



SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 4, 2024

Members: Don McDowell, Christopher Palermo, Laura Streets, Richard Craig, George Cormier

Absent:

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Brent Raymond, Town Manager; Judi Alberi, Executive Assistant; Sara Haskins, Town Clerk/Treasurer; Chief Brooke O'Steen, EMS Chief; Chief Jason Luneau, Police Chief; Tina Sweet, Finance Director; Abbie Griggs, Finance Assistant; Jordan St. Onge, Highway Superintendent

PARTICIPANTS/GUESTS: Jerry & Evelyn Throne, Martin & Laura Green, Jamie Jaret, Ed Rogers, Ruth Ann Rogers, Mary Lou Nichols, Steph Hoffman, Julie Pickett, Sheila Tarbox, Tony Cote, Rachel Duffy, Lucas Peterson, Judy Bickford, Nathaniel Beyer, Kendra Aber-Ferri*

**participating via Zoom*

CALL SELECTBOARD MEETING TO ORDER

Don McDowell called the Selectboard Meeting to order at 4:03PM at the Tegu Building.

AGENDA CHANGES/ADDITIONS

None

TOWN MANAGER'S PROPOSED BUDGET

1. Presentation of Manager's proposed budget to Selectboard for consideration

Brent Raymond, Town Manager, presented his proposed budget for fiscal year 25/26. He started by identifying the difficult decisions facing the town in developing a budget with competing priorities. The economic difficulties many taxpayers are currently facing necessitate significant cuts to the budget to maintain a level-funded budget as nearly as possible.

External variables exist which make budgeting difficult. Many costs have increased due to inflation, such as healthcare benefits. The impact of climate change, including extreme weather and damage from floods, which increases the need for resource management, must be acknowledged. Another influence is the aging population and the outmigration of our youth, along with the ever-present impact of substance abuse on mental health and the overall community. These factors demand more support from service agencies while operating to meet these needs. The affordable housing shortage and homelessness affects all the town departments. These factors have caused increased service demands of our EMS, Fire Responders, and Police Departments.

Strategic approaches are being taken to reduce costs. The town is pursuing economic development initiatives, identifying funding opportunities, and inter-municipal and regional collaboration, such as partnering with LCPC to share resources. Public-private partnerships are important. Building trust and working relationships with residents and businesses can create sustainable solutions.

Brent then reviewed the details of the budget draft. The overall budget increased in the following categories: general government, cemeteries, Police, Fire, and Highway Departments. Decreases were for the Morristown Centennial Library, the EMS Department, and the anticipated revenues. The total operating base budget increased by \$347,561. Other sections of the budget were shown: Special Warning Items, Wages & Benefits Overview, Estimated Tax Rate, Unassigned Fund Balance, Review of Departments, Organizations, Appropriations, Cost Pressure Points, Cost Control Methods, and the Infrastructure & Deferred - Capital Investment Concerns. The Presentation ended with the budget line details.

Brent acknowledged the challenges it takes to cut spending in response to the increase in needs. However, he stated that he is committed to maintaining essential services while safeguarding the community's financial well-being. This proposal does not address the years of deferred maintenance of the town's infrastructure. He plans to develop a comprehensive plan addressing the longstanding neglect.

More budget meetings will be planned for December and in January the Community Meeting - Pie for Breakfast is from 8-noon at the PA gym and there will be plenty of opportunity to ask questions there.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

Various members of the community responded with their initial comments most regarding the proposed cuts to Recreation and Library.

ADJOURN

Motion made by Chris Palermo to adjourn. Motion seconded by Richard Craig. Motion carried. (5/0)

Meeting adjourned at 7:07pm

Submitted and filed this 12/9/24.

Bonnie McDermott, Scribe

Please note all minutes are in Draft form and are subject to approval at the next Selectboard meeting.