

Lyndeborough Budget Committee

Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2023

Citizens' Hall

Chairman Karen Grybko called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Members present: Chairman Karen Grybko, Arnie Byam, Walter Holland, John Pomer, Geoff Allen, Fran Bujak, Kevin Boette, Walter Holland, and Selectmen's Rep. Bob Howe

Members not present: Alyssa Lavoie

Present: Town Administrator Russ Boland, Finance Officer/HR Paul Hebert, Police Chief Rance Deware, Lisa Post, and Charlie Post.

4210 Police Budget

Chief Deware reviewed the Police Department Budget with the Budget Committee.

The total proposed budget is \$301,097, up 6.67%.

See the budget worksheet for details of the police department budget heard tonight

Other Business

Mark chamberlain, who is currently attending the Recycling Center budget meeting in Wilton, reported their budget was set at \$960,118.

The Board discussed the school budget. Fran Bujak said the State Education Portion is 40%. T/A Boland said the town should be at 33% if we look at the local, state and town, and looking at the overall tax rate, including county, we are 33%. Fran Bujak said we (town) kept taxes down due to using the unexpected fund balance. This was discussed.

T/A Boland said on average, the town tax rate has gone up 1.3% per year in the last nine-years. Some years the tax rate has have not gone up but some years it has been higher. The tax rate has been steady last two-years. When the school tax rate goes up, the town tries to take our taxes down. He added that unexpended fund balance comes from being frugal.

Fran Bujak said that if we took the school budget and applied the \$644,000, that they did not spend last year to that budget, it would not be showing an increase at all. He felt that every time they expend money, it evaporates. The town and no one ever counts it. Last year the town went up 8% but by using the unexpended fund balance, it went up 4%. Discussion continued.

Goeff Allen said that both school budgets were \$1,380,900. *(verify figure)*

The Committee had a lengthy discussion regarding the increase in town employee's salaries, and benefits which in total equals about a 20% increase for full-time employees. Some members felt that is a significant increase and suggest adding those increase in stages. The

proposals include a 2% COLA, 4% step increase, 100% health insurance, and an additional 2% in New Hampshire State retirement fund.

Kevin Boette said he is uncomfortable with the proposed wage and benefit changes this year. He has a concern about answering questions to his neighbors and the public when they ask why town employees received a 20% increase and they got about a 3% increase and the cost of food, gas, homes, etc. have increased dramatically.

The office did a factual comparison to neighboring towns in relation to pay and benefits and are not asking for more than their competitors. It was acknowledged that Lyndeborough does have excellent employees. John Pomer felt this is the cost to have employees and this is what we need to spend on our people.

The Board discussed their concerns about this proposal. Some members felt it was the health insurance increase and not the raises that they had the most concern with. Chair Grybko suggested compromising on the health insurance. We are at 80% now for employer contribution. Many neighboring towns are offering 100% health insurance. Discussion cont.

Arnie Byam asked for data for the next meeting. Paul Hebert will provide a few different scenarios to see what it will cost at different levels. It will be sent out prior to the next meeting.

T/A Boland said, "The Town has lost candidates to other communities, mostly due to health insurances but we have not lost employees to other communities. This is about fairness. We have great employees. I know of four of our seven full-time employees were attempted to be "poached" by communities coming after them. Some are paying more and that is factual." It was noted that a few years ago they might have had 20 applications for a heavy equipment operator position, now there are very few applications, if any, to fill positions.

Rance Deware said the health insurance only impacts full-time employees. Geoff Allen did a scenario on an employee with a \$50,000 salary then added in the benefits that included the family health insurance package and it could be a \$10,000 increase.

Fran Bujak noted that next year the school district will be negotiating a teacher's contract for about 60 employees. The school district lost a lot of older employees and is having a problem retaining employees. New employees are coming in. Their insurance is at 85%.

The cost of the health insurance plans has increased by 5.6% this year for the same coverage.

Geoff Allen said its worthy of your opinions and collaborating as a Budget Committee to decide the best way to be fiscally responsible and be fair to our employees. To come up with a realist plan, maybe not shoot for everything year but it tells our employees, we are thinking of them, and we think we can do this then have a plan.

Fran Bujak suggested to consider increasing the COLA to 3%. Most employees are on step 10. The Committee was challenged to find that money in the budget. It was noted that the total increase on this insurance would be \$40,000 which is not huge but it's symbolic.

T/A Boland said that \$103,000 will come out of surplus and \$45,000 will be raised from taxation.

Doing nice things for employees, such as hosting a lunch, was discussed.

The Board would like T/A Boland's opinion on if the COLA/Step program is a better way to go first and delay the insurance contribution increase. The COLA would impact more employees.

Fran Bujak questioned the money spent on regional planning – NRPC. Some members felt that could be cut as well as library's extra hours. Chair Grybko mentioned how important the NRPC Circuit Rider has been in relation to the Planning Board and ZBA cases. This was discussed.

The Warrant Articles would increase the budget by 6%.

Fran Bujak mentioned that the school budget is at 13.8% now they are talking about adding \$300,000 to replace the boilers. The district office does not run a CIP (Capital Improvement Plan).

It was noted that all employees who participate in the 401K, are matching their 6%.

A member complimented the Highway Department's new Facebook page and said the information is very helpful and they are pleased with what the Highway Department is doing.

Next Meeting:

The Board will meet again on **Monday, January 23, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. (postponed)**

Updated on 1-24-23: The January 23, 2023 meeting was postponed due to a snowstorm until Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. at Citizens' Hall.

Adjournment:

VOTE: Fran Bujak made a motion, John Pomer seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathleen Humphreys – signed electronically

Kathleen Humphreys
Minute Taker