

Lyndeborough Budget Committee

Public Hearing

January 30, 2023

Citizens' Hall

Chairwoman Karen Grybko called the hearing to order at 6:32 p.m.

Members present: Chairperson Karen Grybko (KG), Vice-Chairperson Kevin Boette (KB), Walter Holland (WH), John Pomer (JP), Alyssa Lavoie (AL), Geoff Allen (GA), Fran Bujak (FB), Selectmen's Rep. Bob Howe (BH)

Members not present: Arnie Byam and Stan Greene

Present: Town Administrator Russ Boland and members of the public

Karen began the hearing by introducing the members of the committee and Russ Boland. Karen asked Russ to provide a budget overview.

Russ stated that the operating budget would be up 3.9% (\$2,501,691) if the committee approves the latest proposal for employee wages and benefits that could not be voted on last week. If all warrant articles were passed, they would total \$139,750. The Selectmen have voted to offset that amount with \$103,500 from the Town's unexpended fund balance. Last year the Selectmen offset all warrant articles with unexpended funds.

Russ stated that we used an extremely conservative approach to estimating revenues because of the problems that would be caused if revenues were to be lower than estimated. Russ provided some examples including the State funding from the Rooms & Meals tax which was estimated this year at \$125,000 and we received \$150,000. Russ also stated that revenue from building permits is higher than estimated. Revenues will be reviewed in August 2023 and the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) will then use our data to set next year's tax rate in October 2023.

Karen explained that the committee's work on the budget is not complete because of the inclement weather last Monday that cancelled the scheduled meeting and the inability of the committee to have a quorum on Tuesday.

Russ provided the committee and public with updated employee wage and benefit options and their impact on the budget.

Kevin Boette stated that he supported the 2% COLA and 4% merit pay increases and an increasing the employer share of employee health benefits to 85% from 80% today. Kevin expressed concerns about the proposed increase in NRPC contracted services to

correct years of incorrectly filed documents and with a possible economic slow down from a possible recession. Kevin also recommended freezing the Building Inspection budget at 2022 levels for the same reasons.

Karen asked Town Building Inspector Leo Trudeau if permitting was slowing?

Leo stated that in the first two (2) pay periods of 2023 he has worked 28 hours compared to the 16 hours budgeted because of the workload. Leo stated that there were 14 permits issued in January, usually a very slow month. In 2022, there were 195 building permits issued.

Dawn Griska, Administrative Assistant for Lyndeborough stated that building permits are significantly higher than in the past.

Charlie Post, Planning Board member, responded to Kevin's concern regarding additional NRPC contracting. The Town's administrative staff does not have the time to address the filing problems and does not always have the expertise needed to assist residents with correctly completing building permit applications.

Geoff questioned if anyone outside of the NRPC could assist.

Russ stated that he believed the expertise is needed at this time and could also be used to train Town employee(s). Russ also stated that since this is a contract hours position, the Town would not be obligated to use all the hours budgeted if not necessary.

Karen stated freezing the Building Inspector line is not necessary because all spending is offset by fees from the permitting process.

Fran expressed a concern that the \$60 per hour contractor rate is significantly higher than comparable administrative salaries.

Geoff stated that the Town's Master Plan has not been updated in 20 years.

Charlie Post stated that the Planning Board has started looking at updating the plan. There is no money in this budget to do any work on the Master Plan because the Planning Board is looking into getting a grant for this work.

Alyssa stated that to this point the Master Plan has not negatively impacted any permit requests.

Dawn Griska stated that for at least a six (6) year period, none of the permitting documents were properly filed.

Burton Reynolds, resident, agreed that the increase in NRPC services should be approved and that this has needed to be upgraded for a number of years. The inability

to have the necessary documentation and be efficient can cost the Town much more in litigation later on.

Richard Herfurth, resident, agreed with the increase in NRPC services.

John asked Russ if there were multiple levels of medical benefits available to town employees through the provider.

Russ stated that the company offers multiple plans but the town only has a single plan available to employees. Russ stated that it is not a high deductible plan.

Mark Chamberlain, Selectman, stated the previous Planning Boards haven't kept up with the job requirements and the additional NRPC services are necessary.

Alyssa stated that this was the second year in a row that wage increases at the library have been a concern. Last year one of the reasons was that the employees were put on the Town's pay scale. Alyssa expressed a concern that the salary line keeps increasing. Alyssa stated that from 2019 to the proposed 2023 budget, salaries for the town full-time and part-time employees are up 26%, the Highway department is up 52% and the library is up 92%.

Russ stated that the library employees were assigned to the lower end of the Town wage scale when they were added last year.

Fran stated that the budget shows an increase of two (2) hours per week for the Librarian, eight (2) hours per week for the Assistant Librarian and two (4) hours per week for one of the clerical positions. Two (2) hours of the increase were explained as being recommended for safety concerns by the police chief and Russ in order to have two (2) employees working during evening hours. No data was provided to justify the request to expand services from 10 am – 2 pm to 10 am – 4 pm.

The 2023 warrant articles were discussed. Karen stated that if all were approved the total amount would be \$139,750. The Selectman have voted to offset \$103,500 of this amount with the Town's unexpended fund balance. Last year the Selectman funded all warrant articles out of unexpended funds.

Russ briefly explained each of the warrant articles.

Bob Newton, resident, asked if the town receives any revenue if we vote to approve Keno?

Charlie Post stated that the money goes to the State and is used to fund education. We only get money from the education grant provided by the State. Having Keno in Lyndeborough doesn't mean our grant would increase.

Bob Newton, resident provided the committee feedback on tonight's Public Hearing and offered to assist in preparing a presentation for the Town Meeting if the committee was interested.

The hearing ended at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Francis Bujak