

## **TOWN WARRANT NARRATIVE**

**OVERVIEW:** The Selectmen, Budget Advisory Committee, and Department Heads worked hard to be responsive to public needs while planning for inflated costs impacting municipal programs and significant future capital projects; our overall budget reflects a 2% increase due to this trend and personnel-based costs. Due to conservative budget estimates this past year, programs and services were not impacted by the significant increase in costs for supplies and goods across all budgets. Increases in energy costs alone create an unprecedented challenge. With the addition of several one-time grants and other anticipated revenues, the Selectmen and Budget Advisory Committee intend to offset future capital projects/purchases in a way that lessens impact on the budget. We are keenly aware of purchase and project planning as it relates to cash flow. The recent adoption of a semi-annual tax billing cycle will reduce strain to our cash flow and the town's reliance on debt to fund town services. We are very grateful for the support of the Quimby Trustees and their ongoing generosity to the town. As always, the Selectmen and Town employees strive to provide exceptional services in a fiscally responsible manner.

The following is a brief overview of each Article listed in the Town Warrant.

**ARTICLES 1 & 2:** Articles 1 and 2 in the Town Warrant will be decided by ballot on Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> at Town Hall. Voting hours are 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. All other Articles contained in the Warrant will be considered at the Deliberative Session on Saturday, March 18, 2023, at the Sandwich Elementary School at 10:00 A.M.

**ARTICLE 3:** General article notifying of any changes to Town Officer wages. We appreciate the work of our town officers!

**ARTICLE 4:** The General Government section decreased slightly by just under 2% in part due to reduced legal fees, one election in the 2023 cycle (as opposed to three) and slightly reduced personnel costs. Increased costs include implementation of a new website that will enhance communication and access to information, a priority of the Selectmen. The Town Building budget reflects a reduction in contractor fees, offset by heating oil prices that have increased by 50%. Our legal retainer has slightly reduced based upon actual usage of legal consulting hours in 2022. Our audit expenses have increased as we have an additional audit associated with the scale of federal grants we've been fortunate to obtain. Debt service covers the Town's bond payments for which we have two: Town Hall Building Renovation (bond ends in 2027) and the Young Mountain Road and Schoolhouse Road Bridge Projects (bond ends in 2032). We refinanced these debts in 2021 resulting in a significant interest rate decrease and continue to appreciate the resulting cost savings that benefit the town.

**ARTICLE 5:** The Police Department's operating budget increased by 11.2% from 2022 primarily due to increased personnel expenses and increases in fuel prices for heating oil and gasoline. 3% of this increase is entirely offset by police detail reimbursements and is a result of an accounting change due to the elimination of our police revolving fund. We plan to utilize an outside instructor to continue the LEAD program taught at Sandwich Central School which will be funded by the Robert Ramirez Trust.

**ARTICLE 6:** The Highway Grader was scheduled and reviewed for replacement last year. With added maintenance, we were able to postpone purchase for a year. As a 25-year-old piece of equipment that is relied upon for year-round operations (grading and winter snow removal) we feel this is an essential purchase. The 1998 grader will be traded in to offset the purchase, as will a one-time highway block grant from the State of New Hampshire last year that is specifically designated for expenses associated with road maintenance. We have a grader readily available pending Town Meeting approval.

**ARTICLE 7:** The Town's contract with Stewart's Ambulance last year had been slightly reduced due to a formula error that benefited Sandwich. 2023 prices will increase according to our contract. Contract prices are formulated based upon valuation and call usage as a percentage of total calls between Moultonborough, Center Harbor, and Sandwich. In addition to regular ambulance service, this inter-municipal agreement provides for 24/7 paramedic coverage out of Moultonborough. This contract does not cover an individual's costs for ambulance services.

**ARTICLE 8:** The Fire Department's operating budget is up by 5.5% from 2022 due primarily to personnel costs. We are fortunate to have added new members to our active departmental roster. Gasoline and heating costs have also largely increased. Included within this budget are the costs for the special detail at the Sandwich Fair (\$5,275), which are offset in full by the Sandwich Fair Association.

**ARTICLE 9:** The Highway Department operating budget is increased by 1.1% from 2022. We are fully staffed with one new employee. Increased expenses include personnel/benefits, gasoline and heating oil and communications as a result of the transition to a reliable and much faster internet system. We are currently exploring alternative vehicle fuel vendors to ensure the most competitive pricing which will benefit all departments.

**ARTICLE 10:** The Selectmen decided to invest \$120,000 this year into the maintenance of our roads, an increase of \$25,000. In 2022, paving plans were shifted due to the large increase in projected expenses with planned road paving. 2023 plans include repair and paving of Grove Street (initially proposed for 2022), Church Street, Quimby Field Road and the beginning of Heard Road (town-owned portion). Fees are partially determined based upon proximity of paving projects, therefore the Road Agent takes location into consideration when planning. The Trustees of Trust Funds have given preliminary approval to partially offset these expenditures (in accordance with fund purpose specifications) utilizing two trust funds totaling \$20,000. In addition, the Selectmen propose use of \$100,000 in Federal ARPA funds that have already been secured by the town.

**ARTICLE 11:** This Article is to raise and appropriate funds for the fifth (of seven) year's lease payment for the two dump trucks acquired in 2019.

**ARTICLE 12:** The Transfer Station operating budget reflects a 6.7% increase due to personnel costs and a contracted increase with Waste Management for trash removal.

**ARTICLES 13 & 14:** These Articles are by petition from the Sewer Commissioners and cover their operating expenses and Capital Reserve deposit. These monies are derived from sewer user fees and have no impact on the tax rate.

**ARTICLE 15:** This expenditure includes the Parks and Recreation Department, Old Home Week, 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Memorial Day celebrations. Fireworks costs for 4<sup>th</sup> of July have increased greatly. Personnel costs, sanitation facilities and supply costs have also increased within the Parks & Recreation budget. The Town is very grateful to the Quimby Trustees for their continued support of these programs and the Parks and Recreation Department. Partially reduced by the conclusion of SandwichLot (independent programs), this budget reflects a negligible increase less than 1%.

**ARTICLE 16:** There are two components to the Groundskeeping expenditure: General Groundskeeping (around Town buildings and other Town properties) and Roadside Snow Removal to provide downtown parking along Main and Maple Streets. These are contracted services.

**ARTICLE 17:** This article is for ongoing aerating and maintenance of the Quimby Field. The Quimby Trustees have generously offered to continue funding this maintenance.

**ARTICLE 18:** This appropriation is used to support the Conservation Commission, assist with the funding of Five Days of Sandwich (a three-week summer program for children ages 7-14), and contribute to the Green Mountain Conservation Group (GMCG) toward their annual river testing. The Coolidge Conservation Trust assists the Town in funding these endeavors, as do camper fees and general taxation.

**ARTICLE 19:** The Selectmen propose funding \$103,242 of the Library's operating budget; this mirrors the 2022 Town appropriation. The balance of the Library budget is derived from income from the Wentworth Trust and private donations.

**ARTICLE 20:** The Town's Forest Fund will pay for expenses related to the maintenance and improvement of the Town's Meadow Brook property; specifically, mowing a small section of existing fields and encouraging/introducing pollinator plants.

**ARTICLE 21:** The Selectmen continue to prioritize funding of the Town's Capital Reserves and Expendable Trusts to save for future projects or purchases. Most significantly, the Selectmen chose to prioritize two particular projects: the anticipated expense of a future replacement or renovation of the Police Building and replacement of a fire engine. The Selectmen are prioritizing saving for these projects to reduce volatility of future tax rates. The Selectmen are actively pursuing grant funds to offset these future expenditures.

**ARTICLE 22:** A coalition of performing arts representatives that frequently utilize the upstairs of Town Hall have spearheaded a project to replace electrical, lighting and rigging systems at Town Hall. These antiquated systems could be a perceived liability to the town. The Quimby Fund Trustees have generously agreed to offset this expense.

**ARTICLE 23:** The Town was approached by the Miles Pond Road Association in 2021 seeking adoption of the private road as a Class V Town road. The Association completed several projects in 2021/2022 at the request of the Road Agent and Selectmen as a condition of consideration for a Selectmen's warrant article; the Selectmen sought to ensure the road meets town standards. The Selectmen recommend passage of this article.

**ARTICLE 24:** The Selectmen are in the final year of a GIS implementation project. We anticipate rollout of the system in late 2023. A GIS system is a computer system that analyzes and displays geographically referenced information. A GIS system will enhance the accuracy of our files while also giving taxpayers online access to a wealth of information currently in Selectmen's paper files. In addition to previously funding the first two years of this project, the Quimby Trustees have generously offered to offset the entirety of this year's final payment.

**ARTICLE 25 & 26:** Veterans (having served more than 90 days) that have resided in New Hampshire for at least one year are currently eligible for a \$750 property tax credit. Per recent updates to state legislation, this article proposes expansion of credit eligibility to include active service members.

**ARTICLE 27:** The Marjorie Thompson Trust may be used to assist children of Sandwich with the costs of their education or other needs. This is an annual article.

**ARTICLES 28 - 36:** These petitioned articles require the signatures of at least twenty-five registered voters in Sandwich to be placed on the Warrant. Brief descriptions are as follows:

**Community Food Center:** The Community Food Center is a food pantry that serves the towns of Sandwich and Tamworth.

**Tri-County Community Action Program:** Community program which provides necessary services to Sandwich residents if they are financially distressed. Services include fuel and electric bill assistance, emergency shelter, and support of several food pantries.

**Doris L. Benz Community Center:** Our local community center that provides a gathering space for private parties, club meetings, social groups, Town government, charitable organizations, exercise, musical groups and more.

**Moultonborough-Sandwich Senior Meals:** The Sandwich Senior Meals program (Meals on Wheels) is run under Ossipee Concerned Citizens and provides home-delivered meals to area residents as well as hot meals served at the Benz Center and Moultonborough Lions Club.

**Starting Point:** A non-profit organization serving victims of domestic and sexual assault in Carroll County. Services include a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, court and hospital advocacy, and support groups and education. All services are provided at no charge.

**Granite VNA & Hospice:** Visiting Nurse and Hospice organization, which provides home health care.

**InterLakes Community Caregivers:** An organization which provides rides to medical facilities, grocery stores, and personal appointments to Sandwich residents at no charge to assist them in remaining independent and in their own homes.

**Sandwich Children’s Center:** Since 1985, Sandwich Children’s Center has provided a high-quality, affordable, early-learning experience for the children of Sandwich and surrounding communities.

**Court Approved Special Advocates (CASA):** A non-profit organization that recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers to serve as advocates for children throughout the state who have experienced abused or neglect. CASA volunteer advocates get to know a child and the important people in that child’s life to provide vital information to help a judge make decisions based on the best interests of the child.



**The Halloween Parade Pauses for a Photo at Town Hall**

*~ Photo credit: Dick Knox ~*