

Kingston Municipal Budget Committee
Public Meeting
Kingston Fire Station - Meeting Room
November 8, 2023 6:00 PM

Members in attendance:

Trish Tidd, Chair
Rick Russman, Vice Chair
Stacy Dion, Secretary
Claudine Dias
Nick Hilfer
John Pramberg
Annemarie Roth
Kim Donahue

Members absent:

Chuck Hart, BOS Representative
Gary Finerty

Other attendees:

Phil Coombs, Kingston Public Works
Susan Prescott, Historic District Commission
Melissa MacDonald, Library
Melissa Mannon, Library
Tammy Bakie, Town Clerk/Tax Collector
Marissa Federico, Health & Human Services
Paula Mahoney, Finance & Human Resources
Ellie Alessio, Select Board
Laurie Szwed, Select Board
Cindy Mulcahy, Recording Secretary

Trish called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Trish moved to approve the minutes of the last meeting and Rick seconded them. All in favor.

NEW BUSINESS:

The Select Board has requested that all future Budget Committee meetings be moved to Town Hall so that they may be televised. This will start with the next scheduled meeting (11/12/23).

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DEPARTMENT PRESENTATIONS:

Library (4550):

Melissa Mannon noted that programs at the Kingston Public Library have tripled and that circulation has increased. Efforts have been made to keep numbers the same and they are within about \$1,000 of last year's budget. Request for increases all relate to staffing.

- *Salaries – full-time (4550-S1)/ Salaries – part-time (4550-S2):* Melissa noted that COLA is included in these line items, and that she would prefer to have COLA replace any Pay For Performance (PFP) amounts. This includes additional payroll hours due to increased activity and 4% raise for all staff to ensure competitive pay and staff retention.

Historic District Commission (4191):

The HDC has some slight increases in expenditures but some areas have been trimmed or can be reallocated.

- *Salaries - Full-Time (4191-S5):* Susan noted that the increase in this line item reflects that a recording secretary has recently been hired. This cost was also increased to increase the hours for the recording secretary.
- *Books (4191-51):* This line item was trimmed.
- *Dues (4191-52):* Susan noted that this line item was trimmed and includes a yearly payment to the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.
- *Training (4191-55):* Susan noted that this line item was trimmed due to free webinars.
- *Supplies (4191-56):* This line item is probably inadequate due to increased printing costs and should be increased to \$200.
- *Technical Consulting (4191-59):* Susan noted that this line item could be decreased to \$1, and the remainder transferred to Supplies.
- *Abutter notices (4191-60):* Susan noted that this line item is reimbursed by homeowners.

Highway Department (4312):

Pavement maintenance was one of the larger increases in the budget. Phil also noted that the lighting project is about to start and that the oil burner project only has one quote so far, but that it will be taken care of soon.

- *Pavement Maintenance (4312-13):* Phil notes that this is one of the larger increases. This was previously the Pavement Marking line item. Phil noted that there are steps being taken to preserve pavement and maintain its longevity to deal with increased spending for this line item and the Hot Mix line item. Examples are not striping roads right before they are repaved and implementation of the cracked sealing program.
- *Stormwater Maintenance (4312-29):* Phil noted that a revised bid was received before the meeting and that this line item has decreased from \$39,000 to \$28,000. This item reflects meeting MS4 requirements for the EPA, including catch basin cleaning. The hourly rate for the catch basin cleaning company has gone up but they are the only ones able to do the job.
- *Tools (4312-25):* This line increased due to the need for a scan tool (to override vehicle fault codes). The town borrows Exeter's scan tool: this is not feasible during storms.

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- *Culvert/Catch Basin (4312-04)*: This line item has increased due to many heavy rain events.
- *Signs and Barricades (4312-22)*: This line item has increased due to increased sign costs, which includes replacing signs without adequate reflectivity. This is different from the line item Barricades & Guard Rails (4312-01).
- *Barricades & Guard Rails (4312-01)*: A bridge block grant was received from the State and will supplement expenses for guard rails. Recently one guard rail repair cost more than twice what the line item was budgeted.
- *Cold Patch (4312-03)*: This line has been dropped because of a trade for a hot box with Exeter, a cheaper and more convenient alternative to getting cold patch in N. Conway.
- *Seminars & Training (4312-21)*: Because Lisa got a Public Works Association scholarship and another one to cover her training (\$4,500 total), this line item was able to stay the same. Training for two recently hired employees falls under this line item and also the discounted fees for the UNH Road Scholar Program
- *Salt (4312-19)*: Although salt costs have not increased, the number of icing events increased last year despite a milder winter. Money was encumbered from the prior year, so the budget stayed the same. The 2023 year-to-date figure is not an accurate figure so Phil will get this information to the Board. This item needs to remain adequately funded due to the unknowns.
- *Electricity (4312-32)*: It is believed that this line item could be dropped to \$7,000. The town is participating in an LED project with Unitil that the Select Board approved (this comes out of ARPA funding).
- *COLA (4312-S5)*: This line item increased because salaries increased.
- *Hot Mix (4312-10)*: This line item will remain the same even though the spending went up. A block grant was received for repair of roads, and repairs have been a challenge because of all the wet weather. Asphalt prices are hard to predict as there is a State bid price and then an additional escalation for oil (\$88/ton). The highway block grant is not figured into this number. Phil noted that if every road in the town were repaired with the current funding, it would take 32 years.
- *Plow Blades (4312-14)*: This needs to be separate from the Highway Equipment Fund, which deals with purchase of vehicles. The last truck that was purchased cost around \$200,000.

Government Buildings (4194):

Phil noted that carpeting has been removed from Town Hall and some flooring has been replaced in the basement offices.

- *Air Quality Testing (4194-29)*: This line item was decreased by \$1,200.
- *Heat & Service (4194-09)*: Phil noted that they are taking over the maintenance costs for the Library. Because of the state-of-the-art design of the building (along with the Fire Department), local vendors are no longer adequate. Dowling in Hampton has increased up-front costs but the service is necessary and comprehensive.

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- *Monitoring (4194-15)*: Phil noted that this line item increased because the security system provider rates have gone up. Phil feels that despite this increase, Reinholdt is the best deal.
- *Septic (4194-23)*: This line item has increased. The Fire Department has two tanks (one for decontamination and one for the vehicle bays) that have been filling rapidly; the source of this water is under investigation. Pairing this issue with the Town Hall alarm system malfunction, this line item has been maxed out. The septic pumping schedule is also running behind because of this.
- *Fertilizer (4194-04)*: This line item has held steady due to wet weather reducing applications.

Street Lighting (4316): Phil noted that this line item has been reduced because the LED upgrade has been implemented and nine streetlights have been removed. However, there are still some sodium lights to be replaced that are on poles owned by the NH Electric Co-op (NHEC). As this is a transitional year, next year will better show how much can further be trimmed.

Sanitation (4323): The outlook for this line item is daunting, but with a proper game plan, the Town will realize future savings. \$293,000 will be spent this year for recycling; the cost of recycling items is now more than twice what it costs to throw them out (this is tied to commodity pricing based upon a government-published index). The Town entered into a five year contract with Waste Management, and a condition of this contract is that any recyclable material that the Town produces is the property of Waste Management. After the contract with Waste Management expires (four years from January 1, 2024), the Town will be free to take its recyclable material anywhere for payment (scrap metal is not included in the contract). At the end of the contract, the Town will be paying almost \$1 million per year on recycling and trash.

John asked if there have been thoughts on trying to renegotiate the contract, but Phil and many Board members feel that Waste Management has no incentive for this. There is mutual need to a point as Waste Management has two dedicated employees and trucks for Kingston and it is difficult to simply pick up a replacement town. However, it is a lopsided dependence as the Town has no other choice than to use Waste Management. John made a point that renegotiating with a view to extend the contract may be a way to interest Waste Management and be of mutual advantage to the parties. Incidentally, the only other competitor, Casella, who is closing their location in 2026, is more expensive (23% more). There are also no other local outlets for trash and New Hampshire cannot import trash to Massachusetts.

The town has set up a collection point to take cardboard and glass, which reduces the overall tonnage of recycling, and therefore the fees. The Town needs an alternative for recycling materials and is using the remainder of the contract as time to develop a fully-functioning recycling center in the future.

- *Bulky Goods Pick-Up (4323-01)*: This line item has been increased to \$4,000 and includes supplies needed for set-up of the new collection point.
- *Solid Waste: Penalties & Surcharges (4323-06)*: This line item exists to cover a newly created Solid Waste penalty that Waste Management can levy (after the Town is notified of an audit) on the Town for repeat offenders trying to dispose of unauthorized items (example: stuffing a bulky item full of trash). East Kingston has already had to pay a penalty and the cost for this will be relayed to the Board. A quality control observer has been doing ride-alongs to identify problem areas (10% is the contamination allowance).
- *Residential Pick-Up (4323-02)*: Breaking this line item into two line items was proposed, and Phil felt it would be beneficial. They would be Recycling Pick-Up and Trash Pick-Up.
- *Solid Waste: Disposal (4323-03)*: Breaking this line item into two line items was proposed, and Phil felt it would be beneficial. They would be Recycling Disposal and Trash/Disposal. This line has increased. Prior to last year, the Town didn't pay for disposal. The cost is \$78/ton of trash and \$183/ton of recycling. Phil enumerated the four fees: curbside collection of municipal solid waste (set price per month), municipal solid waste disposal (per ton), Curbside collection of recycling (set price per month) and Recycling Tonnage (this last item is the largest expense).

Election & Registrations (4140): Tammy noted that the budget will be increasing because next year there will be four elections held as compared with one this year. It was noted that even in the event of default, the election costs would still be funded (purchase of new tabulators would not go forward unless it was found that the town was not in compliance with the Secretary of State mandated upgrade, happening in 2026).

- *Police Detail (4140-16)*: The department was asked to add a detail line item by the Police.
- *Moderator (4140-17)*: The moderator has never received a stipend; an increase is requested to cover her time.
- *Shredding (4140-18)*: This line is new per a suggestion to shred old ballots while following a retention schedule.
- *Tabulator (4140-19)*: The Town currently has two tabulators that will need to be replaced by 2026 per a Secretary of State requirement (no new parts are being made). Tammy and her deputy are deciding on which tabulator to purchase (they cost \$7,000 each). An old machine cannot be used in tandem with a new machine. This is a definite expenditure that will need to happen, but it can be put off until next year because the old machines are currently working properly. It is agreed that waiting to see if other towns experience any issues with the new tabulators would be prudent.
- *Supplies (4140-24)*: This line item has decreased. Part of this is due to the Town receiving old voting booths from Exeter.

Town Clerk/ Tax Collector (4150):

- *TC-TC Salary Full Time (4150-S6)*: This line item needs to be increased as the salary was

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budgeted for only 20 hours despite the fact Gail's position is full-time. Gail currently works 16-17 hours per week and would like to reduce her hours as of January 1, 2024. A temporary person has been hired and is currently working a similar amount of hours. If the budget passes, Tammy would like to retain this employee.

- *TC-TC Dues (4150-17)*: This line item has gone up, and includes the Town Clerk/Tax Collector associations as well as the Notary and Justice of the Peace applications.
- *TC-TC Seminars & Training (4150-23)*: This line item includes the Town Clerk/Tax Collector workshops and the Town Clerk/Tax Collector conference. There was not enough money for two people to attend the Town Clerk conference this year and Tammy would like an increase because it would be valuable for Caitlin to also attend.
- *TC-TC Shredding (4150-25)*: Files that need to be disposed of are piling up and it has been requested that this line item be funded.
- *Record Restoration (4150-26)*: The Town has several very old records currently in a climate-controlled vault that should be restored.
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Human Services Department (4441): Marissa noted that there has been an increase in people seeking aid, which carries with it increased case management, as many times there are several issues underlying the primary one. The main reason for so many people seeking aid at this time relates to the cessation of many state and Federal funded COVID-19 related assistance programs, along with the lifted moratorium on evictions, rent increases and utilities shut-off for non-payment.

- *Salaries - Part Time (4441-S1)*: Marissa is requesting an increase in her hours from 15 to 20 per week to deal with the increased activity. A lot of her time is spent outside the application process, performing tasks such as research and trying to find people alternative support sources as the Town cannot pay for all of the requests.

General Assistance (4442): Laurie praised Marissa's work in her new position, and Trish added that a positive by-product of her work is making people feel more comfortable to come forward. People may therefore seek assistance before things become catastrophic and receive a hand up rather than a handout.

Marissa noted that she has not requested increases, but that she has reallocated some line items. The largest expenditure the department faces is assistance given for Electricity and Rent. There are caps on rental assistance based upon the rental amount. Giving rental assistance is a bigger drain on the budget than mortgage assistance because with a mortgage, a lien can be placed on the property. For heat assistance, 100 gallons of oil are given to an applicant (about \$390); not a full tank.

It was noted that New Hampshire law requires towns to assist an applicant the first time they request aid, no matter their income, but after aid is given, spending can be scrutinized and aid can be denied. Marissa is working on the guidelines for assistance to send to the Select Board and will be making them public. The conditions would require applicants to perform certain

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tasks after a notice of decision is reached. A change has been made to the RSA (NH SB110) which requires a town to offer assistance to an applicant even if they are a temporary or non-resident. A town can return the applicant to their place of residence only if requested by the applicant.

Paula noted that Rents and Electric will most likely exceed budget for this year. Stacy noted that the Committee should work with the Select Board to better understand what has been paid to date as this budget appears to be underfunded.

- *Electricity (4442-01)*: This line item was increased by taking funds from the Mortgage line item. It will need to be increased additionally.
- *Mortgage (4442-07)*: This line item was decreased and reallocated to other line items because it is not often used.
- *Rent (4442-08)*: This line item was increased by taking funds from the Mortgage line item. It will need to be increased additionally.

Social Service Agencies (4445): Marissa has proposed to cut many line items.

- *Red Cross (4445-02)*: The Fire Department has not been using the Red Cross lately so the funds will be cut in half.
- *Drugs are Dangerous (4442-04)*: No budget has been received from them, so this line item will be cut to zero.
- *One Sky (4445-26)*: This would have to be put back on the budget through a warrant article, and will most likely be skipped.
- *SoRock (4445-25)*: SoRock deals with mental health and drug issues in the school district.
- *Waypoint (4445-27)*: Waypoint deals with mostly young families and the elderly and their programming is not altogether a good fit for the Town. This line item has been reduced.
- *Rockingham Community Action (4445-08)*: This is the primary place Marissa sends clients, so it not advised to cut the funding for this line item. She is going to speak with them as it seems they are not providing as much assistance as in the past. They also administer the fuel and electric assistance program.
- *Seacoast Mental Health (4445-15)*: No budget has been received from them, so this line item will be cut to zero.

OLD BUSINESS:

Trish noted that at the last meeting, many motions were started but then got tabled. Rick reiterated that cuts should not be made until all departments have made their budget presentations, and suggested that perhaps control over any necessary cuts should be left with each department rather than cutting each line item. Trish voiced that it may be advisable to ask

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for a certain percentage cut from each department, and then if need be, the top three budgets can be further cut to make up the difference as in past years.

A brief discussion of the General Fund took place as there has been some confusion about all the separate checking accounts, escrows, revolving accounts and detail accounts that operate outside the municipal budget. Stacy explained that all town revenue goes into the General Fund. The General Fund pays the Town's bills as well as the School's tuition payment.

Paula mentioned that Chuck had noted that removal of just the highway block grant expense (gas tax from the State, about \$180,000) and the contracted services for PFA remediation (about \$300,000) would reduce the budget overage from 17.7% to 11%.

Side item: The Committee would like to find out what the Police Department uses Police Detail funds for besides emergency purchases and vehicles. Rick pointed out that taxpayers paid for the cruisers, which are used for raising the detail revenue. Ellie pointed out that the detail account has nothing to do with tax dollars. There is continued question as to whether the Police Chief can say no to using the revolving fund money for certain items proposed by the Budget Committee.

Revolving funds have nothing to do with the municipal budget and are set aside so that funds can be appropriated without going back to a vote by the Town (all expenditures must be approved by the Select Board). These funds are allowed for items such as Ambulance, Fire, Police and Recycling. The legislative body can place limitations on what these funds can pay for when they approve them. Stacy provided a copy of the RSA 31:95-H, and Paula provided a copy of what the voters passed for the Police Detail revolving fund. Per Stacy, using a revolving fund to fund the proposed Active Shooter Training line item would not work as it pays for salary, and salaries need to be in the budget. Tax bills are projected to increase \$400-500 per taxpayer.

People have not received their tax bill yet, and Ellie explained that there is no real buffer this year to reduce taxes. This stems from three issues:

- 1) The Recycling Budget was cut and then ended up \$83,000 short (due to a chargeback from Waste Management).
- 2) Currently there is no Town Manager, and five new employees were hired this past year. The retirement rate for these new hires was miscalculated.
- 3) Town Assessing contract had a \$53,000 bump in its 5th year because of the tax map.

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, 11/12/23 at 6:00 PM (Town Hall), followed by a meeting on Wednesday 11/15/23 at 7:00PM at Town Hall.

Stacy moved to conclude the meeting at 8:55, Anne Marie seconded. All in favor.

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