

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
BUDGET MEETING #3
Minutes of December 13, 2016

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Nathan Freeman, Matthew Gadbois, and Kenneth W. Goslant. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Arlington Supplee (Chair, Board of Listers), Chris Bradley (Board of Listers), and Eileen Supplee.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

- II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. **BUDGET WORK SESSION**

Listers Expenditures. Chair Maxwell asked that Arlington Supplee, the Chair of the Board of Listers, come forward regarding his department's FY 2017/2018 budget request that would be a 68.8% increase over the previous fiscal year. Mr. Supplee stated the bulk of the budget increase was to increase compensation for the elected Listers (Mr. Supplee, Francis Bell, and Chris Bradley) and for the contracted technical assistant (Charlene Lathrop). He noted that Lister pay has been set at \$12 per hour since 2003 and he felt that an increase to \$14 per hour was warranted. In addition, with the increased budget, the Listers will be able to request compensation for all the hours that they work. Mr. Supplee himself has not charged the municipality for some of the site inspections he has done on the way to and from work. He plans to leave the Board of Listers when his term expires in March 2018 and doubts that whoever replaces him will feel as charitable. Also, that person will need to have some training and these additional work hours are reflected in the requested budget increase.

Chair Maxwell asked how Lister compensation in Northfield compares to that in other Vermont communities of similar size. Mr. Supplee said that Lister compensation is a popular topic on the social media site he visits and he has learned that Northfield's compensation is on the low end of the scale. Some of the wealthier Vermont communities pay their Listers more than \$20 per hour but Mr. Supplee feels his \$14 per hour request would be more appropriate for Northfield at this time. He added that the next edition of VLCT's annual statewide salary and benefits report will be available next month should the Select Board members want to review the matter.

Selectman Gadbois noted Mr. Supplee included correcting lawyer mistakes on property transfer documents as one of the services the Listers provide. He asked if there a possibility of charging the applicant for the extra time this takes. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio said that there is a recording fee that provides about \$45,000 of revenue to the Town Clerk's Office each year. Mr. Supplee doesn't know if there are precedents from other communities to charge for correcting mistakes on submitted documents. Also, he hasn't kept track of how many such errors the Listers correct each year. His main concern always has been to make sure that the municipality's records are as accurate as possible. All errors are reported immediately to the Town Clerk's Office. Selectman Gadbois suggested that it might be useful to learn if other towns do charge for this.

Chair Maxwell asked if it were possible to split this proposed \$2 increase in the hourly wage over two years. Mr. Supplee did not feel this was appropriate as it was his recommendation to the other Listers to seek another \$2 increase next year (to \$16 per hour) so that the Lister compensation approaches parity with that in other Central Vermont communities.

Mr. Supplee then noted that Ms. Lathrop's hourly wage also has not been increased in several years. He is proposing that her hourly wage be increased from \$25.00 to \$27.50 per hour. In addition, Ms. Lathrop receives retirement pay from the State of Vermont for her past work in the Tax Department and this limited the amount of billable hours Ms. Lathrop was able to charge Northfield without penalty. However, this restriction will be lifted from her next year so her timesheet afterwards will reflect all of her work hours. Mr. Supplee added that it would be very difficult to hire another person with Ms. Lathrop's experience and expertise even at the higher salary being proposed. Selectman Freeman felt that this seems like a reasonable request under the circumstances.

Lister Capital Improvement Plan. Mr. Supplee noted that there now is about \$60,000 in the CIP account for the next town-wide reappraisal with an additional \$17,000 to be set aside for this in future years. He felt that this amount was probably sufficient but there remain the unsolvable problems that no one can predict when the State of Vermont will decide a new appraisal is needed or how much the project will cost after bid proposals are solicited. He noted that the current balance includes funds leftover from the last reappraisal, which actually came in on time and under budget. Mr. Supplee believes that Northfield's Coefficient of Dispersion (COD) and Common Level of Appraisal (CLA), which are the triggers for a state-required town-wide reappraisal, both are where they should be so he did not anticipate any mandates in the near future.

Chair Maxwell noted that there is about a \$4,000 balance in the "tax maps" account with an additional \$2,500 projected for each year in the foreseeable future. He asked Mr. Supplee if this level of funding was appropriate. Mr. Supplee said that the future contributions could be lowered to \$2,000 per year since most of the backlog in tax map updates had been addressed.

Accounting Expenditures. Ms. Baroffio said she was projecting a 5.3% in her department's budget and the bulk of this was due to higher personnel costs (wages, health insurance, etc.) that were incorporated in the municipal employee union contract. There also is a 20% increase in the cost of the copier/printer maintenance contract but since this would include toner replacement and other supplies, there would be a corresponding decrease in department supply costs. In addition, the telephone budget will go up due to the installation of the new telephone system last year. Ms. Baroffio added that she has been able to keep department supply costs in check by obtaining surplus materials from the state and local businesses, i.e., binders, bank boxes, etc. She noted that since she starting working here in the 1990s, the number of employee hours per week in her department has been reduced from 175 to 110 due to municipal merger, staff reductions, and other efficiencies.

Accounting Capital Equipment. Ms. Baroffio said that this account included funds set aside for the scheduled replacements of the Municipal Building's copiers/printers (6 years) and computers (5 years). There also is an account for the replacement of the postage machine, which was operating well for several years but has crashed three times in recent months. The Select Board will need to decide whether to lease or purchase ("lease to own") the new postage machine. The cost of either option would be about the same if the machine lasts the expected five years but there could be considerable savings if the machine is purchased and lasts a few years longer.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Schulz

Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 10, 2017.