

**BUDGET COMMITTEE  
TOWN OF PEMBROKE, NH  
November 9 at 6:30 PM**

**FINAL**

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Video recordings of Budget Committee meetings can be found at:

[https://townhallstreams.com/towns/pembroke\\_nh](https://townhallstreams.com/towns/pembroke_nh)

The relative start time of each agenda section is noted below.

Gerry Fleury, Vice Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

**I. Attendance:**

Budget Committee Present:

Clint Hanson, Gene Gauss, Gerry Fleury, Brian Seaworth, Peter Gagy, Louis Caron, Matt Miller, Jason Mayeu, Jenn Miskovic (formerly Johnson)

Budget Committee Excused: Mark LePage, Sue Whitbeck

Budget Committee Not Present:

Gerry Fleury took the opportunity to note that tax bills had recently been sent out, reflecting a rate of \$27.88/thousand of assessed value and an overall increase of 12%. This compares to the Committee's estimate at March meetings of \$29.03, or \$1.15 less than forecast.

**II. Approval of Minutes: October 12 2023 [02:20]**

Clint Hanson made a motion to approve the minutes of October 12, 2023. Gene Gauss seconded the motion. Louis Caron suggested clarification of the School Update section through addition of the word "storm" to precede "water runoff". Motion as amended passed 8-0, with Jenn Miskovic abstaining.

**III. Library Budget Review [04:00]**

Library Trustee Judy Mitchell presented the proposed budget, supported by Shelley Fowler and Kaitlin Camidge. In reviewing Library activity it was noted that the children's program has seen an increase of 50% over last year, with 2200 attendees so far this year. There are roughly 2000 active cardholders, including 322 new patrons this year. An average of 67 people per month utilize Library computers.

The most significant proposed changes to the budget are in wages, with requests to increase the children's librarian hours from 25 to 31, and addition of a new part-time position of 15 hours. The children's librarian increase is a result of increased demand and success of the programs. The additional part-timer is to help cover during vacations and illness, and with overall increasing Library usage. The total proposed increase to the operating budget is about \$5000, while the overall budget would be up 18% primarily due to the added staff hours.

A new budget line, Contracted Services, has been established, consolidating several previously used detail lines for clarity. Licenses and NH Downloadables (e-books and e-mags) are included in this, with a 2% increase in fees etc.

It was noted that the operating budget has not significantly changed in many years, at \$66-67000 from 2011 to 2021, a decrease in 2022, and an increase in 2023 due to benefits changes and electricity costs.

Gerry then opened the discussion to Committee members. Matt Miller asked about the budget format. David clarified that the column Prior Year Revised reflects the full year approved budget for last year, while Prior Year Actual reflects year-to-date spending. Matt then asked about a breakdown of the overall wage line increase, and David referred him to the supplemental Library wages page in the budget pack.

Brian Seaworth asked for clarification on the start date of the new PT position, and David clarified the May start is reflected in this year's budget. A full year of wages would be shown in the subsequent 2025 budget. The increased children's librarian hours would begin January 1.

Jenn asked about minimum hour regulations for having to provide benefits. David noted it's 35 hour for NH Retirement and while it's 30 hours for healthcare Pembroke has no match so there's no impact.

Gerry noted that the Library is taking a somewhat unusual approach with it's new PT staffing request in that it would start in May which would be after approval at March Town Meeting, ensuring it would be funded. Judy noted this was purposeful as they would not be able to otherwise absorb the costs. The Trustees however did feel they could cover the added six hours for the children's librarian if necessary, particularly given user demand. Gerry also encouraged members of the Committee to visit the Library, including story time on Tuesdays, to see the well run environment and enthusiasm.

Judy noted that Director Ryan O'Hora has applied for a number of grants. They recently received a national program grant to support parents of young children (birth to 3 years) with two five-week programs focused on developmental activities with specialists to help spot issues early. She also noted that Ryan had gone to PA to inform students of the services available at the Library.

Gene asked about timing of merit and COLA increases, and David replied that the new hire would come in at those new levels. Gene also asked whether there has been any increase in traffic from PA students in the afternoons. Judy responded they had not yet seen that but looked at it as more of a longer-term effort.

Gerry asked the Chairman's typical question of "What keeps you awake at night"? Staff retention and having sufficient staff were the two greatest concerns. Awareness of policy among staff was also noted. Gerry also asked about the condition of the building. David noted the recent sewer problem, resulting from the lower-cost approach during initial construction, required closing both the Library and Town Hall for two days while repairs were made at considerable cost. He also noted the roof will need replacement in 4-5 years and has begun adding funds into the Building Capital Reserve fund to cover this.

#### **IV. Town Budget Review - Administration [39.00]**

Town Administrator David Jodoin reviewed administrative areas of the Town budget, and then gave a brief preview of budgets for the other departments (Police, Fire, etc.), which the Committee will be hearing from over the next several meetings.

David explained that the administrative area includes such segments as his position, town clerks, auditing, tax collecting, assessing, planning, zoning, and others. He then called out highlights in many of these areas:

- Contracted Services – now includes video recordings of meetings.
- Elections – new voting booths and machine.
- Auditing – additional audit planned for ambulance service transition.
- Assessing – full revaluation next year covering residential and utilities.
- Legal – reduced by \$20,000.
- Buildings – now using a part-time janitor, long-term electric contract at low rate.
- Liability insurance – up 9%, with rate boosts due to increasing cyber issues.
- Workers Comp – up 12%.

David noted the longevity of many of the administrative staffers at Town Hall.

Gerry asked about decreases in postage budget lines even though rates will increase in January. David responded that he's comfortable with the numbers, and reminded everyone that fees in planning and zoning for required notifications are typically paid by developers.

David then continued with a summary of the remaining departments:

- Police – down 2 officers, continued difficulty finding people. Larger departments poaching from smaller towns. The Selectmen have rolled two part-time officer positions and funds from county prosecution into a new full-time prosecutor position for better service and results. Pay has also been increased as Pembroke had the lowest pay of area towns.
- Ambulance – David recapped his presentation of the ambulance budget to Allenstown Selectmen.
- Public Works – have lost two full-timers, both large truck drivers which is of concern for the coming winter plowing season. Have hired one replacement but that individual does not have a CDL for large trucks. David also noted that the State of NH is down over 200 plow drivers for the coming season.
- Solid Waste – costs are up, including recycling.
- Welfare – COVID funding has run out so all demands now hit the Town budget. Federal regulations require provision of assistance, regardless of where an individual is from.
- Debt Service – the Library and Safety Center bonds have been paid off. David noted that the Town portion of increase in the recent tax bills was 63 cents, with 39 cents due to the Main Street project.
- Capital Outlay – A one ton truck was not included in budget due to other priorities, including electric trash truck, road patching, and a security system for Recreation.

Gerry then opened the discussion to Committee members. Matt asked about future expected costs for the ambulance service after separation from Allenstown, and David responded we could expect costs to roughly double what is currently spent. Further discussion followed on revenue structures.

Matt asked about covering costs for the revaluation, and David explained those will come from the capitol reserve fund. Matt then asked about the possibility of adding an electronic screen to the conference room for display of materials, and a discussion on possibilities followed.

Gerry noted that the budget binders did not include the Town audit. David said that was an oversight and would have copies available next week.

## **V. School Budget Update [01:33:10]**

Gene Gauss provided an update on School Board topics, including:

- The Board had recently reviewed initial building needs & wants requests totaling \$2M (excludes personnel).
- A new paraprofessional contract is under negotiation.
- Patty Sherman, SAU Superintendent, reviewed the MS tax form process to the School Board. There is an extra set of steps requiring confirmation from NH DOE (Dept. of Education) before submission to NH DRA that slows things down.
- The construction manager met with the Building Committee and informed them that preliminary estimates show that the cost of renovations would be comparable to that of a new building. Harvey will be in to discuss with the Board at their next meeting.
- Budgets are expected to be ready for the Budget Committee by December 21, hopefully sooner.

Gerry noted that several Committee members have in the past used Excel versions of School budgets for their own analysis, and asked how that might be accomplished going forward given the SAU's current system. Gene will look into this. (David will provide this for the Town.)

Discussion shifted to the SAU as Gerry informed the Committee that he had attended the recent budget hearing, after having requested a set of information regarding organizational structure and roles & responsibilities. He expressed concerns over the materials received regarding the work being done by consultants rather than SAU administration itself. Discussion followed on the hearing itself, SAU oversight, the use of consultants, and audits.

Moving back to the budget, Gene noted that principals had been directed to consider use of capital reserve funds for purchase of books and materials.

Gene reported on a recent AREA meeting regarding student population at Pembroke Academy. Currently they are at +9 students, meaning there are more than budgeted (a good thing). They also looked at where students budgeted from the other sending towns (Chichester, Epsom, Allenstown) are being "lost" to, with many due to simply moving away or moving to home schooling. However, it was noted that three students from Epsom are now attending Prospect Mtn (an open enrollment school) for hardship reasons. This led to discussion as to whether this is legal under the AREA agreement, and to concerns for further loss of revenue should this become an accepted practice.

## **VI. Other Business [2:06:18]**

No other business was noted.

## **VII. Adjourn: [02:07:45]**

Clint Hanson made a motion to adjourn at 8:37 PM. Louis Caron seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

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Mark LePage, Chairman

For more detailed information, the meetings are now taped and can be seen on [www.townhallstreams.com](http://www.townhallstreams.com) click on Pembroke NH and look for the day of the meeting under the month.