

**Kingston Municipal Budget Committee**  
**December 2, 2020 - Town Hall**  
**Also Held Virtually via Videoconference (Zoom)**

**KMBC Members in Attendance:**

Chuck Hart, Chair  
Rick Russman, Vice Chair (attending virtually via Zoom)  
Kim Donahue, Secretary  
Marissa Federico, Recording Secretary  
Gary Finerty (attending virtually via Zoom)  
Heather Hanlon  
John Pramberg  
Annemarie Roth  
Kevin St. James, representative from the Board of Selectmen (BOS)

**Absent KMBC Members:**

Ray Donald  
James LaValley  
Stanley Shalett

**Other Parties Present:** Ellen Faulconer  
Stephanie Hasselbeck, Trustee, Library  
Rebekka Mateyk, Director, Library  
Laura Thibault, Trustee, Library  
Shaw Tilton, Conservation Commission

No members of the public were in attendance.

Chuck called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Approval of Minutes**

John moved to approve the minutes from the meeting on 11/29/20. Annemarie seconded. All in favor.

**Specific Budget-related Items**

Chuck provided updates on the following items:

- The Highway Department has determined that the funding for Part-time Salaries (4312-S3) will be put on a warrant article.
- Police Dept update: His telephone budget was underfunded in 2020, so the budget is going to move up to \$6,500 for 2021.
- The SoRock financials are in. There will be a warrant article for the increased budget.
- Representatives from the Library/Library Trustees and the Conservation Commission will be re-appearing before the Board at tonight's meeting for further discussion.

### **Planning for Future Meetings/Next Steps**

For future budget-related meetings, Kevin believes these will be held in the auditorium at the high school so it can be broadcast, and there is plenty of room for social distancing.

Ellen explained the next steps from her years of experience on the KMBC:

- January 9, 2021, Decision Day #1, Operating Budget/Revenue Report: The KMBC reviews the budget and revenue figures to come up with final recommendations for an operating budget and votes on this budget. Members of the public can be present to listen in.
- January 10, 2021, Public Hearing, Operating Budget: At this meeting, department heads can appear before the KMBC to debate changes to the budget.
- January 16, 2021, Public Hearing, Finalize Warrant Articles: This is where the budget is submitted as a warrant. There is no debate at this meeting, just a reading of the text of all warrants. After this, there is a vote on these warrant articles. The KMBC will vote on the text of each warrant article.
- January 30, 2021, Deliberative Session: This is the final vote on all warrant articles, including the budget, in preparation for town election on March 9, 2021.

### **Discussion of Hampstead Wage Survey**

Kim asked if the BOS can clarify their stand on the usage of the wage survey for salary guidelines. John and Rick also agreed that it would be helpful if the BOS provided this guidance so the KMBC can provide consistency in budget discussions.

Kevin stated the BOS is not questioning the usage of the salary study and does not have an official position on this. His feeling is the BOS is fine with what's budgeted right now. He added that at the last BOS meeting, they discussed a salary increase for Janey Ramey but not for Tammy Bakie.

Kevin explained that the salary study is a tool. Pensions and benefits should also be considered in salary discussions.

Kevin also explained that at the time of this discussion with the BOS, the police had a very large turnover issue, and there was a roughly 20% increase in salaries for fire and police. However, at that time, the police were hiring new recruits, not experienced personnel, and the administrator was being paid more than the officers.

Kim asked what guideline was used by the BOS when considering the salary increases for 2020. This information could be used in considering other departments' raises. Chuck will look into this.

All members were in agreement that if the BOS provides guidance that this study is to be used as a guideline, the same, consistent criteria must apply across all departments.

Heather stated the issue is percentage increases. There was a discussion of using the 40<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles as guides for starting salaries, which does not account for experience/time and grade.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Chuck shared that an assistant treasurer was recently appointed by the BOS. Jayne Ramie's salary request is still being researched, and Kevin is looking at treasurer salaries from comparable towns.

There was also a discussion about Personnel Administration, part of the BOS budget. The Pay for Performance, or PPP (4155-01); Social Security (4155-03); Medicare (4155-04); and Retirement (4155-09) budgets have increased. The process for how merit-based raises (PPP) are considered and awarded was discussed with Kevin. Kevin explained that the PPP was estimated to be 3%. This is therefore reflected across Social Security/Medicare/Retirement for 2021 as well. Kevin also clarified that department heads cannot give themselves a raise. The town has switched to contracts instead with varying durations: Fire chief (maybe 5 years), road agent (3 years), and police chief (term until 70 years old consistent with state regulations).

## **DEPARTMENT PRESENTATIONS**

### **Zoning Board of Appeals**

Chuck stated the budget is level funded for 2021. He explained that the ZBA is similar to the PB in that there are revenue offsets in the form of fees.

Kim asked about the spending on legal ads in 2019 being overbudget and asked if this is anticipated in 2021. Chuck does not believe this will be the case. The large projects that the PB is considering in their budget at this point do not require the involvement of the ZBA. Kevin believes the PB will incur these costs, not the ZBA.

Chuck will also check in with Ellie Alessio regarding the budget for her thoughts.

### **Budget Committee**

This budget is also level funded.

### **Library**

Stephanie discussed the challenges posed to the library due to COVID and the variety of programs offered during the pandemic and their service to the community. She explained that the Trustees have continued to keep the focus on serving the community.

#### *Salary:*

Laura now discussed the salary increases utilizing the Hampstead wage survey. The library was experiencing turnover and wanted to respond to this issue. In 2019, the BOS and the KMBC approved a raise for some of the employees that was to be applied in 2020. In the 2021 budget, there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of increases to bring the rest of the employees up to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile utilizing the survey's figures. Rebekka explained that the salary for the youth and adult librarians are budgeted to be raised.

There was a discussion about the vacant position. It was advertised in September. Rebekka stated she has published multiple ads and has had 4 candidates apply with 3 interviewed. She and Stephanie explained they want someone with the confidence to handle broad responsibilities. Rebekka explained that it is important that the applicant have the educational background as well as experience, so a master's degree is preferred. Kim questioned if a master's degree is necessary, and Gary agreed. Annemarie stated that the new employee can have a bachelor's degree and be trained.

Kevin stated the KMBC doesn't have the authority to grant all raises, only some. There are also variations in job titles to affect pay grade.

Ellen explained that the Trustees determine the requirements for the potential applicant. She explained that the role of the library has changed tremendously due to technology and availability for low-income families. Rick concurred.

John stated his concern is the 26% salary increase, whereas other departments may not be receiving this high of a salary increase.

Rick explained that the wage survey was helpful for police and fire and is helpful for other departments as well. Heather expressed her concern again that the Hampstead wage survey be used as it is subjective at best.

Rebekka explained that the Trustees determine salaries and employment.

*Benefits:*

Rebekka stated benefits have gone up, and if they are overbudget, the unspent funds are returned to the town. The actuals will be considered in January once the books are closed. Chuck asked about the projections for health and dental insurance. Ellen stated that Cindy provides recommendations to ensure that town departments budget enough for health/dental insurance to account for changes throughout the year.

*Bookkeeper for the Trustees:*

Laura stated that Cindy used to be their bookkeeper and was paid for her services. They now have a different bookkeeper that is also paid and is paid at a lower rate than Cindy was.

**Conservation Commission**

Shaw returned to talk to the Committee regarding milfoil funding (4619-09) as this can be rolled over to 2021 if not spent (does not return to the General Fund). He explained the cost has ranged from roughly \$18,900 to as low as \$4,700; in 2020, it cost \$16,000. Thus, the average cost is \$11,000, so \$14,000 is budgeted as an estimate. In Shaw's consultation with him, Russell Chute of the Pow Wow Council agreed this is a fair budget amount. Shaw explained the DES pays a percentage in the form of a grant of around 25% to 40%; this year, it was 40%. That grant goes to General Fund and is paid out appropriately.

Kevin suggested this budget amount be lowered in consideration of the unspent balance in the account (\$14,000) and as a grant is expected. After a discussion, it was agreed that the budget will be changed to \$5,000. All members were in agreement.

Rick stressed the importance of protecting this resource.

**Board of Selectmen**

Kevin now review budget items on behalf of the BOS.

*Executive:*

- Full-time salaries (4130-S2) up due to raises for the assessing clerk and executive assistant.
- The cost for contracted services (4130-09) is increased due to the cleanup of PFAs.

- The amount for dues (4130-11) is estimated as the BOS is waiting for information from the NH Municipal Association.

*Assessing (4150-08):* Level funded.

*Audit (4150-09):* Level funded. Chuck noted the actual costs in 2019 were lower than the budget, so the actuals for 2020 are important in considering the 2021 budget. Kevin will look into this.

*Legal (4153):* Level funded. The budget appears high, but Kevin said the BOS recommends the budget remain consistent so the money is available if needed. He added that unspent funds get returned to the General Fund.

*Personnel Administration (4155):* Kevin explained that the employer percentage for unemployment (4155-06) was adjusted by the state, but the employee percentage remained the same.

*Insurance (4196):* Kevin stated that the company Primex is used for liability and workman's compensation. The BOS looked into competitive bidding, and you cannot vote on one without the other. The intent is to mirror them so they expire at same time, then go out to rebid.

*Regional Association Dues (4197):* Level funded. This represents membership in the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC).

*Other General Government (4199):*

- Other General Government (4199-01) is a contingency fund and is level funded.
- Gasoline (4199-02): The town gets a better price by using the state shed. The state bills us for the gas we use.

*Town Inspectors (4240):* Level funded. Kevin stated the permitting fee structure is being looked at and reworked. The only inspector that is salaried is Peter Broderick (health), all others paid by permit (building, electrical, plumbing).

*Street Lighting (4316):* Kevin explained that the town is working on converting street lights to LED fixtures, but they will need a warrant article this year to pay for the conversion of old arm fixtures for new ones. This cost will be offset by money savings, but those savings will not be realized immediately. He stated we cannot use the energy grant from the federal government for that purpose. The town will be getting a 0% interest loan from Until for the work. Rick suggested some of the lights can be removed to save money while still proceeding with the conversion. The contractor hired for this conversion is Infinity Lighting, who has done similar conversions for other towns. The work is projected to last 4 months. A fee must be paid up front and then Until pays the rest. The town has 5 years to repay Until. As a result of this conversion, energy costs are expected to decrease after 5 years.

*Other Highway Streets and Bridges (4319):* The Highway Block Grant (4319-02) is down.

*Sanitation (4323):* This is contractual. It is a 5-year contract, and Kevin believes the last one was signed in 2018 or 2019.

*Health Department (4411):* Level funded. Chuck added that this is income producing which offsets costs.

*Pest Control (4414):* Mosquito Control (4414-10) is currently out for bid, so this figure may go down. This is level funded at this time.

Kevin will also look into the fireworks budget for Kingston Days and see where that money is budgeted for in 2021.

**NEXT MEETING:** Chuck proposed another meeting before 1/9/20 to prepare for decision day. Wednesday, 12/30/20, at 6 pm will be the date of this meeting if needed.

Chuck concluded the meeting at 8:50 p.m. Heather seconded.

*Prepared by: Marissa Federico*