

**Kingston Municipal Budget Committee**  
**Public Meeting**  
**Kingston Town Hall**  
**November 14, 2021 at 4 p.m.**

**Members in Attendance:**

Chuck Hart, Chair  
Rick Russman, Vice Chair  
Kim Donahue, Secretary  
Marissa Federico, Recording Secretary  
Claudine Dias  
Stacy Dion  
Gary Finerty  
Nick Hilfer  
James LaValley  
John Pramberg  
Annemarie Roth  
Kevin St. James, representative from the Board of Selectmen (BOS)  
Trish Tidd  
Shaw Tilton

**Also in Attendance:**

Kelly Binette, SoRock  
Heidi Blais, Trustee of the Library  
Kim Boyd, Trustee of the Library  
Chief Donald Briggs, Police Department  
Kathy Chase, Historical Museum Committee  
Glenn Coppelman, Planning Board  
Ellen Faulconer, Planning Board Admin, Human Services/General Assistance  
Nell Fillmore, Trustee of the Library  
Stephanie Hasselbeck, Trustee of the Library  
Lesley Hume, Historical Museum Committee  
Ernie Landry, Heritage Commission  
Melissa MacDonald, Trustee of the Library  
Virginia Morse, Historic District Commission  
Susan Prescott, Historic District Commission  
Charlotte Scott, SoRock  
Richard St. Hilaire, Highway Department

Chuck called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

***Approval of the minutes from the KMBC meeting held on 10/13/21:*** MM&S: John moved to approve the minutes as written. Jim seconded. All in agreement.

Chuck explained there are not many changes to the 2022 budget at this point. He added that in examining spending versus revenue for 2021, the budget is in line right now. Per information received from Cindy Kenerson, the Finance Director, the interest paid by the town has increased for 2020 and 2021. The town's tax rate is up, but the increase is tempered by money returned to the town from the School Department.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

Chuck explained the process for tonight's meeting. He reiterated that the overall budget is up 10% and the hope is to bring that down as much as possible, even for smaller line items.

Kim asked if the value of warrant articles has been calculated. Chuck said that is not available right now. Kevin added that there is a potential warrant article to save the old fire station, and more information will be forthcoming as it becomes available.

Kevin explained that there is an upcoming hearing regarding spending of ARPA funds (\$600,000). The town has 3 years to spend these funds. Chuck added that there may be budgeted amounts that could be covered by ARPA funds, and once approved by the BOS, these projects/items should be pulled out of the budget to reduce the tax burden. Stacy asked about spending guidelines for ARPA funds; Kevin explained these guidelines are available. He added that decisions regarding the spending of ARPA funds should be made by the time of the deliberative session.

#### **DEPARTMENT PRESENTATIONS:**

##### **Police Department (4210):**

Chief Briggs explained that there is still an officer retention problem due to low wages. There is one open FTE position that is currently being advertised. He stated that a new officer must go to the academy and undergo training and does not immediately enter the town's workforce. He would like to schedule a salary raise at 3 years then 5 years to try to retain officers after the initial 3-year contract. He added that hiring PT officers saves the town money in benefits.

- FT Salaries (4210-S1): Chief Briggs informed the Committee that since he decided not to retire, the FT salary line is now reduced to \$388,606. This figure includes 6 current FTE and the one open position. Annemarie asked about FTE hourly salary ranges. Chief Briggs stated the range is from \$25/hour to \$29.73/hour. He just lost an officer to the town of Kensington, who offered an additional \$1.50/hour. Chief Briggs explained that although salaries were brought up last year, surrounding towns are still paying more.
- Salaries - Overtime Court (4210-S5): He explained that courts are re-opening, so court fees may go up due to backlog.
- PT Salaries (4210-S6): Chief Briggs explained that this salary figure includes 7 PTE.
- COLA (4210-S8): Briggs explained his salary should not be in COLA. Kim said it is included on the budget spreadsheet.
- Seminars & Training (4210-01): Officers are now required to do more online and hands-on classes that will cost extra money.
- Capital Equipment (4210-04): Three laptops utilized in cruisers need to be replaced; the cost of these may come out of ARPA funds. Chuck noted that in the past, 2 vehicles were purchased using funds from the outside detail account, and he believes there is approximately \$67,000 left in this fund; funds from this account could assist in offsetting the cost of this equipment.

- Computer (4210-05): Chief Briggs explained that IMC Mobile provides software for laptops in cruisers to allow communication between various agencies. This budget item includes the cost of setup and maintenance; going forward, there will only be maintenance costs. Nick asked if this can be paid for thru ARPA funds, and Kevin said it may be.
- Prosecutor (4210-15): The prosecutor requested a \$1,200 salary increase for 2022. Chief Briggs said she is dedicated and works 30-40 hours/week for low pay.
- Radio Maintenance (4210-16): He needs to purchase new radios. Nick asked if this could be paid for via ARPA funds, but per Chief Briggs, it cannot.
- Surplus Equipment (4210-18): The town has purchased military surplus equipment, and these funds are for maintenance of these vehicles.
- Uniforms (4210-20): Chief Briggs stated they need to replace bullet-proof vests. Kevin did not think this can be paid through ARPA funds.
- Heat (4210-22): The town's finance department looked at fuel costs of various companies, and the existing provider is still the most cost efficient. Rick noted the possible cost savings from the prior installation of high-efficiency furnaces.
- Electric (4210-23): Kevin stated the BOS was looking at changing over all town buildings to LED lights, but the initial cost is high; it will take approximately 5 years for savings to be realized by the town.

Chief Briggs informed members that the Department needs to purchase new Tasers with an estimated cost of \$42,000. He explained the current emphasis on less lethal weapons. This cost is not currently included in the budget.

Nick noted that with the reduction of FT salaries and its effect on the COLA figure, the possibility of utilizing ARPA funds for the purchase of the new laptops and the IMC Mobile software, funding is more in line with the budget goals.

#### **Pest/Animal Control (4414):**

Chief Briggs explained that mosquito control is managed by the BOS, and the cost of animal control is managed by his department.

- Veterinarian (4414-09): Historically, costs for veterinary care have been low as the veterinarian has done pro bono work for the town. This vet will be retiring, so costs may go up.

#### **Conservation (4619):**

Shaw explained there is a conservation fund and a forest fund available. Unused balances for these funds do not go back into the general fund. The forest fund consists of proceeds from timber sales, and a warrant article is required to utilize these funds.

- Milfoil Testing & Treatment (4619-09): Shaw explained there is no expense other than testing. There are leftover funds from a previous warrant article and also a conservation fund earmarked for milfoil and other aquatic invasive species. Grants also help keep these costs down.
- Trail Maintenance: This is a new line item. In the past, trail maintenance was paid from Supplies (4619-06) and the conservation fund. The \$2,000 figure is a rough estimate based on past and current costs to maintain the town's trails and add new ones.

**Historic District Commission (4191):**

- Salaries (4197-57): Virginia explained that the salary figure includes a 3% COLA increase.
- Supplies (4191-56): The cost of supplies decreased as the HDC is now utilizing the town's machine to stamp outgoing mail.

**Planning Board (4191):**

Glenn explained the purpose and work of the PB. He explained that last year, there were increases as the town planner increased his hours and due to increased engineering costs for various large projects in town. Chuck reminded members that the PB also generates income.

- Contracted Services (4191-02): Although most of the costs involved in the PB process can be charged back to the applicant, there are some that must be absorbed by the town. Glenn explained that budgeted money for this line item is not always fully spent, but it is best to include this in the budget for contingency purposes.
- Computer Upgrade/Maintenance (4191-17): Stacy asked if there are any projects being paid for by these funds that can be paid for through ARPA funds, but this budgeted amount reflects only maintenance for 2022.
- MS 365 (4191-18): This is a new line item and reflects the cost of utilizing town email addresses rather than personal ones for town business. Nick asked if a free service like Gmail could be used; Kevin explained that using MS includes privacy protection and offers features that a free service like Gmail does not. Chuck asked if the town as a whole will need to do this. This prompted a discussion among various members of which groups in town are using town addresses rather than personal ones. Kevin explained that information for the PB is more likely discoverable in the event of an issue.

**General Assistance (4442)/Human Services (4441):**

For Human Services, Ellen explained the only increases are in salary and COLA.

For General Assistance, the guidelines have changed, and the averages for the region have increased. Throughout the pandemic, state and federal programs as well as private programs were available to taxpayers, so this kept town spending low. Ellen expressed caution in underbudgeting for general assistance as the town must pay requests if they cannot be passed on to another entity (state/federal/private programs). If the town underbudgets, it is still required to pay, necessitating other departments in town to effectively cover these costs.

Claudine asked how much assistance was provided to residents by outside agencies (state/federal/private programs) in 2021. Ellen said she can calculate and send these figures.

John asked about heating oil assistance in light of increased oil costs. Ellen explained that the town covers only 100 gallons and then assists the taxpayer in signing up for state fuel assistance distributed at the county level.

*\*\*\*\*Chuck called a recess at 5:45 p.m. The meeting was called back to order at 6:05 p.m.\*\*\*\**

Chuck reiterated the importance of keeping budgets down as much as possible, even smaller line items.

### **Highway (4312)**

John reminded the members that costs were up due to warrant articles that passed in 2021. Rich explained there were no change to salaries and that a part-time driver is being hired for the winter. He also shared that an employee with a CDL with a clean driving record can get a job paying up to \$30/hour, which is less than what the town pays; Rich is worried that employees may leave.

- Hot Mix (4312-10): Since this is a petroleum-based product, Claudia asked if this figure should be increased. Rich explained this is a low-quality oil product, and he does not expect that number to change dramatically.
- Salt (4312-19): Due to higher supply costs, the cost of obtaining salt increased. Rich explained the salt used comes from various sources, some overseas.
- Heat (4312-33): Rich explained there is an \$0.80/gallon increase in gas costs. Oil costs have increased from \$1.786/gallon to \$2.676/gallon. He emphasized this could affect other departments as well, and the budgets should reflect these higher heating costs.
- Telephone/Internet (4312-24): The budget decreased based on actual numbers from 2021.
- Storm Water Maintenance (4312-29): Rich explained that the encumbered funds from last year are spent first, and the contract runs from October to October. These costs are incurred due to an EPA-mandated program, and the town must complete projects to meet their standards to avoid costly fines.

Kim asked about the new full-time admin that was hired by the highway department in 2021. In the budget, it appears this employee will be receiving a COLA increase. There was a brief discussion on whether that was appropriate.

### **Government Buildings (4194):**

- Air Quality Testing (4194-29): Rich explained this has not been done yet in 2021 but expects it to be expensive.
- Cap Improvements (4194-02): New garage doors will be installed in a town building, and a fence is going in at Magnussen Field. The cost of the fire suppression system has gone up but is currently funded by the capital reserve fund. Also of note is the furnace at the library should be replaced, and the BOS agreed for the town to fund this expense.
- Flags (4194-07): Fifty flags need to be replaced.
- Heat & Service (4194-09): The cost of the heat and heating systems in town buildings has increased.
- Paper and Cleaning supplies (4194-19): The budget has been reduced based on actual costs.
- Utilities - Electric (4194-24): Rich thought the actuals appeared low, but he will check with Cindy.
- Water Cooler Rentals (4194-25): Rich explained this line item is for water cooler rentals in town buildings. The BOS also has a line item for this due to the provision of bottled water to some homes in town due to soil contamination.
- Equipment Rental (4194-31): The increased budget reflects higher costs.

**Historical Museum Committee (4589):**

Kathy explained that they received an estimate of technology upgrades from Block5 of \$12,644. There was a ransomware attack to their system that caused irreparable damage. They lost videos, interviews, and transcribed reports. Kevin questioned the amount of the Block5 estimate, and he and Kathy will work on this offline to resolve the discrepancy. Kevin explained there are 2 budget considerations for Block5's services: Higher setup costs but lower ongoing monthly cost charged per computer. He is not sure what the ongoing maintenance/recurring costs will be.

Kathy also noted that the budget was reduced last year due to COVID. Grants have been received to assist with costs.

- Archivist/Curator/Transcriptionist (4589-05): They wish to increase the hours of the archivist to process backlogged items. They also have oral histories that need to be transcribed. They hope to hire a consultant curator to help with their mission.
- Computer Supplies: This is a new line item that was added to reflect the work proposed by Block5.
- Computer Support (4589-03): This line item also reflects the work proposed by Block5 to maintain their systems.
- Comcast: They are looking into upgrading their system but may look for another provider to save money. It was noted that Consolidated Communications may be able to provide the same service for less money.
- Facility Work Required: This line item will be removed as Rich will take care of this work.

There was a discussion on funding the technology needs of the museum. John asked about fundraisers and the possibility of partnering with the Friends to help fund these needs. He asked if a warrant article might be needed. Chuck expressed that the Museum should work with the BOS to discuss funding options and supported John's suggestion of the possibility of a warrant article. Kevin did not think ARPA funds could be used for this project.

**Heritage Commission (4950):**

Ernie discussed the budget.

- Salaries (4950-13): Added transcription services for the creation of meeting minutes.
- Supplies (4950-08): Looking at actuals, Ernie explained very little was spent in 2021 as members are using their own personal equipment and supplies. It is hoped to not do this going forward. Also, it is hoped to purchase a plaque commemorating the inclusion of the Nichols Building on the National Register of Historic Places. The process is underway to have the Plains Cemetery approved to be on the National Register as well; it is hoped this process will be completed, and another plaque will be required.

**Social Service Agencies (4445):**

Seacoast Mental Health has not returned Kim's call and has not submitted a budget request at this time. She will follow up with her contact.

Kevin said Waypoint is taking over Richie McFarland. Kim will reach out to her contacts to find out how this affects budgeting.

Charlotte Scott and Kelly Binette of SoRock now approached the members to discuss their program and services. Charlotte is the program director and is the only paid employee. The program leverages available resources to assist with the costs of their program. Charlotte stated the school has not yet reached out to SoRock regarding the possibility of fundings; SoRock received \$3,000 last year from the school. She explained that they served 5 towns in 2021 and have level funding requests for 2022. She expressed appreciation for the office space provided for SoRock in the high school which increases access to the students.

**Library (4550):**

Stephanie handed out a new budget. She explained that in consideration of the town's budget constraints, this new budget reflects a reduction in the proposed FT and PT salary increases.

- FT Salary (4550-S1): There are currently 3 open FT positions (director, youth services, adult services). Stephanie said they are focusing their efforts right now on hiring a new director, and they are conducting the interview process. Chuck asked about the proposed new salary for the director, and Stephanie stated they are budgeting a maximum of about \$76,000 but the starting salary could be lower based on the applicant's qualifications. The job posting on the library's website for the open director position states a salary range of \$65,000 to \$76,500. A new children's library was hired but left at the end of August. Kevin explained that if the money is not spent on salaries, it goes back to the town. Stephanie confirmed that the salaries of all 3 FTE employees are included in this budget.

John asked if salaries could be reduced for the adult and youth librarian services positions. Stephanie stated she is unsure when she will post these jobs, but some of the director candidates could be candidates for these other positions. She is focused on creating a cohesive team.

Stephanie also explained that during the last budget season, the library FT salary budget was cut by \$6,645. In the 2022 budget, she reinstated that back into the budget. There was a discussion about whether or not this had been agreed upon in the budget discussions at that time. Kevin said budgeting these funds back into FT salaries is reasonable. Chuck stated this is only the first meeting of multiple, and further discussions can be had to resolve the salary issues.

Chuck explained that firefighters and EMTs in town get paid less per hour than library employees, and there are retention issues across many departments in town. Stephanie said she is also concerned about keeping PT library employees for the same reason. She stressed the importance of finding qualified people with the right pay.

Claudine asked about COLA increases. Stephanie stated she used the CPI to guide salary increase decisions. Kim Boyd explained they will not have a COLA for new hires but pointed out that the cost of living in Rockingham County is the highest in the state.

Kevin stated he appreciates that Stephanie has worked hard to change the budget to keep costs down. Rick stated he thinks the library is moving in the right direction and recognized Stephanie

has worked hard in difficult circumstances. He wished Stephanie well in the hiring process. He applauded their efforts to lower utility costs as well.

- Pay for Performance (4550-S3): Chuck asked about the PPP increase. Stephanie stated the PT library employees have worked very hard under difficult circumstances.
- Transfer Account (4550-04):
  - Stephanie stated the library is also working on a cybersecurity project with Block5 and is waiting for more detailed information from them. She explained how IT and bookkeeping funds are encumbered. Kevin explained about upgrading technology across many town departments and emphasized that the security needs of the library system are unique in that they are accessible to the public. Stephanie explained that the previous director setup an IT contract with an individual for ongoing IT support but believes the services of Block5 may better suit the library's needs. Nick requested a breakdown of the library's IT budget. The upgrade is reflected in the IT Computer Support budget of \$20,280.
  - Utilities: Rick asked Stephanie to verify utility figures due to higher energy costs. Regarding Building Maintenance, Stephanie stated the 2021 funds have already been spent, and there are maintenance issues that need to be addressed. It is planned that the some of the maintenance needs of the library building will be taken care of by the town. Kevin suggested that the internet cost could be reduced if they change from Comcast, but Stephanie was worried about unbundling internet/phone.
  - Insurance/Benefits: Kevin questioned the health insurance increase as the town's cost is projected to decrease for 2022.

Chuck encouraged the library to utilize their impact fees wherever possible to reduce the budget and to review the budget to make reductions wherever necessary.

*\*\*\*\*Recording Secretary left the meeting at 8:15 p.m. Kim Donahue assumed recording secretary duties.\*\*\*\**

- Additional conversation around being fiscally responsible with total percentage on the budget and that a 10% increase is not feasible to the taxpayers in Town. We saw little movement on the budget tonight.
- Discussion around all employees receiving 3% cost of living increase which was already approved by Selectmen and an additional \$42k for pay for performance. It was stated that they are doing both with a total increase \$112,831 in salary adjustments alone as the budget stands.
- The need to market value jobs was brought up. We continue to have an issue with salary each year. It was suggested that the Selectmen market price the jobs for future budget discussions. Kevin was provided with the link to research and discuss with Board of Selectman: <https://www.nhmunicipal.org/town-city-article/customized-wage-salary-and-benefits-reports-offer-resource-aid-decision-making>

Meeting closed at 8:44pm

**NEXT MEETING:** Sunday, 11/28/21, at 6:00 p.m. in Town Hall.