

Jan 4 2022

01-04-2022 Annual Budget Hearing Meeting

The 2022 Annual Fairlee Budget Hearing was held on Monday, January 4, 2022, in the Town Hall Auditorium and remotely on Zoom. The hearing was called to order at 6:37 pm by Elizabeth Wilson, Budget Committee

Present:

- Dan Ludwig, Budget Committee Chair (excused)
Elizabeth Wilson, Budget Committee Member
Stephen Bentley, Budget Committee Member
Peter Berger, Selectboard Chair
Catherine McGrath, Selectboard Member
Tad Nunez, Town Administrator
Joanna Bligh, Minutes Clerk
Lisa Hinsley, Treasurer
Noël Walker, Lister
Jason Bachus, Police Chief/Delinquent Tax Collector
Lance Colby, Head Water Operator
Chaz Hinsley, Cemetery Commission Chair
Beth Reynolds, Library Director
Cyrie Lange, Library Trustee
Jen Johnson
Larry Martin
Georgette Wolf Ludwig, Town Clerk (8 pm arrival)

Present – ZOOM

- Lance Colby
Simon Holdaway
Charlotte Williams, Library Trustee

Elizabeth Wilson started with:

Administration
No questions
Cemetery
No questions
Community Organizations
No questions
S Holdaway: Is the draft budget online?
Emergency Services and Building
No questions
Fire & Rescue
L Martin: Can we backtrack to the Admin. Section?
Administration (cont).
L Hinsley: Increase in computer & intern expense, cybersecurity insurance,
5.7% COLA for employees
C McGrath: \$11,000 for auditor
L Hinsley: Admin budget
E Wilson: Professional fees are for what?
T Nunez: Attorney fees; consultation engineering; special meetings; VLCT Mac can assist but 'refer to attorney'

Fire & Rescue

L Martin: Cost?

L Hinsley: Actually decreased

Highway

T Nunez: Last two bills from today are an additional \$28,000;

L Hinsley: from Nov 30

N Walker: Any funds to maintain Brushwood Rd?

T Nunez: Special project – \$5,000 – for Class IV roads; beyond ditching & culvert

C Lange: Figures for Summer Road; labor costs?

T Nunez: Time & labor

Library

C Lange: Concern – page 2 of contract– no COLA for Library Director – Budget Comm – understand this

is not what we submitted; salary \$44,091; Trustees in agreement. Sixteen years experience;

no salary increase-hired at \$44,091; just as deserving of COLA

E Wilson: COLA factored into the \$44,000?

C Lange: No discussion of COLA by Trustees for Librarian but all other staff. \$1.31 increase

with COLA for Librarian; feel increase compared to actual – may not need increase

S Bentley: Cost of fuel going up. Negotiated 4-week vacation?

C McGrath: Concern about the equity of the Town Staff; we researched COLA between 2.5% to 5.7%;

Librarian position has gotten raise; equitable- same merit raise as Librarian

L Hinsley: 8% increase from previous Librarian

J Johnson: Hiring decision; hire people with experience; giving pay cut

C Lange: Not equitable that one employee only does not get COLA

P Berger: Negotiate of Trustees for hire; breaking budget; did not come to Town; "we are doing his" requirement; leeway 10%; understand not palatable; no conversation

C Lange: Talked to Town Administrator. Explained to Selectboard; did not know retirement (formerly 5 years)

E Reynolds: Librarian: 2- week vacation; generous \$38,000 to \$41,000, 8% Samantha to Elizabeth

C Lange: Librarian has a contract, no dental

T Nunez: 3 weeks– 5th year

C Lange: Contract: 2 weeks, year 1; 3 weeks, year 2; 4 weeks, year 3. Discussion

C McGrath: Sign increases in the budget; necessary cuts; equity among employees; has benefits to no other employ

C Lange: Did not increase; negotiated salary – under budget; made cuts

L Martin: Appreciate the C Lange discussion; 7.75%, agree with equity of staff; difference

retroactive to 2021; 5.7% COLA

J Johnson: Give up those rules; hired a new Librarian

C McGrath: Selectboard – keep salary in range because Selectboard in charge of salaries

No chat on-line

L Hinsley: Add \$2,000 to grant; 2021 ARPA grant

L Martin: On behalf of taxpayers; paying bill; delinquent taxes?

J Bachus: As of Dec 21, 2021 – \$81,228.09

E Wilson: Is this normal?

L Martin: This is high

E Wilson: Took a moment to pause and comment on the overall tax bill and what % is actually town related monies vs. School related monies and encouraged all to focus on that as well.

T Nunez: Charlotte Williams – Librarian not included in COLA – this is a pay cut

L Martin: All in same boat; appreciate everyone's work and to think about sustainability of how much people can afford

E Wilson: Thanked everyone for their input and will talk and recommend to Selectboard

C Lange: Process – does not reflect submitted budget; adjustments would be made on recommendation of Budget Committee

L Hinsley: Revised & changed during Selectboard meeting. No motion to change; all recommendations – until Selectboard decides

L Martin: C Lange, at last Selectboard meeting; never seen decision made except in public

C McGrath: Appreciate everything Librarian does

E Wilson: Comments as a Town member – library; COLA increase should be for everybody; 5.7% is too generous.

Hire new employee – negotiate salary & benefits – has NO bearing on previous employment; market as such came into higher salary

Equity: every employee is underpaid; to penalize a new employee is wrong

Listers

N Walker: Reappraisal fund; decrease 38%; Selectboard to make adjustment; professional Fees \$10,000 (estimate) cover Board of Civil Authority hearings

L Hinsley: \$10,000; is \$7500. Okay?

N Walker: costs \$1,000/day

Lake (Milfoil) & Town Forest

No questions

Other: None

- Elections –Higher
Primary
General
Town

Police

J Bachus: Contractors? Orange County Sheriff's – 12 additional hours, LM Associates works 10 hours/week in Fairlee;

L Hinsley: dedicated time

J Bachus: Sheriff – full time, Deputy – 20 hours/week

S Holdaway: This voted down in the 2021 Budget; same this year; up & down vote

T Nunez: In General Funds

P Berger: Turned down; data from data – more coverage – FT Orange County dedicated officer absolute necessity for public safety

C McGrath: Vote as separate item. Last year no data

E Wilson: Any other questions or comments?

Railroad Station

N Walker: Grant match

L Hinsley: P & R grant, (Town matches \$3,000)

P Berger, C McGrath, L Martin: take out of Fund Balance

Recreation Council

No questions

Town Hall & Parks

No questions

Trash & Recycling

L Hinsley: Attendant salary moved from Trash to Town Hall

Tri Town Commission –

P Berger: Dam maintenance – purchase buoys for in front of dam

C McGrath: Safety issue

Zoning

E Wilson: Registered Energy Coordinator

P Berger: Questionable value to the Town

Water

E Wilson: What does PER stand for?

T Nunez: Preliminary engineer report offset by grant

Capital Budget

L Hinsley: Capital Budget is in its 3rd year

Town Building & Land Reserves #31; title on document

T Nunez: Money to implement study report; done in phases for Transfer Station

J Johnson: Village enhancement \$6,000 – tree trimming, Railroad Station, beach; use arborist for trimming

T Nunez: street removal of hazardous trees

E Wilson: Quotes each year?

T Nunez: too volatile; sole source

Emergency Equipment Reserve Fund

No questions

Town Highway Reserve Fund

No questions

Lake/Forest Reserve Fund

No questions

General Fund

E Wilson: Page 1? – Any questions? Question 10% increase in taxes?

L Hinsley: Cash available \$25,000, same as last year

Fund Balance \$334,464

No policy for use of Fund Balance; 4 months of operating costs

E Wilson: operating costs

L Hinsley: \$50,000; Fund Balance of \$200,000

E Wilson: 1%?

L Hinsley: \$20,000 = 1 cent on tax rate

C McGrath: Selectboard will decide the Fund Balance policy

E Wilson: Credit on tax bill? Reduce taxes; one time?

L Hinsley: Credit could fluctuate year to year

L Martin: Who gets tax credit if sale?

C McGrath: COLA equity; public money; positions-COLA-genuine and accurate; negotiate new salary, challenging, TM; big picture

E Wilson: Policy and procedures in place

S Bentley: Not a business

P Berger: Vacation, sick policies not reviewed in 20 years

S Bentley: Administrator of Town of all employees, buildings

E Wilson: Big supporter; stand firm, COLA should be for everyone

N Walker: Surplus Reserve Fund Balance; what was not done-needed to get done. Roads Class IV

E Wilson: Good point

C McGrath: Don't get done because not enough staffing

L Hinsley: Goal? With recommendations- Police & COLA

E Wilson: Budget Committee meet to discuss and make recommendations to the Selectboard

Budget Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm

Attest: Joanna Bligh, Minutes Clerk

