

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
TOWN BUDGET MEETING #5
Minutes of December 6, 2010**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Gregory Sanders, Selectmen Melvin Adams, Kenneth Goslant, Kenneth Johnson, and Charles Morse. Also present were Town Manager Nanci Allard, Accounting Manager Laurie Baroffio, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Richard Wobby, Chris Bradley, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Sanders called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

At the end of the last budget meeting (11/23/10), the Board asked Manager Allard to identify possible areas for reduction in the proposed budget in order to lessen or eliminate any increase in the property tax ("level fund"). In the interim, Manager Allard and Accounting Manager Baroffio have worked on this and produced a memorandum that provides suggested reductions in the proposed budget. The first item was to use the remaining surplus (\$25,000). The other suggestions are listed below by department.

Selectboard: Manager Allard suggested reducing the "Legal Services" line item by \$4,000 (to \$16,000). Selectman Morse asked what was the reasoning behind this, as this line item has been well over this amount the past couple of years. Manager Allard believes that there will be fewer legal expenses related to personnel issues in the coming year. Also, \$1,620 will be added to the budget to cover the Treasurer's stipend (see below).

Treasurer: Manager Allard recommends eliminating this separate department with the aforementioned stipend moved to the Selectboard account and all other expenses absorbed by other departments. The savings would be \$4,600.

Accounting: Manager Allard stated that \$2,000 would be added to this department to absorb the costs for the eliminated Treasurer and Delinquent Tax Collector (see below) accounts.

Delinquent Tax Collector: Manager Allard asks that the voters be asked again on Town Meeting Day to eliminate this position and have the duties assumed by current staff. The savings would be about \$18,000 (minus some administration costs that would be shifted elsewhere). Selectman Johnson noted that the voters had rejected this request last year; why bring it up again so soon? Selectman Adams felt that this matter had not been explained properly at Town Meeting. He was willing to put this matter on the Town Warning again due to the need to reduce the budget. Selectman Johnson was concerned that the Board would appear to be indifferent to the will of the voters by bringing it up again so soon. Ms. Baroffio stated that there may be some time and cost savings involved as some tasks (i.e. data entry, copying, etc.) would not be duplicated by the Delinquent Tax Collector and the Town Clerk. The Board's consensus was to bring this matter before the voters again.

Listers: Manager Allard suggests that this budget be reduced by \$10,000 because past actual expenditures indicated that level funding was not justified. Selectman Morse asked about costs associated with the anticipated Town-Wide Reappraisal. Selectman Adams stated that the plan was to put voter authorization for the Reappraisal RFP on the Town Meeting Warning; the reappraisal itself probably wouldn't begin for another year. Manager Allard added that the main cost of the appraisal would be for the contracted appraiser (not the Listers). Selectman Adams stated that some funds might need to be shifted to the Listers' budget should the reappraisal begin sooner than expected. Selectman Johnson added that if the Listers put in the work hours for this or other projects, they will be paid. Selectman Adams suggested reducing the "Elected" line item by \$8,080 (instead of \$10,000), so that the remaining amount will be an even \$10,000.

Fire Department: Manager Allard suggests reducing the "Radio Expense" line item by \$1,000 (to \$1,500).

Police: As was discussed at the previous budget meeting, the suggestion is to remove the funding for an additional (sixth) full-time police officer (\$50,000) and add \$10,000 to the "Part-time" line item. Manager Allard feels that if there is room for flexibility in the budget, this position should be reinstated. The Board's consensus was to not fund the position and add the \$10,000 to the "Part-time" account.

Support Services: Manager Allard recommends removing the \$9,000 in the "Personnel Services" account. These are monies set aside when an employee retires early and vacation time and other benefits need to be "cashed out." She does not anticipate this expense in the next fiscal year. Selectman Adams asked if there was a requirement to keep these funds on hand. Manager Allard noted that the practice of allowing employees to bank vacation time has been discontinued.

Brown Public Library: Manager Allard's suggestion is to level fund the Brown Public Library (BPL), which would mean a \$5,000 decrease in the original proposed budget. In addition, the Northfield Historical Society would be asked to increase their contribution by an additional \$1,500 (to \$3,000). Selectman Adams did not know if the Historical Society would be able to raise this amount through its membership fees, donations, etc. Also, he and Selectman Morse were not supportive of the \$5,000 decrease in the library's funding. Selectman Morse did not see where this amount could be cut. Selectman Adams did not want to start a conflict with the BPL's Trustees. He noted that they had petitioned before to have an article on the Town Meeting Warning to restore proposed cuts in their funding and had always been successful. Selectman Morse asked to have discussion of this matter deferred until later. The other Board members agreed.

Selectman Morse then repeated his concern from the previous meeting that the budget did not take increased costs of gasoline, diesel, and heating fuel into sufficient consideration.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP): Manager Allard suggested adding \$5,000 to the "Manager Search" account; reducing to \$7,500 (from \$15,000) the amount in the Fire Department's "Aerial Truck" account; and removing the \$1,000 in the Ambulance's "3 Cots & 2 Chairs" account.

Manager Allard also recommends removing \$18,000 from the "Vault" account since the Village is looking at renovating the Municipal Building; this would include an expansion of the Town Clerk's vault. The Village would probably require a bond vote to fund this project. Selectman Morse noted that the Town pays the Village rent for its use of the Municipal Building. Manager Allard said that this was true; the collected rent then is used solely for building operations, improvements, etc. Selectman Adams asked if it were possible to bundle any weatherization work done at the Municipal Building with similar work at the BPL. Manager Allard stated that it was. Richard Wobby said that he had heard that federal grant money for public building weatherization would be part of the next "stimulus" package. He believed that the work under discussion would qualify. Selectman Morse stated that the Board cannot be sure when or if the Village will renovate the Municipal Building but it is known that the vault needs to be expanded. He favored keeping the \$18,000 in the "Vault" account. Selectman Johnson asked if this suggestion has been discussed with the Town Clerk. Manager Allard replied that it had not. In that case, Selectman Johnson felt that the money should be left as it is until after the Town Clerk has added her input. Manager Allard agreed with this.

The next suggestion was to remove the \$2,700 in the "Repair Backstops/Fence" account (Grounds/Parks/Facilities). Manager Allard noted that the school has taken care of the baseball fields lately so this would be an unnecessary expense. She also asked to have the \$1,500 in the "Playground Equip-Falls" account cut as the Recreation Committee does not have any approved plans to use these monies. Selectman Adams stated that the Recreation Committee had recently purchased playground equipment for the Municipal Park and asked why there were no plans to update the Falls facilities. Selectman Johnson proposed that this account be combined with the general "Design/Update Parks" account. Selectman Morse then suggested moving the \$2,700 in the "Repair Backstops/Fence" account into this new combined account and then eliminating the \$3,000 in new funding that had been designated for the "Playground Equip-Falls" and "Design/Update Parks" accounts. This was acceptable to the Board. It will be researched as to whether a Town Meeting article will be required to combine the two CIP accounts.

Wages: Manager Allard would like to defer discussion of wages until after the meeting with the Town and Village union representatives on December 15, 2010.

Town Highway: Manager Allard's recommendation was to use the \$20,000 in surplus funds; cut the \$7,000 in the "Paving-Town Garage" CIP account; reduce equipment rental by \$2,500; reduce the gravel/stone account by \$15,000; and cut \$5,000 from the roadside trimming account. Even with these cuts, taxes to support the Highway Department would rise by about \$32,000, which would be just over a one cent (1¢) increase on the tax rate.

Selectman Morse asked why the amount in the Mechanic's health, dental, etc. account had doubled. Ms. Baroffio noted that the newly hired mechanic is married; the previous one was not. Selectman Adams was concerned that cutting the gravel/stone account would undermine the progress achieved through the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) program. Selectman Johnson thought that roads that already have been treated through the program would require less material in the near future. Chair Sanders would like \$5,000 removed from the "Sand" account (leaving \$35,000). He felt that there should be some savings in materials with the contracted plowing and sanding of certain roads. After some discussion, the consensus was to approve Chair Sanders' recommendation. Selectman Morse asked about the \$5,000 in the "Ledge Removal" account. Manager Allard stated that small ledge removal projects would be done by the Town crew and a contractor would take care of the larger projects. As there was nearly a \$10,000 balance in this account, Selectman Goslant asked that this \$5,000 be cut. This was the consensus of the Board. Selectman Morse asked about the \$48,000 in the "Falls Drainage Design" CIP account. Manager Allard stated that the study has been complete and the Town now is ready to apply for grants to fund this "shovel ready" project. Selectman Morse asked how much these additional cuts had affected the Highway Department's tax rate increase. Manager Allard stated that it had been reduced to about one cent (1¢).

Brown Public Library: The Board then returned to a discussion of the BPL budget. Selectman Adams stated that he still opposed the proposed \$5,000 cut and would like to hold off on the \$1,500 increase in the Northfield Historical Society contribution until it could be ascertained whether or not the Historical Society could pay for the increased amount. Selectman Goslant suggested negotiating with the BPL Board of Trustees on level funding the library. Selectman Johnson was reluctant to provoke an argument with them over \$5,000. Selectman Goslant stated that he was still concerned about the large energy costs involved in heating the building. Mr. Wobby thought that an article on the Town Warning could be on whether to authorize spending \$26,000 to weatherize the Brown Public Library/Northfield Historical Society Building. This way, the public could vote separately on this expenditure.

Conclusion: Selectman Adams noted that at the previous budget meeting, Mr. Wobby had asked Manager Allard to provide recommendations that would allow for a level-funded budget. With her suggestions in the memorandum and the additional cuts approved tonight, Selectman Adams believes that this request has been met. Mr. Wobby thought that if Manager Allard's "once-over" was able to achieve \$150,000 in reductions, there might be additional cuts possible. Selectman Adams felt that the budget had been "cut to the bone." Manager Allard added that some of her suggestions had been provided to previous Boards but not accepted. Selectman Adams stated that he did not agree with all the proposed cuts but he accepted that sacrifices needed to be made. He added that if there is an attempt to level fund the budget again next year, the rise in material costs alone will require more drastic measures, i.e. cutting programs, personnel, etc. Mr. Wobby felt that some of these measures should be considered in the budget now under consideration.

Next Meeting: The next budget meeting will not be scheduled until after the aforementioned meeting with the union representatives (12/15/10).

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: Non-agenda items. There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Without objection, the Board adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes are subject to approval at the next regular meeting