

Approved 10/10/2018

The meeting was called to order by Chair Mary Anderson at 7:00 pm at the Fremont Town Hall in the first floor meeting room. All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were Budget Committee Members Mary Anderson, Mary Jo Holmes, Brittany Thompson, Jonathan Starr, Joshua Yokela, Joe Miccile, Pat Martel and Gene Cordes; members of the Public Gordon Muench, FCTV Operator Alex Coulombe, and Town Administrator Heidi Carlson.

Members reviewed the minutes from the meeting of 09/26/2018. It was noted that Mary Jo Holmes moved to accept the minutes from the prior week, not Gene Cordes (who was absent). With that amendment, and correction of the date to 09/26 on the top of the page, motion was made by Thompson to approve the minutes of 09/26/2018 as amended. Starr seconded and the vote was approved 7-0-1 with Cordes abstaining.

Members discussed the Reappraisal of Property budget request, discussing back and forth the addition of a Warrant Article to be able to withdraw the \$8000 in an existing Capital Reserve Fund. The Committee worried that “no means no” and if the Warrant Article (which does NOT raise any addition funds, merely withdraws them from the savings account) that it might affect the Town’s overall ability to have assessing services. By NH Statute and the Constitution the Town is obligated to provide assessing services, but we do not want to get stuck in that trap.

Following extensive discussion it was left that Carlson will contact the NH Department of Revenue to see how they want to proceed. It was DRA who indicated the Town could not simply withdraw money against the budget even though the Selectmen are authorized agents of this fund.

At 7:15 pm Road Agent Leon Holmes Jr met with the Committee to review the Highway Department Operating Budget. He reviewed each line item with the following highlights:

Salt – the price is down to \$47 per ton from over \$51. Per ton, so the budget is less for the same amount needed.

Sand - price is the same as last year and budgeted for current usage, considering what is currently on site in storage.

Winter Equipment Hire - spent \$76,000 to date for the early winter months of 2018. The plan is to leave an allowance of 25,000 to get through November and December. Holmes is keeping it the same anticipating two more new roads next year, Jacob’s Cover and Thunder Road, being accepted as Town Roads.

It was noted that we do still have the Expendable Town Trust Fund for Winter Maintenance in its full amount of \$20,000.

Summer Equipment Hire - includes rental equipment for projects. Holmes said he rented an excavator this summer for the projects, and it may include bigger trucks for hauling gravel. The amount is the same for 2019 to include equipment hire for work on Chester Road. That Warrant Article will not include the equipment hire, as Town crews will do the prep work themselves from this operating budget line.

Full-time wages - up to account for a full year of the second full-time person, and includes 2% wage increase for both employees.

Full-time OT - budgeted the same, and is hard to predict due to big storms when it can’t be avoided.

Part-time wages - used for extra part-time help to do flagging, and driving a truck in the summer.

Part-time OT - used for big storms in any week where we can’t avoid OT.

Road Agent Salary – consistent at \$4,500; and covers 10 hours per week of admin time and driveway permits.

Training – allowance for three of the UNH classes for the new employee.

Safety equipment - \$200 to repair/replace as needed.

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Holmes said he was trying to come in as level-funded as possible. He did move some lines around to account for actual usage.

General supplies - \$3,000; noting that it has been overspent in the current budget.

Guardrails – budgeted in 2018 for some work and it could not be completed because of repairs to the backhoe. He is budgeting again to get these replaced.

New Equipment – has been kept open in past years with \$1. He explained that the Town generally uses the Highway Equipment Capital Reserve Fund for equipment purchases. The increase here for 2019 is a new lawn mower for the shed, and to be used for cul-de-sacs that are not kept up by nearby owners. There was discussion about taking this out of the Capital Reserve Fund. Holmes said in 2020 and 2021 he is planning to purchase replacement backhoe and truck and preferred to save the CRF for those large purchases. There was further discussion and he was open to it.

Martel asked about having money left this year and being able make the purchase and all were open to this as a possibility as well.

Communications - up slightly given the actual per month cost. This covers the Road Agent's phone.

Drainage – will include the cost of replacing three of the culverts on Chester Road (9 culverts in total on Chester Road).

Signs and posts – Beede and Red Brook, North Road signage that wasn't budgeted within the Warrant Articles accounts for the overage in 2018.

Cold Patch - down due to Red Brook, Beede and North being repaved, and a lot of patch money went there in prior years. Bean, Chester, and Martin Roads still require a lot of patch work.

Erosion control supplies – drainage work and supplies (straw, rip rap) come from this line.

Backhoe fuel – budgeted \$5,000 to cover actual expenses.

Truck Fuel – expecting to use less than budgeted, and it has been cut back based on actual for both trucks in 2018. The present year was an estimate and was the first time we have had two trucks to fuel.

Other fuel - covers all of the small tools and equipment.

Plow maintenance – Holmes stated the Town owns five front mount plows and four wing plows. This amount covers replacement cutting edges, pistons, and welding when needed.

Backhoe maintenance – as discussed earlier there were unforeseen repairs to the backhoe in 2018. The increase of \$3,000 for 2019 will cover new tires (with life expectancy of three years).

Sander maintenance – our sanders are stainless steel and can be repaired when parts wear, versus purchasing new at an estimated \$12,000 cost per unit. We currently own five, and he plans to rebuild a one next year.

Sweeper – Purchased a new machine in 2016, and generally only have to annual replace the brushes. The new machine was cleaned and put away for the winter, and due to a defective part on the machine, water got inside and ruined the transmission. The dealer said the warranty was up and they are refusing to fix it, even though it has now been redesigned due to this manufacturer's flaw in the original design. The roads never got swept this spring due to the breakdown. The cost for parts to fix it is \$2,850 and that is in the budget so the machine will be operational again.

Other Equipment Maintenance – covers maintenance for the chipper, small gas and diesel powered equipment.

Truck Maintenance – The Town owns and maintains a one ton truck and a six wheel truck. Last year was an estimate because it was the first year of having a second truck.

Cracksealing – the company can do 9,000 linear feet of cracksealing per day. This will cover several days of work.

Hottop and reconstruction \$155,000 – reduced from last year, which was used to complete North Rod.

The sum of \$67,445 will do the wearing course on Red Brook Road and covers some engineering of that work. The \$87,000 balance will be used to do repairs on Scribner, Abbott, Bean, Martin and possibly

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Nathaniel Brown Drive. The cell tower company has posted \$20,000 to do the Nathaniel Brown cul-de-sac over, as well as some other areas where rocks are coming up through the road.

Roadside mowing – Fremont rents a machine for three weeks each year, at a cost of \$9,000 which is up from this year. The machine is \$126,000 to purchase.

Painting Lines – This will cover the yellow lines and stop bars or white fog lines, on the newly paved roads.

Beaver control – a lot of problems with beavers this year. They have to be trapped and removed at a cost of \$175 per beaver.

Yokela said that the only thing the Committee might hold off on would be to purchase the mower this year and not include it in the 2019 budget, or whether it should be taken out of Capital Reserve instead. Holmes Jr agreed that if the Committee felt that the Capital Reserve Fund should be used to purchase the mower, he could do it that way.

Holmes will return to talk about the Warrant Articles after the Selectmen have reviewed it. This will include work on Chester Road, and Capital Reserve additions to the Highway Equipment Fund and the Bridge Fund.

Holmes Jr left the meeting at 8:10 pm. Town Clerk Tax Collector Nicole Cloutier met with the Committee to discuss the Town Clerk Tax Collector Budget (4140). TXC Clerical Assistant Cheryl Bolduc also joined the meeting at this time.

Anderson asked her to review the Town Clerk Tax Collector budget by line item. Cloutier began by saying she wanted to rebut the discussion held about her at last week's meeting that lasted 18 minutes according to the recording she had reviewed. She began a minute by minute review of last week's meeting and took exception to several items raised, wanting to bring facts back to the Committee. She refuted that five times someone stated that there were lines at her counter. She referred the Committee to comparative facts that they all had in their hands in her handout (distributed the week previously).

Cloutier felt she was bashed at the meeting and wanted to offer a rebuttal about the Committee's discussion that she is not working enough hours for her salary. She said she is paying her assistant out of her salary because she had had a hard time with child care.

Cloutier took exception to Anderson approaching her at the window about the number of hours worked and Anderson said she went to Cloutier as a courtesy given that taxpayers approached her after the 2018 Public Budget Hearing about the Town Clerk salary and number of hours worked. Anderson said she was taking the discussion out of context.

Cloutier said she viewed last week's meeting multiple times, and referred often to the Committee's discussion on hours worked. Yokela said he had edited the current spreadsheet to come up with some averages. The data had been made available to all. (Later in the meeting Yokela emailed his spreadsheet to Cloutier's desk).

There was lengthy debate about how many hours she is working per week. Cloutier said several references were made to her making \$98 per hour, and she asked how many times that happened. Yokela read through some of the statistics he had edited into the spreadsheet.

The Committee said they were trying to get the average, and that the discussion was more centered about the job and the time she was putting in to it. Yokela said he got rid of the maternity leave time so the data was not skewed by that.

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Starr said that what he thought the Town wanted was 25 hours per week which had been outlined in previous budget rationales.

Cloutier said she worked in the office once a week during maternity leave. She outlined the current schedule in that Cheryl only works on Tuesdays alone, and works a couple of Thursday afternoon hours; and that they work together on the Wednesday afternoon hours from 3 to 7:30 pm.

Cloutier said she works alone Monday and Friday approximately 9-2 including the bank run, Wednesday 3-7:30 and Thursday 9-2:30. Cloutier said that they never have lines, sometimes people are here 10-15 minutes tops, and that includes getting all of their questions answered and their task completed.

Anderson noted a day (she thought it was right around the day taxes were due) that she had been in the office and waited in line longer than she had at the DMV in Epping. This was debated.

Cloutier said she has paid \$3,300 from her salary to Cheryl to cover extra hours to cover in the past 12 months when she could not get child care.

Anderson said that in the past when the budget was presented, it looked like the Clerk was working 25 hours a week, and that the Committee felt pay of \$26 per hour was acceptable, and that the expectation is that the Clerk was working most of the office open hours.

Anderson stated that according to the Municipal Association the Clerk could work whatever hours she wanted to, as many or as few. It is an elected position.

In response to questions, Yokela quoted the average hours worked by the Town Clerk Tax Collector in each of the following years as 2014 – 26; 2015 – 23; 2016 – 24; 2017 - 20 (w/o maternity leave) and 2018 – 15. This is a decrease, and the average number of hours worked by the Clerical Assistant has increased.

It was noted that the clerical hours in the budget was increased so that there would be more overlap, but there hasn't been much of an increase in overlap, with the Committee estimating five hours per week of overlap.

Cloutier said that this is a temporary circumstance and the Committee is looking to make a permanent solution to a temporary problem. She said every single day they get comments from patrons about how easy it is, how friendly and helpful they are, how they take the time to go over next steps and procedures. She said she has personally driven absentee ballots to elderly residents, answered questions through facebook while at kids games or at home, and said she is at a loss as to how the Town is suffering at her hands.

Anderson said she was repeating what had been brought to her by residents, and again stated that she had been at the Public (Budget) Hearing by someone who wanted to amend the Salary, and had planned to do so at Deliberative Session. Anderson had asked the resident(s) to hold off, and see how the situation worked out over this year, and had told Cloutier about this as a courtesy as she was anticipating it to be brought up again.

Cloutier said she wanted to make sure all of the calculations are being done in a realistic manner, saying it is not her fault that holidays or her vacations fall in any given week, reducing hours worked. Committee members said that what they did was look at the total number of hours worked in a year, and divide it by the salary to come up with the various hourly rates in any given work week.

Starr said the Committee is looking to move forward. He said they are the Budget Committee, no one said anything about not doing a good job or swindling anyone. Miccile added that the Committee is

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trying to look at the numbers and find a way to move forward. There was discussion about the perspective of people not working the hours they were hired for, and that in a regular work force, they could/would be fired for that. Because this is an elected position, that is not the case.

Cloutier said that she feels if the job is getting done it doesn't matter how many hours she works.

Yokela stated the Clerk and Assistant don't make the same amount so that if money is paid out to the Assistant, it would skew the balance of funds paid out. There was continued discussion about the expectation of the hours to be worked based on the submitted rationale, and some inclusion of past history.

The Committee felt that the 25.5 hours per week at \$26 was reasonable, and that was how the salary was originally set. It was noted that there is no contract in place, this is an elected position.

Cloutier shared a 2007 budget request from the Town Clerk's Office which showed the request at the time of \$36,700 in salary budgeted for a 40 hour work week. It is thought open hours at the time were approximately 33-35. Cloutier noted that this was just the Town Clerk (before the combination) and that many tasks now are more refined. Discussion about services such as e-reg ensued. There was also discussion about the open hours of the office over time (historically).

In response to questions she said she absolutely feels that if she can get the job done in less time, that is OK; and that it is acceptable to make the \$35,000 salary and work whatever hours she works. She said she is currently working about 20 hours a week now and it will probably stay like that. The Committee then discussed dividing the salary by 1040 hours to come up with a value.

Cloutier said she said she should not receive less pay because she is efficient. She explained that she wanted more overlap for Cheryl so that she could get more consistency.

The Budget Committee said they are just trying to do their job as well. Moving forward, Cloutier said she plans to keep a schedule of 20 hours per week. There are sometimes more hours during elections and tax collection, and less during her vacation weeks.

The Budget Committee can't enforce that it is her salary, a change has to be done by Warrant Article, and it is up to the people. The Selectmen have to enforce what is the bottom line within any budget line. The Budget Committee felt it was difficult to approve a budget where the Town Clerk is making more per hour than the Chief of Police. The Budget Committee makes a recommendation on the number in each line of the operating budget.

Cloutier said efficiency is one reason why she is working less now. The past year she said is entirely child-care related. At 20 hours per week the wage is \$35 per hour; and Cloutier said she is OK with that.

The Committee reiterated that they want the optics to be that the position is worked 25 hours a week. Cloutier read from Statute noting that Municipal officials are set forth in statute not subject to personnel policies. She noted RSA 41:33 and 41:25 regarding compensation by fees. She also noted that the office took in \$38,000 in fees in 2017, and that the Town is making more than her salary in those fees.

It is noted that past practice in Fremont is that the compensation level for the elected positions is set by the voters. The Budget Committee does not put forth warrant articles, the Selectmen do, or they come by petition of the voters.

**FREMONT BUDGET COMMITTEE**

**03 October 2018**

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There was no further discussion of new material and abruptly at 9:15 pm a motion was made by Yokela and seconded by Holmes to adjourn the meeting. With no further discussion, the vote was approved unanimously.

It is noted for the record that copies of the Mosquito Control Warrant Article backup (\$49,550) and a very rough preliminary draft of the 2019 Town Meeting Warrant were circulated to members.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday October 10, 2018 in the basement meeting room at the Town Hall at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Carlson  
Town Administrator