Budget Committee Meeting

Town of Gorham

Gorham Town Hall

Public Meeting Room

Minutes of JANUARY 30, 2024

Members Present: Adam White, Marie Duguay, Judy LeBlanc, Paul Bousquet, Stephanie Russell, and Dio Thagouras

Absent: Mary White, Greg O’Neil, and Kathy Corrigan

Town Staff Present: Peter Gagnon, Town Manager; Bronson Paradis, Finance Director; Michelle Lutz, Assessing; Christina Zornio, Town Clerk

Minutes Taker: Shelli Fortin

AGENDA ITEMS & DISCUSSION

**1.** Call to order: 6:00 PM by Paul Bousquet

**2.** Review of Minutes of January 24, 2024

**On a motion by Adam White, seconded by Dio Thagouras, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of January 24, 2024, as written.**

**3.** Budget Reviews with Town Manager and Finance Director

Peter Gagnon thanked the Budget Committee, noting that he appreciates their important work. Gagnon reviewed the Executive Office budget, noting that there was no change in the Selectmen line, and that the Selectmen Conference line was reduced by $2,000. The Selectmen Travel/Video line covers the live streaming for meetings.

The Town Manager Permanent Position line is down $7,627, and Health Benefits has gone down $10,305 due to a demographic change. Telephone and Internet has increased, as they are looking to upgrade the system. Dues has decreased, and they have shifted some money to the Travel line to attend some training conferences. Stipends for election officials are up, as there are more elections this year than usual. Overall, the Executive Office budget is down $19,105.

Dio Thagouras asked if the town has a contract for phone and internet service and was advised they do. Thagouras questioned the difference between the town cost and the library, which seemed high. Bronson Paradis advised that the cost is broken down by department by usage. Stephanie Russell asked if they shopped around for competitive pricing, and Peter Gagnon advised that they do. Bronson Paradis advised that the Library is not under the SNS contract for IT support, so some of the additional cost may be for that.

Bronson Paradis reviewed the Finance budget. The Permanent Position line has increased per the contract. The part-time position is budgeted at $1,500, and this is for work as needed for 91A requests. Bank Services has decreased, as there are not as many NSF checks returned. Paradis advised he has dropped the printing line, as they are not ordering as many Town Reports. Peter Gagnon advised they have ordered 350 reports this year. Dues and Subscriptions is also down, and Office Supplies is flat. Postage has increased due to the increase in price, and Conference and Meetings is budgeted at an even $500. Travel has increased some, however they are trying to use the travel car to save on mileage reimbursement. Health Benefits has increased, and this is listed as partial buyout instead of demographic change. Audit Services is a large increase, as they have contracted with Cohos Advisors, who were recommended by the former auditors, and they will be checking to be sure they are doing things correctly. This will include professional development for staff, to be sure they are up-to-speed on the laws. The cost will decrease in coming years for the auditing services. The Finance assistant is budgeted as half Finance and half Highway, and there is also a Payroll/HR position, the HR position is down some due to a change in staffing. Equipment and Machinery is down, as they purchased a new desk last year, and do not need to this year. Software has gone down, and Copy Charges has dropped as they are not doing as much historically.

The Wellness line has remained the same, and they have done some with the Wellness Program this year, getting water bottles and shirts for staff.

Paradis reviewed the General Government Building lines, noting the 3.5% increase for the Custodian. Clock keeper and Electricity is budgeted the same as last year. Paradis advised they are hoping to save on electricity once the solar panels are in place at public works and fire, as extra electricity generated there can be used by the Town Hall. They are budgeting for an increase in heating oil, and the same for propane, until they negotiate a new contract. Water is flat.

Dio Thagouras asked about fuel contracts and was advised that they coordinate with the School. The School negotiates the heating oil contract, and the Town negotiates the electricity rate, and both contracts are shared between both entities. Heating oil is currently at $3.09 for up to 20,000 gallons.

Town Hall Inspections, Supplies, and Maintenance are all flat, along with the Town Vehicle. Deeded Property Expense is down $900 as they do not intend to have any this year.

Adam White asked if the bricks on the Town Hall have been sealed yet, and Judy LeBlanc advised there were other projects that took priority, although it is still on the list to do.

Paradis advised there is no change in the Legal line. Insurance has changed only due to the fact they are now being billed on calendar year, so there is some overlap. There is a slight increase in advertising, and Peter Gagnon advised that although North Country Council has increased, they are a great resource and do a lot to support Gorham.

In reviewing the Welfare budget, Paradis advised they have budgeted the same as last year and expenses have been around $21,000 the last couple years. Paradis advised they do work to connect clients with other organizations such as Trip County CAP. They have tried working on repayment plans, with little success. Paradis noted that payments are made to vendors, not the client.

Paradis advised that the Conservation Commission dues are the same. The Bond Repayment is $204,062. They did have a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN), this year so there is some interest budgeted. Capital Reserve Funds are budgeted at $188,000 less than in 2023, and they have set a floor on some of these funds. Petitioned Warrant Articles are down $10,000.

The total budget is down $739,000; however, this does not include the $900,000 budgeted last year for the road project, and the amount for the solar project.

Paul Bousquet asked if the Selectmen were good with this budget, and Judy LeBlanc advised they are in agreement with what the department heads have presented and the bottom line.

**4.** Budget Committee Work Session

Paul Bousquet asked about the 3.5% salary increase and was advised that this will not be added until after Town Meeting, and will be paid retroactively till January 1. Paul Bousquet noted that it would be fair to also give the salary increase to the Town Clerk, so that all employees are treated the same. Peter Gagnon advised that the Town Clerk is an elected position, so is not considered a town employee, and they are currently discussing how to handle this position in the budget.

Paul Bousquet asked if tax rates would be available for the meeting on Thursday, and Paradis advised he will have an estimated tax rate.

Stephanie Russell asked if they had decided if they were going to pay the Recreation Department assistant from the Revolving Fund. Bronson Paradis advised they may be able to do this moving forward, but it may be too late for this year. The Recreation Department will have some added expenses with the damage to Libby Pool.

**5.** Next Meeting Date

Thursday, February 1, 2024, from 6-8 pm

**6.** Adjournment

**On a motion by Adam White, seconded by Dio Thagouras, the meeting was adjourned at 7:02 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelli Fortin