

Approved 02/01/2020

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

Chair Mary Jo Holmes called the January 15, 2020 Budget Committee Public Hearing to order at 7:02 pm in the basement meeting room at the Fremont Town Hall. All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were Budget Committee Members Mary Jo Holmes, Patricia Martel, Joseph Miccile, Joshua Yokela, Michael Nygren, Stephen Bonaccorsi, School Representative Gordon Muench and Selectman Representative Gene Cordes. Also present were School Officials Allyn Hutton, Susan Penny, Sharon DeVincent and Gregory Fraize; Town Officials and Staff Roger Barham, Heidi Carlson, Jeanne Nygren, Leanne Miner, Eric Abney; Jon Twiss, Richard Butler; Leon Holmes Jr; Michael Rydeen, Nicole Cloutier; and members of the public Martha Abney, Andrew Kohlhofer, Carsten Springer, and SoRock Representatives Charlotte Scott and Kelley Biriette. The meeting was live broadcast by Bill Millios of FCTV, and will be rebroadcast up through voting on March 10 2020.

Holmes read the house rules and information as follows:

Please sign in and pick up budget forms from table in the entry.

Please take note location of exits and bathrooms.

Please stand to speak, and if you have a presentation, please sit at the presentation table to use the microphones.

Please speak clearly so all in the room and watching at home can understand and hear you.

Anyone watching at home can email questions to Heidi at hcarlson@fremont.nh.gov.

School Budget and Warrant Article presentation was done by Superintendent Allyn Hutton and Business Administrator Susan Penny.

Article 1 - Election of School District Officers: one School Board Member for three years, one Moderator for one year, one District Clerk for one year and one Treasurer for one year. For candidate sign up you must be a Fremont resident and a registered voter. You can register to vote with the Town Clerk during regular hours, and with the Supervisor of the Checklist during posted sessions. Sign ups can be done with the Town Clerk for Town or School positions and the School District Clerk for School positions. The signup period is from January 22, 2020 until January 31, 2020. On January 31, 2020 the Town Clerk and School District Clerk will be available from 3:00 to 5:00 pm for signups only at the Fremont Town Hall.

Article 2 - Operating Budget: Shall the Fremont School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amount set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the First Session, for the purposes set forth, therein, totaling \$12,300.015? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$12,166.080, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Fremont School District or by law, or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13. X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. (Majority vote required).

Recommendations: Fremont School Board 5-0; Fremont Budget Committee 8-0.

Miccile asked what the tax decrease would be? The response was \$0.78 on the school side.

Article 3 - Appropriation to ETF from One Time State Grant: Shall the Fremont School District transfer the portion of adequacy aid (also known as the one-time infrastructure grant) to the Maintenance Trust Fund previously established. The estimated amount of \$285,000 will be transferred upon receipt. No amount to be raised from additional taxes. (Majority vote required).

Recommendations: Fremont School Board 5-0; Fremont Budget Committee 8-0.

It was noted that this money will help with School issues such as roof within a couple of years and air

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ventilation system updating. A motion to recommend this Article to transfer \$285,000 to the Maintenance ETF was made by Nygren and seconded by Miccile with unanimous approval of the Committee 8-0.

There was a question of whether there is sufficient money if this is not voted on, in other accounts. Hutton replied yes, the budget is down for various reasons, 12 less high school students going to Sanborn at \$20,000 each along with unanticipated revenue, health insurance and tuition savings, GMI reduction, and eliminating one classroom to bring taxes down.

Kohlhofer inquired if it has to be spent in one year and Hutton said it does not. It will go into the Trust Fund and not the General Fund. He also remarked on the Impact Fees which will be presented to the School Board for action at their next meeting. There is approximately \$100,000 in this account.

Chair Holmes thanked the School for their presentation tonight.

There were representatives from the So Rock Coalition for Healthy Youth present tonight to talk with the Committee and the Selectmen about their previous intention of placing a Citizen's Petition Warrant Article before the voters. Charlotte Scott and Kelley Binette shared important data that their coalition is providing to a total of 8 communities.

Their mission statement outlines a six year history of promoting wellness and nurturing resiliency for the children, youth and families of southern Rockingham County with the goals of preventing substance abuse and reducing the stigma related to mental health issues. In the past they have acquired grants, but they have aged out of these grants and realized late in the town's budgeting cycles, that they needed municipal help. They anticipated getting state or federal funds but didn't get it and they are hoping to go to the towns they service to get funds through a Warrant Article or operating budgets. Time constraints didn't make this happen and she only got 16 signatures in Fremont. She is hoping that some type of recommendation by the Budget Committee or Selectmen can make this a Warrant Article or place into the operating budget as a vender service. They are requesting \$1.00 per citizen in Fremont for a total of \$4,750. They are currently in contact with Fremont School and Fremont Police Department in assisting with the two Drug Take Back events annually. The communities their coalition helps are Danville, Fremont, Hampstead, Kingston, Newton, Plaistow and Sandown, NH. School Principal Sharon DeVincent and Muench support this coalition as they are familiar with the many great things they do. They mentioned all stages of life services, including grandparents raising grandchildren due to the drug addiction problems. They encompass all age groups with this assistance provided. They were thanked for their dedication for their efforts and left the meeting but left data and information regarding their program.

At 7:35 pm Carlson and Selectman Barham began the Town Budget and Warrant Article Presentation.

Article 1: To choose by ballot all necessary Town Officers for the ensuing year as follows:

Budget Committee: 2 for 3 years

Budget Committee: 2 for 1 year

Cemetery Trustee: 1 for 3 years

Library Trustee: 1 for 3 years

Moderator: 1 for 2 years

Selectmen: 1 for 3 years

Supervisor of the Checklist: 1 for 6 years

Town Clerk/Tax Collector: 1 for 3 years

Trustee of the Trust Funds: 1 for 3 years

Again, the filing period for Town and School District Offices begins on Wednesday, January 22, 2020 and runs through Friday, January 31, 2020. You can sign up during any Town Clerk Office hours. On Friday, January 31, 2020 the Town Clerk and School District Clerk will be available from 3:00 to 5:00 pm for sign-ups only at the Fremont Town Hall.

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It was the consensus of the Committee to forgo review of the Zoning Articles 2 through 6.

Holmes read each Town Warrant Article as presented for discussion:

ARTICLE 7: Shall the Town of Fremont raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$3,395,997? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$3,279,161 which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Town of Fremont or by law or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.

Note: This operating budget warrant article does not include appropriations contained in ANY other warrant articles. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 8-0. Estimated tax impact \$0.30).

Carlson asked if there were any questions and she outlined the overall changes for the increase of approximately \$226,000 from last year. The highlights included: PD bodycams, approval of FRD Warrant Article last year for night and weekend coverage, 2% wage increase for Town staff, 3% increase in the trash contract as well as increase in tipping fees, contracted rates for oil and propane increase. Department heads are present tonight to entertain any questions if necessary.

ARTICLE 8: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of forty-two thousand nine hundred ninety-seven dollars (\$42,997) to hire a new full-time police officer. This sum covers five months of wages and benefits and necessary gear, equipment and required testing for the officer. If approved, this funding will remain as part of the operating and default budget in future years. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 5-3. Estimated tax impact \$0.10).

Police Chief Jon Twiss provided the rationale for this article to cover the 5-month period. A spreadsheet showing data from 12 nearby communities outlining their crime statistics and number of officer coverage shows Fremont in one of the highest areas for multiple crime situations with less trained personnel. He understands this is an impact on taxes, but as a Police Chief his responsibility is the safety of all residents as well as his officers which is down to a bare minimum and with another full time officer he will be able to provide more coverage for residents. Many times, the Police are the first on a scene to give assistance in a medical emergency.

Nicole Cloutier asked why this isn't in the operating budget and Chair Holmes felt it wasn't up to the Budget Committee to decide and that the voters should make this decision. She also feels that safety is important for the residents of the Town. Bonaccorsi also shared this safety concern.

Yokela said in past years this hasn't been recommended for several reasons needing to spend money in other places that are more pressing.

ARTICLE 9: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate four thousand dollars (\$4,000) to be placed in the Fremont Computer Equipment Expendable Trust Fund. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-1. Estimated tax impact \$0.01).

Carlson said this was established in 2019 to help offset not having to spend \$25,000 in one year to replace all computer and servers at Town Hall

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ARTICLE 10: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) to be placed in the Library Building Maintenance Expendable Town Trust Fund. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 8-0. Estimated tax impact \$0.01).

Librarian Abney stated the library is 17 years old with 5 furnaces, 5 air conditioning units. The life span is approximately 25 years, and this is a savings account for when services or replacement may be necessary.

ARTICLE 11: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) to be placed in the Fire Truck Capital Reserve Fund. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-1. Estimated tax impact \$0.12).

Kohlhofer asked where the Department is relative to vehicle replacement. Chief Butler reported the Department is ten years behind and to replace the tanker his estimate is \$250,000 to \$300,000. This account is a savings plan to place funds away for replacement. It will take about 2 years between ordering vehicle and shipping of vehicle. There is now \$155,000 in the fund.

ARTICLE 12: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) to be placed in the Highway Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-1. Estimated tax impact \$0.06).

Road Agent Leon Holmes Jr said this is set to mainly replace highway equipment. He plans to replace the one-ton as it is 10 years old.

ARTICLE 13: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred thirty-four thousand five hundred twenty-eight dollars (\$134,528) to grind, reclaim and pave Chester Road from the end of work in 2019 to the Chester Town Line (3,270 feet) and do associated shoulder work. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-0-1. Estimated ax impact \$0.32).

Holmes said he hopes to finish the Chester Road binder coat this year to complete the road.

ARTICLE 14: To see if the Town will vote to establish an expendable trust fund under the provisions of RSA 31:19-a, to be known as the Fremont Emergency Weather Expendable Town Trust Fund for clean-up and repairs as needed after natural disaster / weather emergencies (flood, wind, rain) and to raise and appropriate twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) to be placed in this fund and further to name the Board of Selectmen as Agents to Expend with consult from the Emergency Management Director and Road Agent. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 5-2-1. Estimated tax impact \$0.06).

Holmes said this is a new fund. Last year Fremont had a microburst come through on Chester Road where he had to hire log trucks, bucket trucks, chippers to clean up with funds out of the Highway operating budget as there is no provision for this type of unexpected occurrences. The total was over \$15,700 for clean-up. This has put him over his operating budget and requests funds be set aside when these events occur.

ARTICLE 15: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to be placed in the Bridge Construction and Reconstruction Capital Reserve Fund. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 6-1-1. Estimated tax impact \$0.24).

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Carlson reports that as of July 1, 2020 the Town becomes eligible for our share of Martin Road Bridge Aid. The first step is to have the engineering done to finalize pricing. This money appropriation will add to this account which has \$76,000 left after the 2019 reconstruction of the Sandown Bridge Road Overflow. Carlson is trying to monitor timing to balance the tax impact with the funding. The estimate several years ago for this project was half a million to complete. The Town has to hit benchmarks before being eligible for reimbursement from NH Bridge Aid, and the Town will work to time the work and the reimbursements as to minimize the tax impact.

ARTICLE 16: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of forty-nine thousand five hundred fifty dollars (\$49,550) to continue the Public Health Mosquito Control Program. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-1. Estimated tax impact \$0.12).

This has received funding for the past couple of years. It includes primarily wetland monitoring and larval treatment, with potential for end of season spraying of school properties and the ballfields (late August or September if positive WNV or EEE tests start showing up in the area).

ARTICLE 17: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) to be placed in the Historic Museum Renovation Capital Reserve Fund. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee does not recommend 4-4. Estimated tax impact \$0.04).

Town Historian Matthew Thomas asked to have this Article included so people can decide. He is trying to create addition to the existing building to accommodate the hearse and hand tub he has been storing in other locations in town.

ARTICLE 18: Shall the Town of Fremont modify the Veteran's Tax Credit in accordance with NH RSA 72:28, II from its current tax credit of \$500 per year to \$750?

Since NH Law changed in 2019, the Town has been approached by several veterans to have this amount increased. The new maximum credit is \$750. The Selectmen reviewed this and want to place this on the Warrant for voters to make this decision. We currently have 221 eligible veterans receiving this credit. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 6-1-0. Estimated tax impact \$0.13).

ARTICLE 19: Shall the Town of Fremont modify the Disabled Veteran's Tax Credit in accordance with NH RSA 72:35 from its current tax credit of \$2,000 per year to \$4,000? (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 6-1-0. Estimated tax impact \$0.03).

This appropriation is like Article 18 but is for Disabled Veteran's Tax Credit. This will increase the Disabled Veteran Tax Credit from \$2,000 to \$4,000.

ARTICLE 20: Shall the Town modify the provisions of NH RSA 72:39-a for elderly exemption from property tax in the Town of Fremont based on assessed value, for qualified taxpayers, to be as follows: for a person 65 years of age up to 74 years \$70,000; for a person 75 years of age up to 80 years \$90,000; for a person 80 years of age or older \$110,000. To qualify, the person must have been a New Hampshire resident for at least 3 consecutive years, own the real estate individually or jointly, or if the real estate is owned by such person's spouse, they must have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years. In addition, the taxpayer must have a net income in each applicable age group of not more than \$25,000 or, if married, a combined net income of less than \$35,000; and own net assets not in excess of \$45,000 excluding the value of the person's residence. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-1).

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Carlson explained that this article would increase the exemption amount to account for increases in valuation anticipated with the April 1, 2020 revaluation process.

ARTICLE 21: Shall the Town modify the provisions of NH RSA 72:37-b, Exemption for the Disabled from property tax, based on assessed value for qualified taxpayers, to be \$60,000? To qualify, the person must have been a New Hampshire resident for at least 5 years, own the real estate individually or jointly, or if the real estate is owned by such person's spouse, they must have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years. In addition, the taxpayer must have a net income of not more than \$25,000 or, if married, a combined income of less than \$35,000; and own net assets not in excess of \$45,000 excluding the value of the person's residence. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee recommends 7-1-0).

This Article would increase the exemption amount to account for increases in valuation anticipated with the April 1, 2020 revaluation.

ARTICLE 22: To see if the Town will authorize an increase in the Town Clerk Tax Collector's annual salary by seven hundred fourteen dollars (\$714) to be a total of thirty-six thousand four hundred fourteen dollars (\$36,414); and further to raise and appropriate the sum of seven hundred fourteen dollars (\$714) for this purpose. (Selectmen recommend 3-0; Budget Committee does not recommend 5-3. Estimated tax impact less than \$0.01).

The Selectmen request this Article to go on the ballot for voter's decision as this position is an elected official. The current salary is \$35,700 and a 2% raise is requested. Chair Holmes stated elected positions should only be changed by the voters.

This concluded the review of all the Warrant Articles for this Public Hearing and Holmes asked if there were any other questions or comments. Kohlhofer shared his view that this is not a spending problem, but it is a revenue problem. He feels development of areas designated in Fremont have potential for development and how to promote these areas was his concern. He shared the possibility of looking into getting a business broker to maybe help in some of the short falls. Miccile partially agrees, stating our tax rate at \$31.05 is one of the highest rates, and we really don't have a spending problem. Cordes said that all Departments have been looking at all opportunities for relief but Police Department staffing, repairs to our roads, and Fire/EMS coverage for safety, all come into focus. Carlson added that though a more diverse tax base looks desirable, there are significant commerce issues which have arisen causing adverse effects in many residential areas.

Carlson added that the Warrant is still being reviewed by the NH DRA and wording subject to change based on that review, as well as the Selectmen's review of input from Town Counsel at their meeting tomorrow night. The Warrant becomes final when the Selectmen sign and post it. No new money items can be added to it after tonight's hearing.

Cordes asked the Budget Committee for their interest in pursuing the new appropriation for the Citizen's Petition by the SoRock Coalition that was discussed earlier. This started a lengthy discussion with varying ideas on how to pursue this vendor request. It was definitely confirmed that this is a valuable asset for not only the children and residents of Fremont, but due to the untimely submission which does not meet all the past requirements the Town has required of vendors previously (timely fashion, non-compliance of required signatures and presentation to Selectmen and Budget Committee) it was decided this is difficult to pursue not only as part of the operating budget under 4445 vendors, but also as a Warrant Article for voters for this year's election in March. This coalition will continue their work for the community and is eligible for consideration next year with required documentation.

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A motion was made by Nygren and seconded by Bonaccorsi to have the Board of Selectmen place the \$4,750 into line 4445 Social Service Agencies of the operating budget. The vote was 4 in favor and 4 nays. The vote did not pass.

A motion to approve the minutes of the November 20, 2019 meeting with one amendment was made by Cordes and seconded by Martel. The vote was unanimous 8-0. A motion to approve the minutes of the January 8, 2020 meeting as amended was made by Cordes and seconded by Nygren with unanimous approval 8-0.

Holmes asked for any Budget Committee input to the Annual Town Report. Nothing was stated, and Holmes will send her draft around for review by the rest of the Committee.

Carlson said she would reach out to the Committee once DRA had finalized the budget in the website portal. The goal is to have this done by next Friday.

The next meeting will be the Deliberative Sessions on Saturday February 1, 2020 at Ellis School. The Committee will post a meeting for 8:30 am in case there are any last-minute changes to review. This will be at Ellis School.

For Committee members and the public's reference, the following information is posted relative to candidate declaration, voter registration and Deliberative Sessions: In response to widespread community interest, we are holding the Town and School Deliberative Sessions on the SAME DAY, Saturday February 1, 2020. The meetings will be posted for 9:00 am and we will begin with the School District session. Once complete, there will be a brief intermission while the Town Moderator and Selectmen set up, and the Town's meeting will then begin.

At 9:47 pm Yokela moved to adjourn this meeting. This was seconded by Nygren and the vote was unanimous 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Nygren
Selectmen's Administrative Assistant