

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday February 1, 2023 – 4:00 PM – Via Zoom

PRESENT: Bob Gniadek, Chair Finance Cte.; Bob Youdelman, Finance Cte.; Pat Callahan, Finance Cte.; Eileen Martin, Finance Cte.; Steve Patterson, Finance Cte.; Roger Manzolini, Chair Board of Selectmen; Alan Hanson, Selectman; Neal Pilson, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator

Bob G. called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Distribution of Materials and Budget Overview: Danielle explained how the materials were arranged in the Budget Binders that had been distributed. She noted that the Ambulance Service was not included and that she will be speaking with Austin and schedule a meeting to provide handouts. The school has not responded to Danielle's request to begin the budgeting process earlier than usual. Therefore, she put a 4-1/2% placeholder in the budget. That increase would result in a 6.8% increase in taxes.

The Governor' Draft of Chapter 70 monies is usually available at this time, but is not ready yet. Danielle included an anticipated amount from the State, but believes it is too high to be realistic. The State budget will not be finalized before July, so the numbers that will be presented at the Town Meeting will necessarily be guesses.

Roger asked to make a process comment concerning the color coding of some areas and their meanings – some changes were made.

Assessor Contract – Shows an increase of \$5,700, but Danielle is awaiting receipt of the new contract to finalize that number.

Vacation Buyout Option – A total of \$12,600 if all employees were to take advantage of that option, but that has never happened.

Longevity Bonuses – Total \$11,000, which is a real number.

Treasurer/Collector Salary – has decreased by \$6,000 with the hiring of a new Treasurer/Collector. That \$6,000 has been shifted to another line.

In the past, Richmond has never separately budgeted for the software we use. Those funds were taken out of the Treasurer/Collector Expenses and other accounts. Danielle has created a new Budget line for Software with the combined amount of \$24,000.

A new line was added under Treasurer/Collector Expenses for Tax Title Expenses, which had also not previously been separately budgeted. It is currently at a deficit of \$6,000, which will have to be transferred from surplus accounts to avoid hitting Free Cash or the need to Raise & Appropriate.

Jodi has requested \$5,000 for attorney fees in her budget and the Tax Collector Assistant line of \$14,000 has been eliminated.

Town Hall line now includes excess funds dropped from the Library budget: they reduced their electric and heating costs in anticipation of moving to the new building. Those costs and the \$8,000 for rent for the library building were moved into the Town Hall line. There was a discussion of the anticipated costs of heat and power for the new building. Pat will try to get some actual numbers. Currently, the school spends \$100,000 on power. The new building will be tighter and smaller and should, therefore, require less money for power. Pat will try to get a projection.

Town Hall Maintenance Expenses – Currently, staff salaries cost \$7,500. A new, full-time position will be created to be shared between the Highway Department and the Town Hall, all of which will be seen in Pete Beckwith's budget for the Highway Dept.

Elections and Voter Registration has increased by \$4,000, which is based on the number of elections coming up next year.

Salaries increased by 3%, which is the usual amount. If reduced further, it would save taxes by only \$2000.

I.T. Services reflects last year's cost, which is \$24,000. Danielle explained how she arrived at that number and will provide a spreadsheet for clarity.

Town Facilities and Maintenance – Covers the cost of Braman (pest control), well testing at the landfill, and septic pumping costs (which will not be required in the new building).

Fire Department – An increase of \$2,500 for new helmets, hose-testing and fuel.

Fire House Restoration – to be discussed with Chief Traver (left open)

Constable Salary – This item has not been paid in three years. They are only paid when they attend elections and those funds come out of the Elections line. Constables are no longer able to do anything according to new State Laws, except monitor elections.

Constable Expenses – Uniforms, etc.

Rubbish Disposal – This is a year-to-year non-negotiable contract with Casella.

Fire Chief Salary – West Stockbridge pays Chief Traver separately from Richmond.

Tree Warden – Danielle would like to put out to bid Prevention, Maintenance and Emergency Services for tree removal. It would be in the best interests of the Town to get lower rates and more work done. The current Tree Warden does not provide a report on which trees have been removed or the location of dead/dying trees needing removal. Neal suggested including an Article on the Town Meeting Warrant to raise \$50,000 (+/-) for an aggressive dead/diseased tree-removal program.

Animal Control – The Animal Control Officer deals only with domestic animal issues. He is supposed to provide periodic reports to the State and the State keeps asking Richmond for one.

Highway – Machine Maintenance. The Committee will review the whole budget with Pete.

Library – Kristen Smith, Librarian, will meet with the BAC to discuss her budget.

Health Insurance for the Town – Danielle noted that she is still looking for a plan change that would decrease expenses. Bob G. noted that \$81,000 has already been spent out of the \$129,000 budgeted for the year. He was concerned that the Town might go over budget in that line. Danielle explained why that is unlikely.

Cemetery Superintendent – Has requested a higher salary to compensate him for winter burials and green burials. The funeral homes work with Atwood to complete all burials. The Superintendent will be asked to meet with the BAC.

Ramp Monitor – has decreased by 50%. This line was shown as having gone over budget due to a technical error that is being corrected. Danielle is expecting \$6,000 from the State.

Roger requested that the disposition of the current Town Hall become a line item in the Town Meeting Warrant.

Dates of future Budget Advisory Committee Meetings: Every Wednesday in March – try to hold meetings in person but will do hybrids when needed. Anticipated meeting dates at 3:00 PM.

Library/Cemetery – 2/22

School – 3/1

Highway – 3/8

Ambulance – 3/15

The Board of Selectmen will meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 6:00 PM as usual.

There being no further business before the Committee, Roger moved that the meeting be adjourned at 5:32. He was seconded by Pat and the motion was carried by unanimous vote.

Signed:

Bob Gniadek, Chair Finance Cte.