

Selectmen's Meeting

Monday, February 12, 2018

At the Selectmen's Meeting held on Monday, February 12, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. the following people were in attendance: John Tholl; Peter Corey, and Wendy Hersom; Selectpersons.

Other people were in attendance: John Ross, Jr., Fire Chief; Alan Smith, Deputy Fire Chief; Shawn Sherwood; Police Chief Edward Samson; Shawn White; Scott Burns, Bill Jones, Richard Wright; Roxie Severance; Bill Robinson, Martha Hardiman, Jim Sherwood, Bob Stiles, Tom Ladd, Sondra Brekke, Brian F. Hoffman, Sandy Holz, Kathy Dunlap, Beth Cape.

The first order of business tonight is a Public Hearing on purchasing a new Fire Engine/Tanker. Wendy Hersom called the hearing to order at 6:30 p.m. Pursuant to RSA 33:8-a, bond issues in excess of \$100,000 require a public hearing. The Fire Department wants to purchase a 2018 International 7500, 4-Door, 6x4 engine/tanker to take the place of 1988 engine and a 1984 tanker with the one new vehicle. The cost is \$350,000 plus \$7,000 for a radio for the truck.

Fire Chief John Ross said the plan is to replace the older two trucks with one new truck. He said the age of the current apparatus is how ISO rates your insurance and they recommend nothing older than 15 years for a front-line vehicle and 25 years for a reserve vehicle.

We currently have a standard transmission for the tanker and we only have one driver. Liability wise, we have had six breakdowns between the two engines. Another big thing is the safety issue. New apparatus guidelines for safety are the seat belts. Both of the current vehicles do not have shoulder harness. The new vehicle will have alarm systems to be sure everyone is belted in. It will have updated warning lights, horn/sirens, stabilization. You will be able to tell how fast the vehicle was being driven. The new vehicle will have auxiliary braking, and cameras for backing up and it also has a speed governor so it won't exceed 64 mph. We hope to resell both the tanker and engine. One manufacturer has told us they thought they could get \$30,000 for the tanker.

Rick Wright asked about the garaging of the new vehicle – will it fit in current space? Will you have more space? Chief Ross said the current vehicles are in one bay and this new vehicle will take that spot. They will also be able to park their UTV trailer in with the new tanker.

Bill Jones asked if it is like Jefferson Engine 2. John said yes. He had some pictures/design posted on the new vehicle.

Shawn White asked if the public works department would be able to buy the tanker? He said they use the tanker for the flushing of culverts. It is something to think about.

Bob Stiles thought if we could increase the registration fees for vehicles—is that a way to raise revenues to pay for the new truck. Wendy said she believes the registration fees are set by the state. John said it is his understanding there is something where you can adopt the extra motor vehicle fee to only pay for certain things, and he believes it is related to infrastructure.

Bob thinks we should look into something similar to that. It is too bad to get the taxes so high people can't afford to buy property in Whitefield. Wendy said we have a projected bond

payment schedule and over the course of ten years the first year it would increase your taxes .15 cents per thousand and by year ten it would be .10 cents per thousand. Shawn White said on a \$100,000 assessment the first year cost would be \$15.00.

Are people in favor of buying a new truck? Alan Smith said he was. Bill Jones asked John Ross haven't we been lucky to get by as long as we have. John said yes we have been. Rick Wright said two years ago we were talking about buying two vehicles instead of one. This is an improvement from previous plans that we have talked about at the CIP.

Tom Ladd is an EMS member of the fire department and asked how many people will be able to drive the new truck opposed to the current vehicles. This will be an automatic. Four members went through the class to drive the heavy apparatus and we will run the class again this fall. Many more people will be able to drive this vehicle. It has an automatic braking system.

Rick Wright asked if this does break down do we have a back-up and what is the warranty on the new vehicle. Chief Ross said we will still have one vehicle as a back-up. The warranty is 10 year, 100,000 mile structural warranty; 10 year stainless steel plumbing warranty; 10 year paint and corrosion warranty, and one year standard warranty.

Mr. Ladd pointed out that Engine 2 has broken down a number of times when it was pumping for the water department to keep that end of town with water when we had some problems with the Bray Hill water supply. Mr. Ladd said those trucks are not designed to pump continuously for 6-7 days. John said that put another 10 years on that truck.

Martha Hardiman said she has had access to the fire department at her home and thinks it sounds like a very reasonable plan to her.

The hearing on the Fire Engine/Tanker Bond closed at 6:50 p.m.

The Public Budget Hearing opened at 6:50 p.m. Wendy reviewed the Public Budget Hearing handout:

General Government: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$479,393, a \$15,733 (3.39%) increase

The bulk of that is in the election & registration as we have three election days in 2018 compared to one in 2017.

Mr. Wright noticed the planning and zoning had an increase. Wendy said that we added the balance due of the master plan update in to their budget.

Mrs. Brekke is not sure if she was asking this in the right spot, but if we had a town manager where would that be included. Wendy said never having a town manager before she would think in the Executive Office. At this time there is no funding for the town manager position. It was noted that the petition for adopting the town manager form of government was not submitted. Sondra Brekke asked if there is money appropriated for a new Public Works Director, and the Board said that is already included in this 2018 budget proposal but not in the General Government section of the budget.

Public Safety: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$811,930, a \$43,113 (5.61%) increase

The Police Department budget is up \$23,963. Wendy said the bulk of this increase is for salaries and retirement. Ed said we had an employee who left employment who did not require insurance and a new employee is having a family health insurance plan which caused an increase as well.

The Fire-Rescue budget is up \$19,150, and a good bulk of that is for salary increases. Wendy said these departments are working on increasing their revenues as well. Wendy said we are working with the Town of Dalton to increase their contribution, and we are changing our billing and collection system in hope of increasing those as well.

Highways, Streets Bridges & Sanitation: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$914,112 a \$10,425 (-1.128% decrease).

Shawn White said he may make a recommendation for an increase in the salt budget on the floor of town meeting. Salt budget is pretty much 100% used so far this winter due to the weather we have been experiencing this winter.

Health & Welfare: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$22,577 a \$4,000 decrease

There is an increase for \$8,500 to cover summer program fees, which we did not include in the 2017 budget.

Conservation Commission: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$2,500 – no change from 2017

Wendy explained that we currently don't have any members on the Conservation Commission, but are looking for people to step forward and serve on the Commission.

Economic Development: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$5,000 a \$4,925 increase

EDC is much more active so they are looking for a budget to do some activities.

Principal Long Term Notes: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$2,406 a \$2,406 (2.10%) increase

Interest Long Term Notes: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$5,522 (-16.16%) decrease

Tax Anticipation Notes: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$7,500 – same as 2017

Mr. Ladd if any of the notes will be paid off this year, and Wendy said the fuel farm loan will be paid off this year. Tom said he would like to complement the Board on not having to borrow for tax anticipation notes.

Special Revenue Funds: Proposed 2018 expenditure is \$86,100 an increase of \$5,450

The library is requesting a \$2,450 increase and we have added back in the funding for the band concerts for \$3,000, as the money that was in that account is now depleted.

Barbara Pinkham a cemetery trustee stated that the overdraft on the cemetery budget of \$901 is eliminated by the amount of the capital reserve that was closed out.

Martha Hardiman said she was at an occasion to be in the Pine Street cemetery and she noticed a number of graves that were sinking. Martha said a lot of those are perpetual care. Barbara said they fill in as many sunken graves and repair stones, as many as they can. The sexton salary does a lot of this. Barbara said they do as many as they can each year. This was an expensive year for the cemeteries due to storms, trees coming down at Bray Hill and Park Street. We had to deal with those this year. Roxie asked if they have enough money. Barbara said their major cost is the mowing contract. The mowing contract this year went up 6% and next year it is going up 10%. We usually don't get many bids. The mowing contracts are going up. That is a concern Barbara said. Shawn said a hint to the trustees, when he was doing mowing bids he locked them in for three years. It keeps the costs down. Barbara said that was good with their previous contractor. Martha asked how do they estimate for the sunken graves? Barbara said they never faced metered water charges before this year. They replaced the water lines in Park Street and Pine Street. They have costs in the hundreds they never had before for water and sewer bills to the Town. The trustees have thought about raising their rates—Peter has spoken to them about it. We have not wanted to raise the rates. Barbara said we make due with what the town has given us, we are not complaining and we have done a lot with the money, and have been filling in the graves as we are able.

Barbara said that perpetual care is a myth. You have to go thru this mathematical formula that is split among sites. It was something like \$2 a grave site. Some of those trust funds with perpetual care, you can't touch anything but the interest. It is not a huge amount of money. It sounds like it is, but it is not. Sondra asked what an average cost for fixing the sunken graves, and Barbara said that is part of the sexton salary to take care of those. Peter encourages people to attend the cemetery trustees meeting. They meet every month from April to November. Barbara said they have had a lot of people directly contact us about items, 10 requests from individuals to remove trees and shrubs from their sites. They asked them to please remove those items. Barbara would be glad to answer any questions.

Bill Jones asked about an item that was taken out of the budget a few years ago. The Town used to pay a hydrant fee of \$10,000 to \$15,000 for the use of the fire hydrants. Bill Robinson said we eliminated it because the Water Department did not need the money. Wendy does not recall that. People are concerned with the water rates and the new budget. Wendy said that the reason we qualified for as much grant money as we did was for our rates to get us to the middle of the pack across the state and once we get there the Water Department is not at all in the red. We have to get to a certain level to be comparable with the average water rates in the state. Bill Jones said it is not fair, a hydrant fee should still be in place.

Barbara Pinkham said she would like to see the Board consider not charging for any building/property owned by the Town for water and sewer. Barbara doesn't think the cemetery should be charged at all. Barbara argues the lack of consistency. The library does not pay a water/sewer bill. The selectmen pointed out that they do and it comes out of the town buildings water/sewer line item. The cemetery money is raised by general taxation. It is factored in to their budget, and Barbara said they had never paid it until this year. It all comes from the general fund.

Peter said the cemetery is supposed to run like the water and sewer departments, like an enterprise fund and be able to manage its own operations. Peter said he would offer that someone made it known to him after we stopped giving away free water on the common that those people were going to the cemetery to get their free water. Barbara is not sure how they would be able to monitor that.

Barbara doesn't look at them like an enterprise—she looks at them as a town department who wants to take pride in that. Peter said that is how the state has set up the management of the cemetery funds. The cemetery trustees are elected to run those departments. Peter said if you need more money, ask for it. The water/sewer costs in 2017 for the cemetery was \$383.63. They could amend their budget on the floor of town meeting if they feel they need more money.

Town Operating Budget - \$2,560,735 an increase of \$60,180-2.40%

Water Department - \$285,573 – an increase of \$26,655 – 10.29%

Sewer Department - \$222,825 – an increase of 13,055 – 6.22%

The Water/Sewer Department budgets do not affect the tax rate—they are a wash item same amount in and out.

Capital Reserve Accounts \$277,500, a decrease of \$2,500:

PD Vehicle: \$20,000

Highway Equipment Replacement: \$47,500

Revaluation: \$15,000

Bridges/Town Buildings: \$55,000

Sidewalks: \$20,000

Ambulance: \$20,000

Road Projects: \$60,000

Warrant Articles:

\$50,000 for paving the town hall parking lot and driveway. We wanted to put it out to the voters to see if they want to do this. Shawn White said this is a warrant article to expend the money this year. Shawn thinks it is premature. We don't even have a full-time public works director. There is a lot to be done before we should do this. Shawn said he can see a capital reserve account to raise the money. The Fire Department paving needs to be done as well. Shawn thinks it is premature to put it on to be done this year. Shawn said if we want to encumber it into 2019 that would be o.k. Peter said we can encumber it to the following year. Shawn said that we only have a base layer, and we need to put a base coat out back. We should look at taking up the pavement around the fire station and do everything at once.

There is the warrant article for the fire truck purchase for \$357,000. This will be a bond vote and be the first item discussed and voted on at the town meeting.

Barbara Pinkham asked how much the out back is used. It is used quite a bit. The after-school program operates out of there now.

There is an item to purchase a Transfer Station Skid Steer for \$35,000. There is \$25,652 in a capital reserve account for this and the balance of \$9,348 will come from general taxation.

Petition Warrant Articles:

Ammonoosuc Community Health Services: \$4,500

Caleb Group: \$4,000

North Country Transportation/Sr. Wheels: \$4,000

Meals-on-Wheels: \$2,800

Coos Service Link Resource Center: \$1,000

North Country Home Health & Hospice: \$14,913

St. Paul's Church Backpack Program: \$571

Northern Gateway Chamber of Commerce: \$1,019

Center for New Beginnings: \$1,000

These articles are placed on the warrant by petitions that have been signed by 25 or more registered voters of Whitefield.

Roxie Severance, a Board of Director member at North Country Home Health & Hospice, thanks the Town for their support for North Country Home Health & Hospice. They strive to provide the highest level of care possible to Whitefield residents.

Beth Cape of Northern Gateway Chamber of Commerce wanted to appeal to the Selectmen why they ask for \$1,019, .50 per capita and numerous services they provide to Whitefield.

Bob asked about the tax assessment for the Summit project and what we can do to get some of the dilapidated houses around town fixed up. The town has two properties that are owned by the town that we will be putting out to bid. Beth Cape asked about the Brown Street Furniture factory building.

The Public Budget Hearing adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

The Board reviewed a memo from Steve Lafrance re: the water projects.

Peter Corey made a motion to approve the January 29, 2018 Selectmen's Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by John Tholl. All in favor 3-0. Motion passed.

Shawn White updated the Board on the FEMA process for the July storm; the Hazen Road bridge; and if the Board could re-post the Public Works Director position. Shawn thought we could take out the recommending for a PE license. Shawn said we need someone who has managerial skills and would be able to manage the departments and definitely someone with experience in the public works field. The Board reviewed the job posting and made some changes and we will be reposting the position.

The Board reviewed the town meeting warrant for their recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

