

## **Nottingham Select Board Meeting**

**11/27/2023**

### **APPROVED Minutes**

**Approved as amended on December 4, 2023.**

#### **Call to Order**

**Members present:** Ben Bartlett, John Morin, Tim Dabrieo, Matthew Shirland, and Steve Welch.  
**Others:** Town Administrator Ellen White.

**Members of the public:** Please refer to the signup sheet at the end of this document.

**Members Excused:** none

**Pledge of Allegiance:** meeting began with a Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **Department Budget Review**

##### **Highway Department**

Members discussed the draft of the Highway Department budget, Ms. White answered Board's questions on proposed amounts and actual expenditures.

In the process of reviewing the budget proposal, several line items were targeted for cuts:

1. Hired Equipment (Line 259): Reduced from \$20,000 to \$10,000. The rationale for cutting is availability of experienced operators on staff.
2. Highway Mowing and Vegetation Control (Line 262): Reduced from \$20,000 to \$10,000. Members acknowledged the past underutilization and also discussed cost-effectiveness. They also discussed the possibility of postponing some of the work.
3. Highway Equipment Construction (Line 265): Reduced from \$20,000 to \$10,000. Members discussed the hiring of experienced operators, which can potentially reduce the need for external equipment services.
4. Engineering Consulting (Line 277): Reduced from \$20,000 to \$10,000. Members discussed the new Highway Department Director's approach to engineering consulting and the fact that the previous budget may have been higher due to different preferences.
5. Salt (Line 271 - Salt): Proposed reduction to \$100,000 from \$122,000. Members discussed changes in salt usage philosophy of the new Highway Department Director, and a desire to align the budget with more realistic needs.

These adjustments totaled a \$52,000 proposed reduction in the Highway Department budget, bringing it down to \$810,011. The conversation highlighted the need to be cautious about cutting too much, given the impact on services and the challenge of adhering to the 4% tax cap.

##### **Recycling Center**

Members discussed the draft of the Recycling Center budget, and Ms. White answered Board's questions on proposed amounts and actual expenditures. There was discussion about current

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staffing level of four employees working 32 hours a week and whether it was indeed necessary. Members debated the potential reduction of working hours and restructuring, given that a determination had been made that safe operations of the Recycling Center require a minimum of two employees. There were concerns about whether the cut in hours may impact on the job's desirability. Decision was made to flag this line item and revisit it at the next budget review meeting.

The proposed budget for the Recycling Center is \$380,000, with a significant portion allocated to collection and disposal fees. Members discussed the challenges of making the Recycling Center cost-effective are highlighted, considering the lack of revenue from recycling activities. The need for strategic decisions for the Recycling Center to remain user-friendly and within budget constraints.

### **Social Services**

Ms. White explained that the line item for social services includes outside agencies that provide support to town residents. She said that these agencies include Child Advocate Services, RSVP, Labor Health Care, Seacoast Mental Health, Meals on Wheels, etc. The budget for these agencies is determined based on their requests, typically submitted in letters to the town. The letters contain information about the number of residents they serve. The sentiment in the discussion was that there was little room to cut these budgets.

### **Executive Department**

Members then briefly discussed the Selectboard salary line item of \$15,000 and whether they need to have it as several of them do not collect it. There was sentiment that the amount of work the members put into meetings may justify a small stipend.

The conversation shifted to the overall budget again, with a realization that substantial cuts were still needed. The discussion delved into the complexities of the tax cap of 4%. The importance of considering revenues and offsetting them against proposed cuts was emphasized. The discussion concluded with a request for the specific number related to that tax cap that needs to be reached in terms of budget reduction.

There was another discussion about the Town Newsletter's cost, approximately \$38,000, and its perceived value. There was a suggestion to eliminate the printed version and offer it online, with concerns about older residents lacking online access. Making it available for pickup was also proposed. The cost of mailing was deemed significant, and the idea of increasing advertising revenue was also considered. Members acknowledges the importance of preserving the small-town charm but also weighed the budget constraints and decided to flag the item for further consideration. It was also noted that the decision to decrease the amount of printed Town Reports was a particularly good one as it cut costs and there are still books available this day.

Then there was the merit discussion, which revolved around the Merit Compensation pool line item. Ms. White clarified that the actual increases are reflected in individual departments, and the

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pool serves as a placeholder to offset these increases. She asked whether the Board was interested in a more transparent budgeting approach, where departments realistically budget for their merit increases or in a different approach of using the pool for the merit increases with a range of 4-6%. She said that since the police department had already factored their merit increases into their operating budget, she reduced the pool by that amount. Members discussed last year's increases and floated an idea of reducing the pool, perhaps by \$10,000 to \$15,000, is proposed, with the acknowledgment that a complete elimination may not be reasonable. The discussion emphasized the need to consider the Town's financial limitations.

### **Town Clerk's Department and Elections**

There was discussion clarifying the payment structure for the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk, specifically related to their work during elections. It was explained that their salary items reflect additional pay for election-related work, paid by the state as a benefit. The conversation then transitioned to the Elections related budget, touching on various line items such as election workers' salaries, advertising, and election financial administration.

A specific concern was raised regarding a \$6,000 expenditure in the election advertising budget for recording the deliberative session, which was not budgeted for either 2023 or 2024. The need to allocate this expense appropriately was discussed and the idea of not televising the deliberative session to save costs was raised, with considerations about the impact on public awareness. Since the amount was not budgeted for 2024, there were no cuts relative to that line proposed.

Postage was also discussed and whether any cuts are possible there. Line 65 (having to do with the number of properties that have a lien on them) was also considered to be cut from \$1,200 to \$700.

### **Assessing**

Discussion focused on the Avitar contract, covering assessing, building permits, and tax collection software. Ms. White mentioned that CAI GIS also has a contract with the Town for tax map updates at \$5,000 a year and answered questions about budgeted and actual amounts. The suggestion to cut \$100 from "Dues and Conferences," covering specialized training for the Town staff which could be covered by another dues and conferences line item.

### **Legal**

Discussion included concerns about potential budget overruns due to uncertain legal needs. It was noted that budgeting for legal services encompasses various Town boards and officials and their interactions with the Town attorney.

### **Personnel**

In the personnel discussion, the focus was on health insurance, which reflected a 15.6% increase. The conversation acknowledged that this increase was not fully reflected due current staffing levels.

### **Planning**

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Then members discussed the Planner's (RPC circuit rider) role in the Planning Board business and questioned whether certain expenses, such as the Planner's attendance at every meeting, could be reduced.

Then there was discussion about postage expenses, training costs, advertising fees (reimbursed by applicants), mileage, legal, and membership dues for Regional Planning Commission. There was a proposal to reduce these expenses (postage reduced to \$1 due to it being reimbursed by applicants, dues and conferences reduced to \$100, and Planning Board advertising reduced to \$1 – due to it being reimbursed by the applicant, mileage – reduced to \$1 – due to applicants recording their own site plans, legal – reduced to \$1 due to it already being covered by the general legal line item). Members recognized the need for open communication with the Planning Board before making any final decisions on budget cuts.

### **Zoning**

In the discussion, there was a suggestion to check with the secretary to clarify her roles and payments as she serves multiple board and departments. The members discussed various line items, including zoning expenses reimbursable by applicants. It was suggested to further investigate how these expenses were handled and whether the budget figures needed revision.

### **Town Hall and Buildings**

In the Town Hall building discussion, there were considerations to adjust budget line items based on past expenditures and future plans. The \$110,000 budget for a part-time maintenance person was questioned, given historical spending, and there was a suggestion flag it. Ms. White then answered Board's questions about actual expenses and overages on some line items related to maintenance of various Town buildings.

There was a suggestion to review the revenue side for the old fire station maintenance, considering potential rental income and to note that in the budget narrative. The Library building's expenses were briefly discussed, acknowledging that the library had covered some expenditures, such as tree cutting.

Another discussion was about adjusting the budget line items related to electricity, heating, waste disposal, and maintenance in various town buildings. The focus was on optimizing budget allocations based on past spending patterns, potential changes in consumption, and the need for clarification on billing cycles. Line 147 (fuel cubes and lighting for them) was suggested to be cut from \$2,000 to \$1,500. Specific adjustments were discussed for line items such as part-time maintenance, dumpster rental, recycling heat, waste oil burning, and Community Center electricity. Line item 562 was reduced from \$3,000 to \$2,700. Library electric bill line item was cut from \$7,350 to \$5,000).

Then members discussed dropping the Community Center electricity line item from \$24,000 to \$22,000. Ms. White will check the numbers to make sure that the cut is sufficient.

### **Cemeteries, Mowing and Tree Removal**

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No cuts were proposed.

#### **Insurance**

No cuts were proposed. It was noted that insurance policies renew annually and the suggestion to consider putting them out for bid next year.

#### **Police Department**

The discussion revolved around line 189 for gasoline expenses given the use of the fuel cubes on Smoke Street and potential savings from those. There was a suggestion to assess the savings over the year of use and make a more informed decision for the next budget.

There was also a proposal to remove the police cruiser budget line (198) and place it in a warrant article. However, concerns were raised about the need for a constant rotation of vehicles and the potential risks of delaying the replacement. Further conversation touched on the importance of replacing cruisers regularly to avoid wear and tear and the possibility of breakdowns. A suggestion was made to consider budgeting for large items like utility trucks annually or through warrant articles.

#### **Fire Department Budget**

Discussion on whether the proposed increase for the Fire Department Chief's salary (line 205) was reasonable and whether the Chief's salary to a warrant article. There were concerns about uncertainties until a Chief was hired but ultimately decided to be left as the 2023 level without the increase of \$58,560.

#### **Building Inspector:**

There were no significant changes or concerns regarding the Building Inspector's budget with the only notable expense noted for the new code books.

#### **Emergency Management**

No changes were made to the Emergency Management Department Budget.

Members agreed to tentatively meet on December 13, 2023 to discuss the budget further.

#### **Non-Public Session**

*Mr. Shirland moved to enter non-public session at 9:25 PM pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a), (c), Mr. Dabrieo duly seconded Motion. Motion carried by a 5:0 roll call vote. Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Shirland – aye, Mr. Dabrieo – aye, Mr. Welch – aye, Mr. Morin - aye.*

Non-public session was entered at 9:25 PM

#### **Resumption of Public Session**

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The public session was entered at 10:25 PM.

*Mr. Dabrieo moved to exit the public session at 10:25 PM, Mr. Welch duly seconded. Motion carried by a 5:0 roll call vote. Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Shirland – aye, Mr. Dabrieo – aye, Mr. Welch – aye, Mr. Morin - aye.*

**Adjournment:**

*Motion made by Mr. Shirland to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Dabrieo. Motion carried by a 5:0 roll call vote. Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Shirland – aye, Mr. Dabrieo – aye, Mr. Welch – aye, Mr. Morin - aye.*

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 PM.

Submitted by Alvina Snegach

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DATE: 11/27/23

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

	NAME	ADDRESS
1.	Doug O'Rate	30 Langrey
2.	Allan Tranter	20 gravel Pit
3.	May Crockett	5 Teemblay
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