

Town of Sherman
Board of Selectman Budget Workshop
March 8, 2021 at 7pm
Via ZOOM Teleconferencing

Member's Present: First Selectman Don Lowe, Selectman Bob Ostrosky, and Selectman Kevin Keenan

Member's Absent: None

Audience & Invited: Treasurer Eric Holub, Business Manager Liz LaVia, and residents from the community

Clerk: Margaret Beatty

The meeting began promptly at 7 pm followed by the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

The meeting opened with Selectman Bob Ostrosky reminding listeners the procedural protocol and to remain on mute and that he would also monitor the chat for any questions or comments.

Treasurer Eric Holub began the meeting discussing the Town's Revenue. He surmised the estimated revenue for the year which he added projects next year's budget. He noted that the pandemic created an unusual budgetary circumstance driving up non taxed revenue associated with real estate paired with record low interest rates. He commented the most significant change in the budget has come from the issuing of permits in Town along with clerk fees due to real estate transactions and recording fees. He noted that the Town will fall short on the budgeted pre-k tuition. One large hit to the Town's income comes from capital interest income and that's due to historically low interest rates. He projects the Mill Rate will stay relatively flat for the next budget. His calculations were based on the budgets of the previous 5 years. Mr. Holub noted that the Town has a healthy Capital Nonrecurring balance and General Fund balance but discussion is needed to balance the Mill Rate and possible capital projects. He addressed the need to discuss the revenue associated with the Happy Acres cell tower and use for repairs and compensation to the farm manager, as well as, the school's pre-K tuition and possibility of adopting universal pre-K.

Note: First Selectman Don Lowe suggested following up with legal counsel whether David Jellen, the farm manager at Happy Acres, can be payed out of the trust fund or from cell tower revenue. First Selectman Don Lowe and Business Manager Liz LaVia will create an itemized spreadsheet of costs at the farm and bring to the workshop meeting scheduled for Wednesday March 10th at 7pm.

In past budget discussion, the idea of providing Town paid universal pre-K was considered but the Selectman agreed that providing a need based alternative was more appropriate. First Selectman Don Lowe will contact the Social Services Director to create a proposal reflecting the needs of the community.

Discussion of the General Fund of the Town of Sherman:

Selectman: 3% salary increase for selectman salary that will be in effect July 1st-Dec31st, then Selectman Bob Ostrosky proposed a higher salary increase of 7% taking effect January 1st post-election in the year 2022 for whomever is in that position at that time. Increase of 3% salary for the Business Administrator and an increase in hours due to historical need.

Treasurer: no changes

Tax Collector: 3% increase in wages and a minor increase for recertification training.

Town Clerk: Wage increases and rest of budget stays flat.

Assessor: 3% wage increases and the rest of the budget stays flat.

BOAA: Flat, no changes

Building Department: Business Manager Liz LaVia noted that the wage line is running high due to increase in building permits. A 3% wage increase for assistant.

Planning & Zoning: Land Use 3 % wage increase with a minor adjustment for continuing education. The Land Use officer is looking for a \$1000 increase in mileage stipend, subject to discussion. P&Z asking for \$6000 increase for fees to the state due to the volume of permits.

Comment: Selectman Bob Ostrosky does not support increase in mileage stipend for Land Use officer, he needs more information. **Note:** First Selectman Don Lowe and Business Manager Liz La Via will review the numbers averaging the mileage associated with the Land Use officer. The stipend will currently remain at \$2000. Selectman Bob Ostrosky will further discuss only if justification is provided by LUEO.

ZBA: no changes

Inland/Wetlands: 3% salary increase

Counsel and Court Costs: Each line projected at \$10,000 for General Counsel, Land Use, and Ongoing Litigate with no change from prior year. **Note:** First Selectman Don Lowe commented that the Town is going to be required to provide an affordable housing plan but WestCOG will be providing a blanket plan for all Towns within the counsel of governance. WestCOG would take on the expense. First Selectman Don Lowe will confirm with WestCOG the plan potentially alleviating expenses associated with Counsel and Court. Discussion between Selectman, Treasurer, and Business Manager about decreasing the line. All parties agree to decrease the line items from \$10,000 to \$6000.

Registrars: A \$300 increase for supplies, the cost of canvassing and servicing of machines. A 3% increase in salary and \$400 for training of new registrars.

Municipal Memberships: Lines are flat for WestCOG, Cost, and CCM. (\$35 surcharge removed from last year) The Town will keep all memberships.

Consultants: Housatonic Valley Association, Northwest Conservation District, and POCD Regulation Review will remain a flat budget. Engineering Consultants will remain flat but subject to change with pending bridge inspections.

General Government Expenses: Budget remains flat for supply and postage lines, but as a side note, under legal notices the funds have not been used consistently. After discussion amongst ranking members the budget for legal notices will be decreased to the amount to \$1400 from \$2800.

IT: The only increase in IT budget is to cover the cost of adding Ransomware protection at \$9250. Another form of insurance will be added for protection along with the Ransomware but the Town is still waiting on those insurance figures.

Facilities: Reduction in heating oil due to having locked in our oil price last year. The phone line expense has increased because of a shared phone agreement with the school. Building maintenance budget will stay as is but subject to discussion.

Public Safety: The paramedic intercept line increased by \$6400 based on population and experience. The 911 Service Contract, also based on population, slightly increased by \$617. The State Trooper line increased by \$9600 because of a step increase. Fire Marshal wages budget increased due to increased scope of work and hours.

Emergency Services: An increase in maintenance due to the past hard water issues for repairs to appliances. ESF Contracted Services slightly increased due to scope of work and description of position, will be discussed further at the next scheduled workshop to formalize the position. SVFD is at a flat operating budget but an increase is note in the insurance for the new Tanker and miscellaneous insurance adjustments at \$2900.

Candlewood Lake: The water testing budget stays flat, CLA is asking for a \$40,000 for their Capital Plan, broken down into \$30,000 for a new boat and \$10,000 for lake safety. The CLA is also asking for an increase of \$13,611 over last year for operating expenses. Discussion ensued on the proper protocol for funding for the CLA expenses. **Note:** First Selectman Don Lowe will reach out to the neighboring lake community Towns and gauge their willingness to fund the CLA expenses. Will be discussed further at next workshop.

Economic Development: After discussion, budget reduced to \$500 and can be revisited in future.

Animal Control: A reduction of \$6929 due to senior officer retiring equating in a reduction of salary.

Collections/Recycling: An increase in budget of \$3971 because more residents participating in Hazardous Waste Day collections.

Public Works: 3% salary increase, reduction in oil/gas prices, increase in overtime due to raises, and increase for part time help to cover comp. time hours. The rest of budget remains flat.

Health Department: 3% salary increases, change Health Director's mileage from reimbursement to a stipend at \$110 per month for 12 months.

Social Services: Social Services Director wage decreased due to service contract, 6% salary increase for assistant clerk wages (will be discussed further at next workshop meeting). The rest of the budget stays flat.

Debt Servicing: The Town is paying more on debt principle for the next fiscal year, driving the line item up by \$70K with a reduction of \$10,285 to debt interest.

Insurance/Employee Benefit: Pension plan is fully funded so no changes are noted, Worker's Comp budget flat, the Public Works Union contract increased their employer contribution to the 457 plan from 3% to 5%. Once salaries are finalized a more robust conversation will be had in regards to benefits and contributions. The topic will be revisited during Wednesday March 10th workshop.

Land Acquisition Fund: \$120 for clerical work, that might be needed for meetings to close out that committee.

Library: 0% increase, flat budget

Park & Rec: A requested part time maintenance position will not be pursued, the concert series sum will remain flat at \$2000, and 3% wage increases. The Red Cross training budget line will be decreased and funded at \$500. The winterization/maintenance of the pavilion will be increased from \$500 to \$1000 and the Pumping/Refuse will also be increased from \$4000 to \$5000. More discussion on part time help will be revisited at next workshop.

Parades and Town-wide Events: Budget set at \$2550 to cover all potential Town celebrations.

Probate Services: A \$86 increase for overall budget to cover incidentals.

Senior Center: A noted increase in the activities line, the trip line was reduced due to Covid, and 3% salary increases.

Historic District: No change, flat at \$300

Cemeteries: No change, flat at \$100

Trees: A \$200 increase for the tree warden stipend

Miscellaneous: No change, budgeted at \$4000

Conservation Commission: No changes, flat at \$1900

Housing Commission: Reduce budget and fund commission at \$400

As of the discussions and changes made this evening, the General Fund amounts to \$5,038,413 with several items up for discussion scheduled for Wednesday March 10th at 7 pm.

The Capital Plan, BOE, and several open items up for discussion at the next workshop.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 pm.

Motioned by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

Seconded by: Selectman Kevin Keenan **All in Favor:** Unanimous

Notes respectfully submitted by March 15, 2021 by Margaret Beatty.