

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
BUDGET MEETING #10
Minutes of January 19, 2017

- 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, Malcolm M. Mayo, Elroy C. Hill, and Chris Bradley.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

Town Budget Status. Since the last budget meeting (01/12/17), Manager Schulz has worked with Finance Director Laurie Baroffio to incorporate the various revisions to the original proposed FY 2017/2018 Town Budget that the Select Board members had requested. Ms. Baroffio also created a summary page of these revisions and Manager Schulz will review for the Select Board at this time. He added that a great deal of progress had been achieved so far. The already agreed upon revisions would reduce the original \$148,000 increase in the tax levy down to about \$30,000. The estimated increase in the tax levy now is about 1.1%. Selectman Gadbois asked if prior year surplus funds would be used to lower the tax levy. Manager Schulz confirmed that about \$121,000 in surplus funds would be used for this purpose. Chair Maxwell added that about \$95,000 of this amount would be spent on urgently needed paving projects.

Manager Schulz went through the budget revisions in estimated FY 2017/2018 revenues, including an additional \$30,000 in Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) fees collected. In addition, there will be a \$15,000 in "surplus health" revenue due to savings in employee health insurance costs. Manager Schulz then went through changes in estimated FY 2017/2018 expenditures. For example, workers compensation costs will drop about \$17,000 throughout the budget. However, this will be nearly cancelled out by a \$15,000 increase in insurance costs. Manager Schulz then went through the various revisions department by department. There will be significant savings in Town Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) due to already high balances in existing accounts. In the Town Highway Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget, there will be about \$31,000 in savings due to Select Board consensus not to set aside future funds to replace the street sweeper. The current plan is to outsource the street sweeping and either use the Town's sweeper as a backup or sell it.

Northfield Police Department (NPD) Budget. Selectman Freeman would like to follow Chief James Dziobek's recommendation and hire a sixth full-time police officer. The total cost of additional salary and benefits for this position has been estimated at about \$92,000. However, since this does not appear to be Select Board consensus, Selectman Freeman would at least like to be sure that the NPD overtime budget is sufficient to cover any staffing shortages. He also would like the municipality to pursue grant funding that might cover NPD officer expenses. He also would like to see an increase the amount Norwich University (NU) donates each year to the emergency services that provide coverage for the NU campus.

Chair Maxwell noted that since Chief Dziobek has indicated his intention to retire by the end of April 2017, the municipality now is engaged in a search for a new Police Chief. He does not favor adding a sixth full-time officer until the new NPD Chief has had input into this decision. Chair Maxwell does favor making some changes in the proposed NPD budget, such as increasing the overtime line item. If there are deficiencies in this budget, the Select Board will work with the new NPD Chief to resolve them. There are other factors that may come into play but Chair Maxwell cannot discuss them at this time as they pertain to the ongoing negotiations for a new NPD union contract. There are some matters, such as compensation, that the Select Board will need to fully address in the future.

Selectman Doney agrees that any decision to hire a sixth full-time officer should be delayed until the new NPD Chief has been hired. Selectman Gadbois also feels that it is not the Select Board's business to run the NPD but to create a budget that will allow it to operate successfully whether there are four, five, or six full-time officers. Selectman Goslant would like the new NPD Chief's recommendation on proper staffing before adding the additional officer. Selectman Doney asked what would happen to the tax rate should the sixth officer be hired. Ms. Baroffio said that based on last year's Grand List, this would add out four cents (4¢) to the tax rate. This would be three cents (3¢) added to the current projected increase, which now is about one cent (1¢).

Chris Bradley noted that of the last three NPD Chiefs, both Chief Dziobek and former Chief Jeffrey Shaw endorsed hiring a sixth full-time officer. He does not know how the other recent NPD Chief (Chris Outten) felt. Mr. Bradley is wary of hiring a new NPD Chief who will have to deal with insufficient staffing from the beginning. Like most of us, Mr. Bradley feels he pays too much in taxes already but also believes that having a properly staffed NPD would be a justified expense. He noted that on a \$100,000 home, a Northfield taxpayer would pay an additional \$50 a year to fund the additional officer. Mr. Bradley compares this to the cost of an extra cup a coffee a week and felt this was not too much to pay for a safer community. He also believes having an underfunded NPD might prevent an otherwise qualified candidate for NPD Chief from agreeing to work here. In addition, as he mentioned at a previous budget meeting, Mr. Bradley noted that the municipality owns some valuable parcels near the NU campus that could be sold to cover this extra expense without raising the tax rate. Elroy Hill believes that no matter how many full-time officers the NPD has or will have, there should be a stronger effort to put them out on the streets to bring in additional revenue by citing speeders, etc. He would like to see a more visible NPD presence in the community rather than have NPD officers sitting around in the Police Station waiting to be called out.

Chair Maxwell believes even should the sixth full-time officer position be budgeted, there are doubts that it could be filled. The NPD now is operating at four full-time officers since an officer left recently to join another department. This is part of a statewide trend as there are about thirty (30) full-time officer vacancies in Vermont. Selectman Goslant feels it is possible that the new NPD Chief will be able to recruit and retain NPD officers better than his predecessors.

Chair Maxwell favors adding \$10,000 to the NPD overtime budget as opposed to the cost of hiring the sixth full-time officer. He also wondered if it were possible to create a reserve fund that could be used to cover unanticipated NPD expenses. Ms. Baroffio felt this would not be practical and creating the fund would require a vote on Town Meeting Day. She thought it would be better to use surplus funds from the current fiscal year to cover any future NPD deficits. Selectman Goslant does not feel the community is being put at risk due to the current NPD staffing level. He also feels that the municipality should focus on increasing the Grand List by bringing in new businesses rather than looking for new reasons to raise the tax rates. Chair Maxwell said that Select Board consensus seems to be delaying any further action regarding NPD staffing until the new Police Chief can provide input.

Selectman Doney also would like the NPD overtime budget increased to \$20,000. If the new NPD Chief wants a sixth full-time officer, this can be brought up at next year's budget sessions. He added that Northfield may need to look at losing 24/7 local police coverage and relying on the Vermont State Police for afterhours responses. Selectman Goslant felt that increasing the overtime budget would only encourage future overspending. Chair Maxwell favors increasing the overtime budget as it is a good policy to prepare for the worst while hoping for better. Manager Schulz added that by adding new work restrictions on part-time police officers, the Vermont State Legislature has made it more difficult for smaller police departments to hire them to control expenses. This is one reason why police departments have seen overtime expenses go up in recent years. Selectman Doney believes these restrictions can be worked around. Selectman Goslant noted that some of our part-time officers work full-time for another department. After further discussion, the Select Board consensus was to raise NPD overtime expenses from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Miscellaneous Budgets. Selectman Gadbois would like to add \$850 to the Cemetery budget to cover the expense of putting flags on veterans' graves. Selectman Doney feels that local business owners would be willing to donate these funds if asked. Chair Maxwell agreed. The proposed part-time summer position to mow recreational fields, etc. will be eliminated in favor of outsourcing the work. In addition, Manager Schulz will attempt to lower the cost of janitorial services for the Municipal Building, Brown Public Library, and Police Station by putting the work out to bid. The Select Board members then adopted the proposed budget by consensus with tonight's changes. Selectman Goslant has gone through this budget process for several years and this was the most difficult one he has seen. He then thanked his fellow Select Board members, Manager Schulz, Ms. Baroffio, and the various department heads for helping to get the job done.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 8:36 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 revised and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of February 14, 2017.