

2024 Budget Workshop
September 12, 2023 4:30 p.m.
Keene Town Hall

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joseph P. Wilson, Jr., Town Supervisor, Robert Biesemeyer, Deputy Supervisor, Teresa Cheetham-Palen, Christopher Daly, Council Members

TOWN OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Reginald Whitney, Highway Superintendent, Savana Li, Water Superintendent, Anna Whitney, Town Clerk , Ashley LeClair Secretary to the Supervisor

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PRESENT:

Donald Smith

CALLED WORKSHOP TO ORDER AT 4:30 p.m. by Joe Pete Wilson

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Wilson stated that we still have some loose ends. We are meeting with Mark Crawford about the medical increases tomorrow (Wednesday 13th). We have some water things we have to still work through. A Lot of this budget is where we want to be but there is no cover sheet yet because it is too early to tell.

Before we jump into the actual budget I ask we take a look at the Town Wide Capital Plan. Last year we discussed it but never really dug into it. One of the key parts of this is a Fund Balance Policy, it is something we don't have right now and it is something we need. We can't delay it any longer. I have a draft Fund Balance Policy on the last two pages and I put some starting place numbers for each fund, a placeholder for what we want to keep as a fund balance. We are allowed to decide on our own what we want for a fund balance but we need a policy to support it . I ask everyone to take a look at this and at our next workshop we fine tune this and agree to it. We need to have this in place since we are carrying really large fund balances.

Mr. Daly asked to go on the record, the Fund Balance Policy is, correct me if I am wrong, required to allow us to essentially be able to use the excess proceeds we are carrying above the fund balance amounts for sort of wander off type projects , they can't be used for recurring expenses as I understand it, but they can be available for projects that the town board see fits.

Mr. Wilson said the only thing I would narrow down is the Town has wide discretion in how we spend our fund balance but it needs to be justified by the policy. So this is how these two work together, the town wide capital plan we should use some of our very large fund balance to tackle these one time big capital projects so looking at the Capital Plan I listed immediate needs on bottom of page one. These are just my priority list, Sidewalks, Town Hall Building, Facilities Building, Highway Garage, and Community Center. Because we have such a healthy fund balance we got funds to do these things. So the Capital Plan is a backup to how we might handle the excess we have in each fund after we set our reserve, what do we want to keep.

Mr. Daly added, just to give it context for people, the fund balance we are carrying is a Million Eight.

Ms. LeClair asked if we had community bathrooms on the plan?

Mr. Wilson said I just had Community Center. I see the cemetery expansion is still on there so that can come off.

Mr. Wilson moved to our tentative budget. We do have our real money increase which is \$54,000. It doesn't include Water. The tax cap forces us to make hard decisions about how we are allocating our money.

Our new money is about \$50,000 and then we have some savings from the Health Plan. One of the unexpected things was that NYSR payments increased quite a bit.

We are going to make some changes to the layout of this and one we talked about last year is consolidating the salaries for Buildings and Parks. It is so spread out, it will make 6 lines into 1 or 2. We will take all the facilities and it will consolidate what we are paying.

When it comes to NYSR it comes to about \$38,000 so that uses most of what we are allowed.

One of the assumptions I made, this year for the Health Care account we budgeted 100% of what we could possibly use and at this point we are only at 40% of the bank.

Mr. Bieseymeyer asked Mr. Whitney if he has heard any feedback from any employees on the new Health Insurance.

Mr. Whitney stated no, so far I haven't heard anything, some minor things but nothing major.

Mr. Daly asked where are those line items listed?

Mr. Wilson said under Employee Benefits in each of the funds, then medical insurance.

Mr. Daly asked, is this combination of reimbursement of what we pay and premiums.

Mr. Wilson said yes.

Mr. Biesemeyer asked, I am assuming you are thinking not to fund this 100% this year.

Mr. Wilson said, you read my mind. The number we came up with is 65%, that is what we used for this tentative budget. If you all are comfortable with this we will go with that. Then with salaries I put 5%, last year and we dropped it to 3% , I said this year I was really going to push for 5%.

Mr. Biesemeyer said he stays at 3%

Mr. Willson said let me finish my rationale, given the tight labor market I think we need to be competitive.

Mr. Biesemeyer said most of the people I talk to have been happy with the 3%. Lets see where this falls before we jump to this.

Mr. Wilson said he has put 5% in this tentative budget.

I also changed the Keene Valley Library. I raised it to \$6,365 to \$7,000 because they took over the archives.

Oh and We changed how the Community Enhance Fund , the money that comes from Roost, how we account for that revenue and expenses. We added a line for revenue and then added a line in the General fund under publicity to offset that. So this is how we can track that.

Ms. Palen asked when was the first year with this?

Mr. Wilson responded in 2022.

While we are looking at this, things have changed some , one for the better is with the raise of interest rates we have collected \$63,000 in interest. Weddings have tailed off at Marcy field so reduced the revenue, mortgage tax was on fire during Covid but it really slowed down.

Mr. Biesemeyer asked when are we planning to do Water 2, when do you anticipate this going out to bid and bond?

Mr. Wilson said that is what we are playing around with, with this budget, trying to figure out what we will have for debt. Right now we are waiting for DOH and DEC to review our permits from the well testing.

Mr. Biesmeyer asked if he thought we could get any Grant Money from what you read about.

Mr. Wilson, I have been talking about this the last several months, we don't qualify. We are in the same program we were in before. Drilling this test well is boosting our score so we are hoping to get our WIIA funding. We are just waiting, it is hard to plan. We are laying the groundwork.

Adjourned at 5:08

Town Clerk
Ann Whitney