

TOWN OF LISBON, NEW HAMPSHIRE
SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES
Town Budget Public hearing
2/8/16

SELECTMEN PRESENT: Stephen Knox (S. Knox), Donald Butson (D. Butson), Thomas Demers (T. Demers).
Town Administrator: Daniel Merhalski (D. Merhalski)

MEETING OPENED: S. Knox Opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

SELECTMEN'S BUSINESS:

Public Hearing – Annual Town Budget:

D. Merhalski gave a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the proposed Annual Town Budget for 2016. The overall Town Expenditures will be \$2,414,833.67, down \$219,734 or 8.34% from the previous year's budget. The Town's Revenues will total \$1,238,218, and increase of \$22,974, or 1.89% from the previous year. After taking into account the revenues, expenditures, overlays and Veteran's Credits, the Total Tax Commitment for the Town will be \$1,144,806.86. The proposed budget includes using the Fund Balance, or Surplus, to buy down the tax rate by \$124,500. Provided that the total Town valuation remains the same, the Town portion of the Tax Rate will remain at \$10.72.

The Board opened the Public Hearing at 7:23 pm.

Joe Tavernier spoke about the cuts to the Police Department Budget and his years of service as the Police Chief. He mentioned the need for training. He also made reference to submitting his self-evaluation with language to get the Board's attention and referred to the evaluation of Officer Walker and an issue with a bullet-proof vest. He also mentioned the Board's proposed policy on conducting in-house repairs of Town vehicles and said that the Board had a vendetta against him. He summarized his comments by asking for the Board to restore the approx. \$20,000 of reductions to the Police Dept. Budget.

T. Demers asked the Police Chief to speak about the reductions.

Scott Pinson, Police Chief, commented that he was resigned to the cuts occurring and while he wasn't happy about it, it was going to happen.

T. Demers reminded the Chief that they had reviewed the budget with the Department Heads and they were in agreement with the proposed cuts and had requested restoration of cuts if they thought they needed it, and the Board had restored those funds that were requested.

J. Tavernier interrupted and said that the Board shouldn't blame Scott for not liking the cuts to his budget and that the Board should look to make cuts in the School.

S. Pinson said that a memo from the Town Administrator to Department Heads seemed to him like a threat that if they over expended their line items there would be consequences and they would basically lose their jobs.

The Town Administrator asked Scott what the memo he referred to said because he had written the memo and it did not say anything like that.

S. Pinson said that he couldn't find the memo. He said that the policy to have work on Town vehicles be done in-house was micro-management.

D. Butson said that the policy is intended to save money by having the DPW garage do the work if they can, and then only if they can't do the work to send it out for repair.

S. Pinson said that it sounds like the Board is trying to prevent him from taking the department's business to Joe and that he thought it was his call on where to spend his department's funding.

S. Knox said that he thought the Chief was referring to the repair of a bumper on a patrol vehicle where they went out for three bids, of which Tavernier's Auto was one, and after reviewing the bids, Tavernier's was the low bid and the Town went with his shop.

J. Tavernier said that none of them knows that Kevin from DPW had been down to use his tire machine at Tavernier's for Town work and he didn't charge him for the use of that piece of equipment.

S. Pinson read from the memo that he referred to previously: For the coming year the proposed changes to the budget require thriftiness, creativity and an eye to careful stewardship of resources assigned to your departments. Over expending line items will not be permitted unless in the event of an emergency and only with Town administrator approval."

D. Merhalski asked where the threat to his job was in that memo?

S. Pinson said he never said there was a "direct" threat.

J. Tavernier said that RSA 105 said that if a Police Chief went over his budget for three years in a row it was just cause for termination. He said that the Board was requiring Chief Pinson to keep to every line item in his budget, or see the Selectmen instead of rationing the amount out from somewhere else. "That's micro-management. You're cuttin' him off at the frickin' balls, if you wanna, and then you're telling him to remain within line items."

The Board asked if there were any additional questions from the public?

Regan Pride asked about training reimbursements for employees and, if that was still in the Personnel Policy, there would need to be money set aside for that.

D. Merhalski said that he would check to see if the Personnel Policy still contained that or if it was changed, but that there were no requests for use of funds for that purpose last year or this year and that if the policy still existed, the Board would have to approve any such request.

Jennifer Trelfa, Town Clerk, said that there are degree courses that staff could take, but the budget being cut down as it has, no one feels that they can ask for it.

Barry Livinson said that for programs like that you have to sign up in advance and get permission from the Town first so there would be some lead time before that came up.

D. Butson said that communication works both ways and that when the Board met with the Department Heads, they did not express this need and seemed to be content with the cuts that had been proposed. The few requests to restore funding were all granted. So the Board thought the Department Heads were fine with the Budget as proposed.

J. Tavernier said that it was up to the Department Head to decide what trainings to send his employees to, it was not up to “your graces” to decide.

J. Trelfa said that they were told to come up with a budget that wasn’t up from last year and they did that and everyone was happy about it, then the Advisory Budget Committee said to cut it more and the Board went along with it. They didn’t really have an option; the Board was going to do it anyway. We just went along with it. And when people hear that the “Tax Rate” is going to be flat, it isn’t that way when the School portion goes up and we will have to just have to keep cutting until we cut services. The Town still has to pay the School and it isn’t making sense anymore.

S. Pinson said that they were told to have the budget be flat from last year and they did that. Then they were told that the Board wanted to keep the tax rate level from last year and I lost more off of the already chopped budget.

K. Clement added that the new cuts were all within a weeks’ time that we had to make all that happen. At the eleventh hour you pulled the rug out from under us because of the recommendation of the Advisory Budget Committee which doesn’t even have the willingness to have the School cut their budget too.

J. Tavernier said that the Town has a drug problem that the Board doesn’t even know about and you keep cutting the budget. It ties his hands. “Just give him the \$20,000 back.” The Budget Committee is advisory only. “They’re just a goddamn committee sitting in the back running a puppet and you guys are taking the heat. Give ‘em the \$20,000.”

Perry Gagnon said that he had seen the taxes going up and hiring more municipal employees and the Selectmen were there to try to get ahold of those costs. When the executive tells the Department Heads to cut it's not telling them that they are doing a bad job. It's just about trying to get the taxes down and working together to make the best decisions for the Town.

Fred Garafalo said that the Transfer Station is at the bottom line and if anything gets broken at the Transfer Station he has no money to fix it. We've cut down from two full-time people to one full-time and one part-time. When I'm on vacation, there is only one person at the Transfer Station and there will be lines in the summer time. I used to have \$3-\$4,000 to fix it and I don't have it anymore.

D. Butson said that isn't entirely true. There is a fund to cover Town-wide over expenditures.

F. Garafalo admitted that there is a fund, but it won't come out of my budget.

S. Knox asked if there were any other questions or comments?

T. Demers said that he wanted to say something. He knows that training for the Police and Fire can be sporadic, but if they can get their info put together ahead of time, they will look at the budget having the funding that they need to cover the training needs. So please don't give up or get frustrated. They are trying to patch things up and move in the right direction.

D. Merhalski said that the Board would be closing the Public hearing if there were no further questions or comments and then they would discuss the budget. If any changes are made to it they would have to hold another Public Hearing that would be noticed and the Public could come and comment again on the budget at that time. He thanked the public for coming out tonight.

S. Knox closed the Public Hearing at 8:01 pm.

The Board discussed the input of the public. They agreed that they did not want to change course at this point and that communication was offered to the Department Heads for their budgets and when they requested a restoration of lines in their budgets, those requests were granted and the funds restored.

K. Clement addressed the Board about the part-timer position at the DPW that was being advertised. He asked if he could hire two individuals for the position and split their time with that of Lee Veilleux to better use their different skills as needed. The Board agreed that he could do that if they were kept to the amount of hours that was agreed upon and did not go over budget. Kevin thanked the Board and left.

The Board asked D. Merhalski to remind Kevin that the Board needs to review and approve any applicants for the positions before they are brought on board.

The Board discussed the pager stipend at the DPW and the use of the pager by the DPW Director. The Board agreed that the pager stipend policy was intended to have the pager be divided amongst the DPW members and to reduce the burden on the director, but it was not intended to pay for the Director to carry the pager. They instructed D. Merhalski to notify K. Clement that if the policy is not used as intended and the pager is assigned to the other members of the department that they would rescind the policy.

A motion to approve the budget as proposed was made by D. Butson, 2nd by T. Demers . Motion carried unanimously.

D. Butson made a motion to adjourn, seconded by S. Knox. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Dan Merhalski, Town Administrator