

**South Berwick Town Council  
Public Hearing  
2023/2024 Budget**

**April 11, 2023**

Chair Mallory Cook opened the hearing at 6:30pm. Councilors present included Jessica Cyr, Jeffrey Minihan, and Melissa Costella. Town Manager Tim Pellerin and Assistant Town Manager Jennifer Janelle were also in attendance. John James was not present.

The purpose of the hearing was to receive public comment on the proposed budget for FY 2024.

Mrs. Cook apologized to the public; we are having difficulties with the OWL setup. The public was able to participate through Zoom on the Clerk's laptop, however they were not able to view the people present in the room.

Mrs. Cook explained that the proposed budget has been available on our website and hard copies are available at the Town Hall.

-Paul Steinhauer, Hill Dr, expressed his concerns with a recent article posted on social media by Zelda Kenney. Mrs. Janelle explained that she had spoken with Mrs. Kenney because much of the information in the article was wrong. The article was 'pulled' and redone. Mr. Steinhauer asked the Council for a summary of the budget and the process used.

The budget as proposed is \$9,256,455, which is an increase of about \$960,000 over last year. The budget includes an anticipated increase in revenue of \$340,000, the use of \$850,000 from the undesignated fund, and an increase of \$622,000 from taxes. Mrs. Cook went on to say that a lot of thought was put into the budget. The staff was tasked with finding cuts that made sense. A substantial portion of the budget includes an 8.7% increase in wages. [Our Policy dictates the % of COLA increases]. Mrs. Cook stated that the Council chose to include the COLA increase to show support for the staff. If we want to retain valued staff and attract new hires, especially for the Police, we must keep competitive.

It was also explained that by amending the Punkintown TIF and implementing the new Transit Oriented, TIF funds will be available for certain projects reducing the burden on the tax base.

Tamre Steinhauer, Hill Dr, asked where the increased revenue was coming from. It was explained that we will be using \$150,000 more from the undesignated fund over last year's \$700,000, State revenue sharing is up about \$100,000, increased auto excise tax, \$24,000 from the DOT for Routes 4 & 236, and an increase in our interest income.

Manager Pellerin explained that the Town hasn't done any real long-term planning. We are now beginning to invest in our future. We are also dealing with a lot of increased expenses that we have no control over such as the ambulance service increase from \$111,000 to \$295,000, the Town Hall boilers have not been properly maintained and are at a point that once they are turned off, they won't be able to be turned back on. To replace just the boilers will cost about \$50,000-\$60,000. Additional increases beyond our control include health care costs, utilities, and fuel. Mr. Pellerin stated that we can make lots of cuts, but problems will still be here next year. More cuts will mean loss of services.

-Tamre Steinhauer, Hill Dr, asked the Council to be conscious of the fact that not everyone gets raises. We have to balance growth with what we can handle. Mrs. Steinhauer also asked the Council to consider changing over to single stream for our trash collection.

-Paul Steinhauer, Hill Dr. asked if there are opportunities to share resources with other communities. Mr. Pellerin stated that staff are looking at all options.

-Cliff Cleary, Spillane's Hill, stated that we need to make it easier for businesses. Economic development began in the early 1990's, but the ball got dropped.

-Mrs. Costella thanked Mr. Steinhauer for his questions. She added that as a rookie councilor, the budget process has given her a whole different perspective on the process.

Mrs. Cook closed the hearing at 7:05pm.

Attest:

Barbara Bennett, CCM