle purchase before voting, including a copy of the warrant article, a copy of the lease purchase agreement, ongoing costs, maintenance, and equipment alternatives. Mr. Cote said that the price for the vehicle goes up approximately 6% every year purchase is deferred.

Before adjourning, Mr. Copp reported that the SAU 21 superintendent candidate decided not to take the position and that if the SESPA fact-finding article passes, it is not binding on school boards.

4. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by David Peck. Second by Larry Miller. Approved 8-0. The meeting was adjourned at 10:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Kane