

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

FINAL

Video recordings of Budget Committee meetings can be found at:

https://townhallstreams.com/towns/pembroke_nh

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

Mark LePage, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

I. Attendance

Budget Committee Present: Mark LePage Gerry Fleury, Clint Hanson, Gene Gauss, Brian Seaworth, Peter Gagy, Louis Caron, Matt Miller, Jason Mayeu, Jennifer Miskovic (formerly Johnson), Sue Whitbeck

Budget Committee Excused:

Budget Committee Not Present:

Mark LePage opened the meeting by introducing the new recording secretary, Kate Castaldo (-Rice).

II. Approval of Minutes: November 16, 2023 [01:00]

Gerry Fleury made a motion to approve the minutes from November 16, 2023. Clint Hanson seconded the motion. Matt Miller suggested a correction to the first page of the minutes referencing the Standard Federal Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) be reflected as the previous year. Mark LePage referenced the prior year's Consumer Price Index (CPI). Motion as amended passed 10-0.

III. Town Budget Review – Welfare and Recreation [02:19]

Town Administrator David Jodoin started by presenting the proposed Welfare budget. There is a proposed \$55,000 budget for Welfare this year. It was explained that even if the budget is exhausted, the town is responsible for continued funding.

The department put together a summary regarding COVID-19 effects on Welfare. Fewer individuals were applying during the pandemic due to COVID-19 programs and government assistance. Some examples were the moratorium on gas and electric shutoffs and rental assistance through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). These programs have since expired.

Per RSA: 165, it is the local welfare office's responsibility to assist these families and individuals with a safe living environment, which can include a shelter referral if a shelter is available. Currently, there are many applications before the department and it has become hard to find shelter referrals. Welfare is being forced to put up clients in motels, many of which are refusing to accept welfare vouchers or are full. Legal aid is enforcing more that wherever someone applies, that community is responsible, and it does not matter where they are coming from. This is happening in surrounding communities as well.

The Direct Assistance budget did not increase this year and remains at \$55,000. Over the past few years, this budget has not been fully spent and has lapsed into surplus. Because of the current situation, the budget has stayed the same. The Administration budget has an 8.24% increase due to the Cost-of-Living Increase from the Collective Bargaining Agreement for Public Works for wages.

Gerry Fleury asked if you expend entire the appropriation and cannot find appropriations from other areas, can you end up with a deficit appropriation. David Jodoin answered that there would have to be a request for over expenditure from Board of Selectman and Budget Committee and then the Department of Revenue to tap into surplus. Also, there may be need for a special town meeting.

Sue Whitbeck asked what would happen if the town voted no. David Jodoin stated that the court would look at the state law and would have to decide. Mark LePage commented that the budget is currently \$55,000, even if it doubled, town would most likely not take it to that point, but that if that were to happen, he reiterated that the court would have to decide.

Gene Gauss asked if the money has been budgeted each year and not fully spent, what is preventing the town from using that surplus line for funding. David Jodoin answered that surplus funds fund capital reserve or offset tax rate in this case. The funds cannot be used for this purpose.

David Jodoin then moved on to present the Recreation budget.

There was a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) presentation and part of this included a project for the stage roof. This project did not score well so that was not added to the budget. The presentation went to Selectman to put money into capital reserve. This will probably get a request again at town meeting or public hearing. Also, there are three-part timers currently doing mowing and doing a good job. Overall, there was a decrease from last year of 2.85%.

Gerry Fleury asked what happened to initiative to replace the roof on the soccer building. The Recreation Committee approved Seven Siding and cut two checks. They are trying to get in there before winter and looking at doing it during the weekend.

David has walked the site with the insurance company representative, and it is not clear if mulch need to be changed from the current playground mulch or if ruts just need to be filled in. The representative did notice there was a bolt on a swing that was in the wrong way, which has since been corrected. He also looked at new dugouts and let David know what needed to be done to them. He gave David a list as to what needs to be done on the complete site as well.

IV. Town Budget Review - Police [15:41]

Police Chief Gary Gaskell and Lieutenant Dawn Shea presented the Police Department budget.

Wages saw an increase of 11.82% for the year. The money was taken out from the prosecutor line and a full-time prosecutor was hired for the town. The department has had two part time officer positions open for the last two years with no applicants. Mark LePage asked how long the prosecutor has been in the role and how the performance has been. The prosecutor has been in place for approximately two months. They are very pleased for with her performance thus far. She will take over officially January 1, 2024, when the current contract ends.

There were salary adjustments made to the pay rates of the officers. The Selectman made some adjustment to salaries based on surrounding towns. Currently, the department is three officers down with two applicants in the hiring process. This reflects the biggest increase in the Wage line.

The Court Time line hasn't been used each year therefore it has been decreased from \$5,000 to \$3,000 this year. Everything that was going to superior court is now coming to municipal court since Felonies First is going away. This line should be used for officer time in court this year. This should be seen more once the department is staffed.

Gerry Fleury asked about the Vaccinations and Tests line. He asked if we are having to vaccinate officers for anything. What kind of vaccinations? The Chief stated they have not had to do this thus far. He was unsure of where normal flu vaccines funding comes from, but possibly through insurance.

Gerry Fleury also inquired about the School Resource Officer and if there is one and if that individual works for the police department. Also, he inquired how much time is spent in the school. The Chief answered that the department does have one. He estimated that he spends about 80% of his time at the school during the 9 months it is open. Gerry then asked if the officer is still being used to cover shortages at the department. The Chief stated that he is doing this one day. Part of his salary is being paid from Pembroke Academy budget. This is part of the cost per pupil at Pembroke Academy. He keeps track of his hours at the school.

Training and Education line has gone up 22.73% or \$2,500. There isn't as much free training offered. This is continued training after 16-week academy or refresher training. There are many different organizations that will come and teach. Three different training companies have come in this year and the department received free seats in exchange for hosting. Other municipalities are sending people to attend. This counts towards training hours, which are going up yearly. By the end of next year, the requirement will be 24 hours. This year the department has done approximately 682 hours. The department was audited, and the audit came out great, training was part of this. The prosecutor will also need training.

The Telephone line has gone up \$1500 or 10%. Marianne will be retiring in February after 30 years. After going through recent billing, it has been determined that landlines prices have gone up based on review of bill. Mark LePage asked if this also includes cell phones and air cards. This does include 8 cruisers (9 if the investigation card is included).

Community Education, Criminal Investigation and DUI Testing lines haven't changed very much over the years. The average of what has been historically spent was taken and each line dropped based on the data.

Dispatch services has an \$8800, or 18.45%, increase this year. There was also an increase last year. There is an \$8915 increase on a hardware and software fee which we won't be faced with for another 5 years. There is also an increase in user fees but that was absorbed last year in the budget estimation. Matt Miller asked if the dispatch is outsourced. The Chief stated that the service is provided by the Merrimack County Sheriff's Department, and they are charged a fee for the services.

Matt Miller asked about the Criminal Investigations line. He inquired what was included in the line. The line is a very low cost each year. The chief responded that cameras, print lifts that are later sent to the state lab, any other equipment that we may need are included. Matt asked if it included manpower and if this is not included, would that be in the wage line. They have a good digital camera and have training for that camera, and they can do what is necessary. Matt asked if they are doing on the scene investigation versus long investigations. It was stated that they rely on digital storage and other agencies. Lieutenant Shea stated that all the forensics are done through New Hampshire State Police Lab, and there is no cost for that. Labs are popping up at the larger departments like the Manchester Police Department and the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Taskforce, and they generally do not have to pay for those services.

Mark LePage inquired about the Dispatch line to clarify if the increase is due to an increased number of calls in the town. The Chief and Lieutenant stated that there are 14 out of 17 other communities paying the lump sum. Pembroke is number two in the county just behind Bow at 11.21%.

Brian Seaworth added that when he joined the committee, dispatch was done through Bow. It was switched to the county sheriff due to expense. The previous sheriff's philosophy gave a discount to the towns that used it. This unlocked an economy of scale, and the cost per call should, in theory, gets smaller. They are adding an upgrade this year and rather than factoring that in each year, the sheriff is planning to put it on this year's capital expense and divide it up per call. Expectation is that it will go up and then come back down until next time there is another upgrade. It is the sheriffs' proposal (county vote needs to take place), to the Commissioner's budget, which includes this increase, and is to be presented at a public hearing December 8th in the morning at Old Merrimack County Courthouse. If members of this community are concerned about the way that the fees are being reallocated, this would

be the time to come speak about it. This is prior to discussions and is in the beginning stages. The Chief then mentioned that this is our only option for dispatch currently.

Gerry Fleury asked if there are dead zones or dark areas in Pembroke in terms of the transmitters and/or repeaters in the area. The Chief responded that the only dead zone is within the AG (Associated Grocers) building. Other than that, he cannot think of any other locations. He also noted that there are different frequencies on each side of the river that are shared among communities.

The Printing line was decreased by \$300 because the line was not being spent. The Dues and Subscriptions line increased by \$700 due to added fees from the International Association of Chiefs of Police, New Hampshire Chiefs of Police, and Merrimack County Chiefs of Police. The new prosecutor also has Bar fees.

Vehicle Maintenance and Repair was increased by \$10,000 last year at the recommendation of the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Committee, as well as a cruiser being added. This line was lowered by \$2,000 for this year. There are two cars without warranty. There are a few with a powertrain only warranty and a few with bumper to bumper. Gerry Fleury asked if they have all vehicles at this time and that was confirmed.

Mark LePage asked for trends, concerns and what keeps the Chief up at night. Chief Gaskell responded that there is a lot more violence out there. He wants to make sure that the officers are safe and make sure they have the equipment that they need. Pembroke is just like bigger cities. The same training is needed for this town. Social media is a big issue currently. Jurisdiction becomes the problem and ties the departments hands. They have good partners and work very closely with the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC).

Matt Miller asked if they are mostly financial crimes or threats of violence or intimidation? The Chief responded that there are some financial but if there is no loss to the reporting party or the bank then they technically have no victim. Identity fraud is a problem, and they give out handouts and information on this to educate the public. These attacks are mostly against the elderly. They will be asked to load gift cards to get grandkid out of jail, as an example. Search warrants are hard to do with social media – all different ways to request from different platforms. The County Attorney's Office for grand jury takes time.

Mark LePage asked if there is anything you feel that officers are lacking from a safety standpoint? The Chief state that they need other officers to join the department. Once they get a full staff, it will help everyone. It is difficult to get the caliber of officer that they are looking for that goes through the whole process. They have fallen victim to that this year, with candidates deciding it's not for them. He would put the current officers up against anyone in the state.

Gene Gauss asked about the status of body cams. The department has them, but the Attorney General is involved. The new prosecutor will be involved as well. They will be on officers as soon as they can.

Gerry Fleury asked about a Police Dog. The Chief confirmed that the department has one and that he graduated today from patrol school. Franklin – Frank the Tank – is a 13-month-old Malinois. Gerry asked the normal retirement age. The normal retirement age is probably 8. Gerry asked why there is no line for the care of the dog in the budget. The Chief explained that the program is funded by donations – Central New Hampshire Veterinary Clinic, Osbourne's Agway, and support from town citizens. Handler Mike St. Jacques. Will be at Old Home Day and doing demos around town and at school.

Mark LePage asked if there is anything else that they would like the committee to be aware of. The Chief said that he would like to see a cruiser in the budget every year, goes through Capital Investment Projects (CIP). This is the biggest item that they need. He thanked the committee for support for the budget every year.

Sue commented regarding a recent issue. When she went to the police station both the Chief and Lieutenant came out to talk to her. She was impressed and said that she didn't think this would happen in many other towns.

Mark LePage took a moment to thank the Chief and Lieutenant for what they do for the town. They are out in the community and support their staff and officers.

Water and Sewer budgets were distributed for next week. This will be discussed along with Public Works.

V. School Budget Update [58:05]

Gene Gauss, School Board Representative, provided an update on School Board topics. The following items were highlighted:

- On the 1100 lines, Regular Programs, there is an increase of \$837,000.
- On the 1200 lines, Special Education, there is an increase of \$1.391 million increase, which includes Special Education Transportation.
- On the 2100 lines, Guidance and Assessment there is a decrease of \$463,000.
- On the 2700 lines, Transportation, there is an increase of \$875,220 increase, which does not include Special Education Transportation.
- On the 2900 lines, Support Services, there is an increase of \$839,000.
- There is an overall increase of \$3.6 million for the overall budget.

Gene noted that this is first draft of budget, and the School Board will be working to decrease the budget. He noted that increases in Special Education total almost \$1.5 million including transportation. He also stated that 81% of the budget is Special Education or contracted and they will not be able to adjust that.

Gerry Fleury asked if there are still special bargaining agreements with paraprofessionals in progress that, if a settlement is reached, would result in further addition to the budget. Gene confirmed that will be an addition if that is the case.

Mark LePage asked when the budget committee packets will be ready. Gene replied that they should be ready the Monday or Tuesday before the 14th. Mark requested that if they are available early, it would be helpful if the spreadsheet could be emailed. Mark stated that he has started working with the tax sheet and once they have the packet from the school, he will insert the numbers. He thinks he could have a version of that available on the 14th. Gene mentioned the next SAU Executive Board meeting is the 13th of December to bring up the issue concerning the audits.

Gerry Fleury then stated that he requested the most recent for Pembroke School District audits year ago and received nothing. He requested it as recently as last week from the Superintendent. Gene will reiterate request to Patty, the Superintendent. Gerry stated that he has a copy of the audit from 2020 from another source. He feels that they should be available to the public and posted on Pembroke website.

Mark LePage asked if there are any other updates or updates on the building. Gene responded that the architect and construction manager attended last School Board meeting and they are going a different route. Gerry stated that the school needs to be sprinkled, not sure if it will be a problem based on similar elevation of the water tank on Brickett Hill. He is unsure of how much water pressure there will be. Also, you would have to tie into sewer lines. There will also need to be below ground Right-of-Ways to those systems. Gene stated that they are not at that point yet.

Mark LePage asked if there are any thoughts to a different location given problems with that site. Gene stated that there was a small discussion about having one campus. There is an acre or so of unused land by Pembroke Academy. Mark posed the question that it is a suboptimal site and asked if we are going to keep it suboptimal. Gene stated that a new building would be less of a disturbance to the children learning. Gerry Fleury brought up that the town is still amortizing loans for the Honeywell Project that have breakeven points that are in the future. He asked how it will be taken care of if we abandon the building that we still have loan on.

David Jodoin asked if the Committee is planning on having the school budget meetings at the town hall. Mark LePage confirmed that they would at this time.. Gene asked if there was still interest in tours of Hill School at this time as there is a plan to bring bonds forward. Mark stated that we should hold off at this point and see if those plans come to fruition.

Jennifer Miskovic asked if the town is eligible for a bond with the audits being incomplete. According to the bond bank, we are not eligible until all audits are up to date. Gerry Fleury then mentioned interest rates and how audit results may impact this negatively. Gene stated that interest rates are running at 5.25% based on current schedules. Mark stated that this is before they get the specifics of your town. David Jodoin asked why you would build a new school for a large amount of money and only bond for 20 years. Gene was just giving an example since they are not sure of the total cost yet. Jennifer followed up by asking why the town would hold a public hearing if we don't qualify for bonding. Gene stated that if the audits get done and everything is in order then they would apply for a bond. No public hearing to be held until that time. The first day for any public hearing for a bond would be January 11.

VI. Other Business [1:15:51]

Gerry Fleury asked if there is an update on the grant for the electric trash truck. David Jodoin responded that there is no update as there were many applications. Gerry noted that there is a total of only \$50 million allocated for the entire State of New Hampshire.

No other business was noted.

VII. Adjourn: [01:17:02]

Clint Hanson made a motion to adjourn at 7:47 PM. Jenn Miskovic seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Mark LePage, Chairman

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