

Fremont Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Approved 11/18/2020

11 November 2020

Present: Committee Members Mary Jo Holmes, Chair; Josh Yokela, Michael Nygren, Jon Benson, Steve Bonaccorsi (arrived at 6:48 pm), Pat Martel, Selectmen's Representative Gene Cordes, School Board Representative Gordon Muench, Town Administrator Heidi Carlson, Recording Secretary Shawn Perreault, FCTV's Greg Fraize was in the control room.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Holmes at 6:35 pm in the basement meeting room of the Fremont Town Hall. The Pledge was recited.

Chair Holmes opened the meeting by thanking all the Veterans and wishing them a Happy Veteran's Day.

Motion made by Holmes to approve the November 4, 2020 minutes as amended, seconded by Cordes. Motion passed 6 Yes – 0 No – 1 Abstain (Muench).

4140 Town Clerk Tax Collector: Chair Holmes stated that last week the Committee did not vote on this budget because the Selectmen had not seen it. Cordes and Carlson went over a change that was made. Due to the 2% wage increase being calculated wrong, the Clerical wage line decreased by about \$300. The Salary for the Town Clerk/Tax Collector is the current rate because the 2% raise is presented in a Warrant Article. Martel asked if the Deputy Clerk was a stipend, Carlson stated it is an hourly position. Holmes asked Carlson if they would use all the money in the Salary line, Carlson stated yes. Holmes wondered how the department could justify the additional 3 hours a week in the Clerical waged that it was requesting as they are not for added public hours. She also asked if the public appointment hours are being fully booked. Cordes remembers the Town Clerk stating that just because those would not be public hours does not mean they are not needed. There are a lot of things falling behind that still need to be done and these additional hours would help with that. Holmes asked Carlson to remove the word Stipend from the rational under the Deputy Clerk, to make it clear this is an hourly position. Holmes stated this budget has increased about \$7,200.

Nygren asked Carlson if postage would really spend that much? Carlson feels that it can be lowered by the \$180 because she had considered that in the Election budget. Otherwise, the postage line is currently overspent. Carlson feels that some election postage was probably spent out of the Town Clerk postage this year, and that the most recent purchase will last into 2021. Holmes stated next year is only a Town election, so they will not have as many absentee ballots. The postage went up because they must mail things back to residents that are done online, ie: car registrations and dog licenses. Carlson feels next year will look very similar to this year. Muench does not want to lower the postage line too much and shortchange it. Cordes went over a few of the lines that were increased to help the Committee see where and why the budget has increased as much as it has.

Bonaccorsi made a motion to recommend \$72,551 for Department 4140, seconded by Cordes. Motion tied 4 Yes – 4 No (Holmes, Martel, Nygren, Yokela) – 0 Abstain.

Martel suggested reducing the postage by \$3,000 and making it \$7,000, this would make the new overall budget \$69,551. Martel made a motion to reduce postage by \$3,000 for Department 4140, seconded by Holmes. Motion tied 4 Yes – 4 No (Muench, Bonaccorsi, Benson, Cordes) – 0 Abstain

Muench asked if we knew what was spent on election postage. Carlson stated that is a different budget. This year was different due to the huge elections. Muench noted the line has already been spent close to the \$10,000 budgeted for next year, and this year is not over. If we lower the number, we will shortchange mailings. Carlson did recently buy envelopes that will last until the end of the year and into next. So, the \$9,068 should be fine for the remainder of the year. Carlson feels only a small amount more might spent in stamps. Martel asked what the difference was between the Mortgagee and the Recording fees. Carlson stated the mortgagee line is for the research that is done by a contracted

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company. Carlson stated the Collector did have someone do the work this year and they have retired and the Town has not received an invoice. Holmes stated there really are not that many other options to cut the budget. Benson suggested dropping postage by \$1,000.

Bonaccorsi made a motion to recommend reducing the postage line by \$900 seconded by Benson. Motion passed 8 Yes – 0 No – 0 Abstain.

Bonaccorsi made a motion to recommend \$71,651 for Department 4140, seconded Benson. Motion passed 6 Yes – 2 No (Yokela, Nygren) – 0 Abstain.

4155 Personnel Administration: Carlson circulated information regarding the Town's costs, which are up primarily due to NH Retirement. Nygren asked if medical insurance increased, and it has approximately 6%. Carlson stated we have two staff members out on short-term disability currently, and she budgeted to hire someone who make take more than the single plan (one employee will be out a year). We have no idea what a new hire would take for insurance.

Yokela asked if the Selectmen talked about people that did not work through Covid. Cordes stated they did not, they need the data first. Carlson has done the calculations for current. There are a couple of employees eligible for the stipend that did not work as many hours as they normally would have, but she did plan for that. This effects the longevity stipend.

Carlson stated the biggest change is the increase in New Hampshire Retirement System employer rates. Fremont only has Group II staff. Holmes asked if the two employees that are out have been removed from the budget. Carlson stated no because we must hire their replacements. There is one additional police officer who has indicated he will resign as of year end (will stay on part-time); but that plan must also be covered for a replacement hire. Holmes stated there is not really anything we can do as this is someone's choice.

Bonaccorsi made a motion to recommend \$403,968 for Department 4155, seconded by Cordes. Motion passed 7 Yes – 1 No (Yokela) – 0 Abstain.

4196 Insurance: Carlson stated the insurance has increased for property liability. Due to Covid, our carrier Primex did not do CAP agreements to lock in rates. Some of the building values have changed from the company's own assessments as well as the Town's revaluation. The Town doesn't have any major claims but there is one lawsuit in process that involves a property liability claim. Settlement options are currently being worked through. The Town carries a \$1,000 deductible line in this budget. This would cover one claim. The insurance covers all government buildings, staffing, Public Officials Bonds, and another line item for police liability. It does not cover bridges. Part of the premium is based on vehicles, wages, etc.

Motion made by Muench to recommend \$67,110 for Department 4196, seconded by Cordes. Motion passed 8 Yes – 0 No – 0 Abstain.

4215 Ambulance Service: This coverage is out of Raymond NH and the contract was just updated. Motion made by Yokela to recommend \$11,500 for Department 4215, seconded by Cordes. Motion passed 8 Yes – 0 No – 0 Abstain.

Carlson stated that she did supply a new overview and believes all the budgets have been seen and voted on by the Budget Committee. She is still calculating the last couple of default budgets, recalculating the tax information based on the new tax rate and estimating Veteran's credit to formulate a new tax rate impact sheet.

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Carlson stated Selectmen are speaking with Departments about using leftover appropriations to try to reduce requests for next year's budgets and contracting for items. Carlson feels there will be some funds that will be left over to pay for items to offset the Warrant Articles, as well. This helps with the overall budget planning.

Draft of 2021 Warrant: (Article numbers are subject to change.)

Article 1 – listing of open Town positions. – Carlson still needs to double check with the Town Clerk to make sure all needed positions are listed.

Article 2 – Zoning Amendment (place holder)

Article 3 – Zoning Amendment (place holder)

Article 4 – This will be the Town 2021 Operating Budget – the final numbers have not been calculated.

Carlson stated that the due date for petition Warrant Articles is January 12, 2021. Generally if a new agency, such as So Rock, seeks a Warrant Article the Selectmen will put it on the Warrant so long as the services benefit the Town. The Public Hearing is scheduled for January 13, 2021. Carlson stated she heard someone may be submitting a petition Warrant Article for a Recreation Director position.

Article 5 – \$50,000 for the Fire Truck Capital Reserve Fund: Muench made a motion to recommend the Warrant Article for the Fire Truck CRF. Benson seconded and the motion passed 8 Yes – 0 No – 0 Abstain.

Article 6 – \$25,00 for the Highway Equipment Capital Reserve Fund: Holmes asked if the Highway Department would have enough left to purchase the new plow. Carlson explained that Selectmen have voted to take the funds from the Operating Budget for 2020 and only hit the Capital Reserve Fund if there is an issue at year end with an over-expenditure in the total Town Budget. This was not originally planned as part of the current year budget.

Bonaccorsi made a motion to recommend \$25,000 for the Highway Equipment CRF, seconded by Benson. Motion passed 7 Yes – 0 No – 1 Abstain (Holmes).

Article 7 – \$50,000 for the Bridge Capital Reserve Fund: Carlson stated nothing has been done with bridges this year because there is not enough money in the Capital Reserve Fund to complete the next step in the Bridge Aid process. Martel stated there is currently \$76,730 in this fund. She asked if the Town got any Bridge Aid from the State. Carlson stated because we didn't have the match funding, we couldn't access it. Holmes asked, if the \$50,00 is added to the current account balance, will that be enough to be able to move on the bridges? Carlson feels yes if it is added she feels we could take the next step.

Motion made by Muench to recommend \$50,000 for the Bridge CRF, seconded by Bonaccorsi. Motion passed 8 Yes – 0 No – 0 Abstain.

Article 8 – \$45,402 for a new Full-Time Police Officer: Cordes stated that this pays for five (5) months of salary, benefits and all the gear required. If this passes it will then be added to the police yearly budget.

Motion made by Cordes to recommend \$45,402 for a new Full-Time Police Officer, seconded by Bonaccorsi. The vote was 4 Yes – 3 No (Yokela, Nygren, Martel) – 1 Abstain (Holmes). Given this

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vote, Committee members asked Carlson to clarify if this is a positive or negative recommendation (IE: how the abstention is “counted.”)

Article 9 – \$4,000 for Computer Equipment Expendable Trust Fund: deferred until the Board of Selectmen decides on funding from Unassigned Fund Balance (UFB).

Article 10 – Use \$15,000 from Unassigned Fund Balance for the Library Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund: The goal is to place this with Warrant Article #11 to have enough saved to replace the HVAC system. Nygren asked if there were any other projects for next year. Carlson will check but did not think so. The Selectmen want to use two Warrant Articles because if this part fails they couldn’t use any unassigned money for this. Final action deferred.

Article 11 – Raise \$10,000 for the Library Maintenance Expendable Town Trust Fund: final action deferred.

Article 12 – \$40,000 for a Mosquito Control Program: Motion made by Bonaccorsi to recommend \$40,000 for a Mosquito Control Program, seconded by Muench. Motion passed 6 Yes – 1 No (Holmes) – 1 Abstain (Benson).

Article 13 – \$4,750 for So. Rock: final action deferred.

Article 14 – \$729 for the Town Clerk Tax Collector’s 2% raise: Cordes stated he’s not sure this is required, however, due to this position being an elected position, they have always placed it as a Warrant Article.

Motion made by Bonaccorsi to recommend \$729 for the Town Clerk Tax Collector’s salary increase, seconded by Cordes. Motion passed 5 Yes – 3 No (Holmes, Yokela, Nygren) – 0 Abstain.

Article xx – Funding Engineering Study: Cordes explained the purpose and that this may be considered for inclusion by the Board. It would be for a 10 year Highway planning tool. Final action was deferred.

Article 20 – Amend the Elderly Exemption value to correct a clerical error. Carlson explained that it is unclear at this point whether the adjustments made in 2020 are enough to keep our lowest income residents at a level pace given the revaluation assessments. Carlson also explained a clerical error in the 2020 vote that will have to be corrected on stating the criteria (income and assets).

Article 21 – Amend Disabled exemption considering pending 2020 revaluation. Same issue as above, but only related to the amount of the exemption and whether it will keep the disabled residents at the same tax burden level.

Discussion was held on 2% wage increases over the different departments. Martel came up with \$20,000 for the 2% increase, but her number includes Carlson’s salary, increases in hours and clerical wage lines (not accounting for changed positions). It does not include the Police Department matrix employees. Yokela would like the final breakdown of the FICA/Medicare, which Carlson states is 7.65% of the total wage increase. Carlson indicated that just the 2% alone was approximately \$12,000.

Holmes stated next week the Committee will be reviewing the School District budget. Muench stated books will be ready tomorrow and plans were made as to how they would be distributed to Committee members. The Committee changed the Nov 18th meeting start time to 7:00 pm. The following meeting dates were added: December 2, 9, and 16, 2020 all at 7:00 pm.

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At 7:58 pm a motion was made by Cordes to adjourn, seconded by Yokela. The vote was unanimously approved.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 7:00 pm in the Town Hall First Floor Meeting Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Perreault
Recording Secretary