

Budget Recommendations Advisory Committee  
October 20, 2023  
8:30 AM  
Nowak Room, Town Offices  
Draft Minutes

Members Present: Chair Bob Kelly, Christine Soutter, Liz Canada, Andrew Elliot, Anthony Zwann, Judy Rowan, Timothy Gwynne, Christopher Zigmont, and Enna Grazier

Members Absent: James Darden Rives, Amanda Kelly

Others Present: Select Board members Dan Chartrand, Nancy Belanger, and Niko Papakonstantis and Town Staff Russ Dean, Melissa Roy, Corey Stevens, and Laura Zogopoulos.

Mr. Kelly called the meeting to order at 8:35 AM.

1. Introduction

Mr. Kelly said there's a gross Health Insurance estimate in the budget, but now we have exact numbers for each department. We will not be voting on those items but they affect the bottom line.

2. Town Manager

Enna Grazier and Chris Zigmont, members of the General Government subcommittee, discussed the General Government budget.

Ms. Grazier said these Departments are run by a single person or by a small and highly skilled staff. She's impressed with the volume of work they process to support our town. This year, it's a "people-focused" budget, with a wage reclassification and attempts to keep the budget in check in other areas. Inflation is affecting things across the board, in office supplies etc, but there is a lot of level funding because the Departments are a well-oiled machine. We're getting back to normal with travel, education, and conferences. Mr. Zigmont said some Departments have vacancies. There are some sunsetting careers, so there will be new hires and training.

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers for the Town Manager. Mr. Stevens said line item 52100, Town Manager Health Insurance, is now \$57,606. Dr. Zwaan asked about the percentage update. Mr. Stevens said health insurance is up 10%, which we had budgeted for in the preliminary budget; Dental is up 4.7%; Life Insurance is down 15%; Short Term Disability is down 1.3%; and Long Term Disability is down 15%. Property and Liability had some increases, but less than 10%. Ms. Roy said it was initially estimated by the Health Trust between 14 and 16%. Mr. Dean said the January pool was up 12.8%, which means we had a better year than the pool. Health Trust is working to build up its reserves. There's an imbalance between claims and revenues. They're trying to get back to the \$90M baseline amount. Mr. Stevens said Town

Manager Dental is \$3,978; Life Insurance is \$184; Long term Disability is \$959. The new benefits total is \$110,251.

Ms. Grazier said there are increases in Conference/Rooms/Meals due to rising costs. Line item 55058, Contract Services, had no changes. Docusign is TBD. Mr. Dean said that's out but he'd like to put in \$1 as a placeholder. Ms. Grazier said line item 55200, Office Supplies, is up due to inflation paper/printing costs. Line item 55212, Phone Reimbursement, has a small adjustment due to reallocating this line with the proposed Welfare Department. Mr. Dean said we're reallocating the Senior Executive Assistant position 100% to the Town Manager budget.

Ms. Grazier said line item 55302, Town Report, is up due to an increase in printing costs. It also has more pages this year. Mr. Elliott asked if paper copies are a requirement. Ms. Grazier said we had a discussion about paper copies. Mr. Zigmont said last year, there were only three copies left over. He's on the Sustainability Committee and he would push to reduce paper elements, but some members of society need paper copies. Mr. Dean said there's an RSA that requires it be available in a printed form.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to make the budget for line item 55058, Contract Services, \$1. Ms. Soutter seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

Mr. Stevens said the new Town Manager total is \$306,038.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Town Manager total of \$306,038. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

### 3. Select Board

Ms. Grazier said Salary/Wages is not changing. Life insurance did not change. Line item 55273, Special Expenses, has been increased to allow for actual spending in this year for proclamations, special events for committees, and employee recognitions. Mr. Stevens said the YTD in this line is \$923. Mr. Dean said we're looking to re-add the holiday celebration for Boards and Committees. The cost of that was \$1,300 the last time we did it. We also use this line as a placeholder for special expenses such as studies. Mr. Stevens said we spent \$4,400 in 2022 on holiday expenses.

Ms. Grazier said the Subcommittee recommends this budget as proposed. Mr. Stevens said the Select Board total is \$22,468.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Select Board total of \$22,468. Dr. Zwaan seconded. Ms. Canada recused herself and did not vote. The motion passed 8-0-1.

### 4. Transportation

Ms. Grazier said Transportation is a \$1 placeholder.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve \$1 for the Transportation budget. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

### 5. Legal

Ms. Grazier said this budget is \$100,000 with no change from last year. Mr. Kelly said the historicals for legal are all over the map from year to year, but we try to keep the budget stable.

**MOTION:** Dr. Rowan moved to approve the legal budget of \$100,000. Dr. Zwaan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

#### 6. Trustees of Trust Funds

Ms. Grazier said there are no changes to this budget. Mr. Dean said that is a stipend that the Chair receives every year. The stipend has been the same since 2005. This is an elected three member Board that manages funds for the town.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Trustee of Trust Funds budget of \$891. Mr. Elliott seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

#### 7. Town Moderator

Ms. Grazier said this budget has gone up due to the higher number of elections: in 2024 there will be two Deliberative Sessions, four elections, and two special elections. The cost goes up. Mr. Elliott asked about the special elections. Mr. Dean said we budget for an extra special election in the event that we need another one. Mr. Elliott asked how often we think this will happen. Mr. Dean said had one in 2011 and 2014. They can pop up, so we want to budget for them if the need arises. Mr. Gwynne asked what happens to the money if there isn't a special election. Mr. Dean said it goes into the Fund Balance and then back to the taxpayers as a reduction in the tax rate. Ms. Canada said special elections can happen on the State level as well. Mr. Kelly said it's a small amount of money, generally in the \$500 range. Mr. Stevens said the YTD is \$800 for the special election and the meetings in the spring. Last year, we budgeted for one Deliberative, one election and one special election. Mr. Kelly asked what the two Deliberatives in the budget are. Mr. Dean said that would be part of the budget for the special elections. There would be two Deliberatives if there were two special elections. Dr. Zwaan asked if we've historically done that with the budget. Mr. Dean said yes, for the past six or seven years.

**MOTION:** Mr. Zigmont moved to approve the town moderator budget of \$1,351. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

#### 8. Human Resources

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers for Human Resources. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$19,346; Dental Insurance is \$3,088; Life Insurance is \$184; and Long Term Disability is \$903. The Human Resources benefits total is \$62,323. A part time position increased to full time last year, and there is an increase in wages due to this being the first full year of full time.

Dr. Zwaan asked about the titles in that Department and a historical perspective of where we were with HR five years ago versus where we're headed. Ms. Roy said her title is dual, she's the Assistant Town Manager and the HR Director, a position 100% in the HR Department. There is also a full time HR Generalist. Last year we additionally approved a part-time HR assistant, but she's still working on filling that position.

Historically, five years ago the HR Director asked for help but it was denied the first time. Then she got a part time assistant. When Ms. Roy came on, she asked for that position to go to full time and she got an additional part time position. Due to Covid, retention, legal issues, and other HR concerns have changed over time. Dr. Zwaan asked if the previous HR Director was not full time. Ms. Roy said the position was always full time, but she didn't have help. Mr. Dean said that position has been full time since 2008. Dr. Zwaan said over 5 years, it went from a one person Department to 2.5. Mr. Kelly said like IT, it's increased quite a bit, but the world has changed with technology and issues around people.

Dr. Zwaan asked if we're ok with maintaining the budgeting for the HR Director/Assistant Town Manager position fully in HR rather than half and half. Mr. Dean said the status quo makes sense for now. We're undergoing an organizational study and we'll get a report in the next month or two with recommendations. Melissa's position has the title of Assistant Town Manager, but the HR Director is a full time position. If we decide to reorganize we could look at pulling some of the budget out of HR.

Mr. Zigmont asked how many total employees the town has. Mr. Dean said 154 full time and 35 part time regular employees. Ms. Roy said seasonally, there's a 60-70% increase over the summer, and those people need paperwork, training, and onboarding too.

Mr. Zigmont said 2.5 people for HR is a low ratio for all the needs of employees and recruitment. This is a people-focused budget. Retention is a keyword this year.

Ms. Grazier said everything in the Departmental lines is level funded. Is the postage printing, etc adequate? Ms. Roy said for us it is, we're trying not to do a lot of postage. There are some times when we need to send something certified. The printer is in the Town Manager's budget, but she has her own printer just for confidential items.

Ms. Roy said the pre-screening budget is high, but there is a hope that we've had so much staff turnover this year that we see less next year.

Mr. Stevens said the HR total is \$206,534.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Human Resources total of \$206,534. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

## 9. Welfare & Human Services

Executive Assistant to the Town Manager and Welfare Administrator Pam McElroy was present to discuss the Welfare and Human Services budget. Ms. Grazier said this is important work and work that the town is mandated to do. She read a positive testimonial from a Welfare client. On paper, there's a 16% allocation of the Executive Administrative Assistant to the Town Manager, but Welfare is taking proportionately much more time, energy, and resources. There's a Case Manager quality to the types of tasks that are presented. Each call or occasion for service requires immediate intervention and support, so it's disruptive to the other projects and tasks the position is also responsible for. It will be great to separate this work out in a new Department by a separate person. Mr. Zigmont said regarding the time element, in the first six months of 2023, there were 2,500 neighbor requests, including phone, email, and walk-ins, from Welfare. Each one of those neighbors deserves attention to make sure that their needs

are looked after. That sounds like a full-time engagement. 16% of the total budget for this position seems inadequate. We often don't think about these neighbors who need assistance, but it reaches into every neighborhood. This is our opportunity to stand up for our neighbors. This is the only part-time position added in the budget. Mr. Dean said there's also a Fire Department position, for a part time Emergency Manager.

Ms. Grazier said the separation between the roles of this position doesn't mean a 16% increase in her capacity for the Town Manager; the Subcommittee felt this is more of a correction than an increase, to address everything she's already responsible for. This is case management work that merits training and skill, which Pam brings to the table, but the need is still going to grow.

Ms. Canada asked why the proposed position is part time and not full time. Are we going to find someone to do a part time role? This is a significant need. Mr. Elliott said he agrees. How different is this job from HR? We have two part time jobs, one you already can't fill - can you make this full time and have them split a role? Mr. Dean said we talked about that. Ms. McElroy said HR is employee-based, while Welfare is community-based. Dr. Zwaan said they both involve highly confidential things. In a building such as this, that is very difficult. A dual role of HR Director/Assistant Town Manager is tricky. A position of Welfare/Town Manager is tricky. Ms. McElroy said the Town Manager is officially the Welfare Director, she is the Welfare Administrator.

Dr. Zwaan said the Executive Assistant to the Town Manager counts as a full time position. Ms. McElroy said the position is 84% now, but 100% in 2024. Dr. Zwaan asked Mr. Dean if historically he's had an assistant part time. Mr. Dean said the Assistant was always a full time position. In 2005, the role was filled by Barb Blanc, who also did the HR function. When she retired, we reassessed, and in 2008 hired a full time HR Director.

Ms. Roy said we're not halfway to a full time position with this part time position. The cost of benefits would have to be included in full time, which is quite a significant jump in expenses. Mr. Zigmont said there's the question of recruitment without benefits. Mr. Kelly said this is a very stressful job, and probably consumes most of Pam's day. We need "care for the caregiver" and she needs some downtime.

Dr. Rowan said line item 55541, Direct Relief for Hotel, was \$54,135 actual this year, but there's only \$27,000 in the budget. Ms. McElroy said when the State was assisting with hotels, there was the knowledge that those were an option for people who were homeless. The use of hotels is much higher, and we're looking to decrease that by working with agencies to find affordable housing. The State is aware of the need. We're working toward making sure people are housed. The shelters, whether State or local, are full, but they're working hard to have turnover. In the winter, we have warming shelters. There have been more positive steps forward to try to stay away from hotels. We work toward keeping people in their homes, because people paying rent is a lot less expensive than a hotel. The hotel is \$800 - 1,300 per week, where rent is maybe \$1,600 -2,000 per month. The goal is to keep them in their homes and move them forward to sustain themselves, which is where the case management comes in.

Mr. Zigmont said there is an excellent narrative in the packet. These are our neighbors that are unhoused. They may have children in our schools. We need to do

everything we can do to keep them in their homes. Hotels make it difficult to keep kids in school and are expensive.

Mr. Elliott said the hotel option dates from 2020; historically there was no funding. Ms. McElroy said she started in July 2019, and she didn't have great numbers for 2019. We may have been doing hotels. The option was available prior to Covid. It may not have been for an extended period of time, like with Covid. It's a temporary fix until we can get to a permanent fix. Living in hotels is very difficult. Mr. Elliott said it's required by law to do these things.

Dr. Rowan said for line item 55079, Direct Relief - Rent, we've spent \$63,000 by June, and the previous year was \$65,000. Is the request for \$45,000 sufficient? Mr. Dean said you have to add rent and hotel. There are no expenses allocated to 2023 for hotel, those are in the rent category, so the question is "is a \$72,000 total budget enough for 2024." We don't know from year to year what it will look like. Some costs are offset by third-party reimbursements. We are willing to go with the \$72,000 number.

Dr. Rowan said this is a perennial problem. Is there involvement with the state and regional authorities to do something about the housing situation? Ms. McElroy said she doesn't think anyone is ready to answer that yet. The State is working on affordable housing, but we can't say right now that something specific is coming. There's a voucher program through the state and one through the Housing Authority, so those are the two places she suggests that folks apply. Mr. Dean said right now, we work through it case-by-case. It takes a lot of effort and energy. Pam spends a lot of time coordinating with the different agencies and EHA and beyond Exeter. Ms. Canada said regarding the rent and hotel actual, it's not even winter yet. People might be in cars or other places. She's worried that the Welfare total is short. She wants to return to the idea of having a full time person and increase the budget. She doesn't see the situation changing in the next year. How are we investing to take care of our people?

Mr. Kelly said we can table this item and talk about it at a later time if we want to have staff recalculate the position.

Dr. Zwaan said this is an essential function of what a town does, and it's mandated by the State. Do we track how this compares to other municipalities? Ms. Soutter said we're certainly meeting what we're supposed to do. No one is sent away. As for how other communities deal with their obligations, every community is different.

Mr. Dean said every community is supposed to deal with its own residents. We get information from our listserv from other towns on Welfare budgets, there's an informal discussion. We're seeing that people are going to individualized assistance and creating positions to handle Welfare.

Ms. Soutter said on Indeed, she didn't see any Welfare positions open. It'd be great to start with a 30 hour a week position, but if we don't get any candidates in three months we should have the authority to bump it up to full time. It would be wrong to wait another year to ask again. We are overburdening a great employee.

Ms. Grazier said we have great data, so we can take a data-driven look at this role. Pam has been tracking calls and external resources involved for five years. If we start with 30 hours, we have a good foundation to see if that's adequate. We also want to make sure the support budget is adequate.

Mr. Elliott said they've recommended this budget, so we should go with it and table a further discussion for next year. We have so many open positions in Exeter. We're frugal. He would go with the Human Welfare budget as specified.

Ms. Canada said if we're not filling our positions, we have to reevaluate. If we have vacant part time positions, that's not helping us. Mr. Kelly said we've heard about the difficulty of filling a part time position. Option 1 is to leave it as-is and see how it goes for the year. Option 2 is to table this until November 8th with the Human Services discussion and see the numbers for the full time aspect. Option 3 is not to make a decision, but to meet with the Select Board in December and present them with both versions. We're a budget recommendations committee, not a policy recommendations committee.

Mr. Zigmont asked if it's possible to write a motion that would have the budget as proposed as a fallback if all three options fail.

Dr. Zwaan said comparing us to other towns, should we be doing more? It seems like we've done a good job as a town. More could be done, but we do pretty well. Mr. Kelly said he feels like it's a full-time undertaking and we won't get anyone part time. His inclination would be to vote on the numbers in front of us but also get numbers on a full-time position and discuss them on November 8.

Mr. Stevens said because the new position is part-time, none of the benefits/insurance have changed. The total budget is \$144,094.

**MOTION:** Dr. Rowan moved the Welfare total of \$144,094. Mr. Zigmont seconded. Mr. Kelly said he requests that staff put together the delta for this being a full time position. The motion passed 9-0.

#### 10. Town Clerk

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers for the Town Clerk. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$70,891; Dental is \$6,177; Life Insurance is \$230; and Long Term Disability is \$761. The benefits total is \$131,377. Ms. Grazier said there are more conferences and training planned next year, so there are increases in Conference/Rooms/Meals, Travel Reimbursement, and Education/Training. Town Clerk Andie Kohler asked for an additional \$300 in line item 55308, Travel.

Dr. Rowan asked if there have been any threats or concern about security for 2024. Mr. Dean said the Police are at elections. Ms. Roy said we're not aware of any threats. We're getting new ballot machines approved by the State which addresses data security.

Ms. Grazier said line item 55308, Travel Reimbursement, has a request for \$300 in addition to the \$1,000 for \$1,300 total. Mr. Dean said this is related to certification of personnel for the Clerks. The training just happened so it's not reflected in 2023 actuals.

Ms. Roy said there is a potential retirement in this Department, so we'll need to get the rest of the staff trained up.

**MOTION:** Mr. Zigmont moved to increase line item 55308, the Town Clerk Travel budget, to \$1,300 for certifications. Dr. Zwaan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

Mr. Zigmont said some of these expenses are driven by elections, and there are four elections in 2024.

Mr. Elliott said he thought printers were in the Town Manager's budget. Mr. Dean said four printers are in the Town Clerk's budget, and everything else is in the Town Manager's budget.

Mr. Stevens said the new Town Clerk budget with the increase is \$419,906.

**MOTION:** Dr. Rowan moved to approve a Town Clerk budget of \$419,906. Mr. Elliott seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

#### 11. Elections

Ms. Grazier said this budget is up due to the additional elections, trainings, and meetings in 2024.

Dr. Zwaan asked about the technology of elections. New things were rolled out in the last year or two, is that reflected in this budget? Ms. Roy said the polling pads have already been purchased, but the service contract is in here. Mr. Dean said new the new voting booths and voting machines are coming from ARPA funds.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve an Elections budget of \$24,771. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

#### 12. Finance

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers for Finance. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$50,139; Dental is \$3,657; Life Insurance is \$275; and Long Term Disability is \$903. The total benefits are \$111,744.

Dr. Zwaan said average insurance is about \$20,000 per family. For Town employees, what percentage does the town cover? Mr. Dean said we pay an average of 80%. Different plans have different rates. Ms. Roy said there are also different union agreements.

Ms. Grazier said for line item 55014, audit fees, is that from an RFP? Mr. Stevens said no, it's last year's number plus 7.5%, but he does have an RFP out for services. It closes at the end of November. Ms. Grazier said there are bank fees, ACH and fraud protection. Mr. Stevens said it's a continuation of the program from last year. Ms. Grazier for Conference/Room/Meals as well as Travel, the Department was able to do local events this year so they underspent in 2023, but in 2024 they don't have the same local options. Contract Services is up due to the GASB contract. Mr. Stevens said this line is \$1,000 one year and \$6,000 the next, in a biannual rotation. Ms. Grazier said we're not budgeting a credit rating in 2024, is that in contract services? Mr. Stevens said he proposed a new line for that but pulled it back in the first scrub of the budget. We were hoping to re-rate the town's creditworthiness. It's a \$5,000 ask, but we can put it off until 2025.

Dr. Zwaan asked what GASB is. Mr. Stevens said the Government Accounting Standards Board evaluates our post-employment benefits other than retirement, such as healthcare.



Ms. Grazier said there's an increase in Office Supplies and paper, but otherwise it's mostly level-funded.

Mr. Stevens said the new total is \$370,133.

**MOTION:** Mr. Elliott moved to approve the Finance budget of \$370,133. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

### 13. Treasurer

Ms. Grazier said there are no changes proposed to this budget. The Subcommittee recommended adopting it as proposed. Mr. Dean said the Treasurer is moving from an elected to an appointed position, which will allow us to look at the Finance operation differently. We may be able to combine the Treasurer with another function in the office.

**MOTION:** Dr. Rowan moved to approve the Treasurer budget of \$9,962. Ms. Canada seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

### 14. Tax Collection

Ms. Roy introduced Melissa Heitz, the new Deputy Tax Collector. Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers for this Department. Mr. Stevens said Health insurance is \$30,118; Dental is \$1,668; Life Insurance is \$138. The total benefits are \$57,724. Ms. Grazier said there is a decrease in Certifications, as Melissa comes to us with the correct certifications. There are higher postage rates and higher volume of postage and mailing.

Dr. Zwaan asked if the tax collection is contracted services, and Ms. Roy said no, it's fully in-house.

Mr. Elliott asked if the Water/Sewer fund comes into this, and Mr. Kelly said the Department also handles the Water bill collection. Mr. Dean said they administer the shut-off notices as well.

Mr. Stevens said the new total is \$120,611.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Tax Collection budget of \$120,611. Ms. Canada seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

Ms. Canada left at this time.

### 15. Assessing

Mr. Dean said our Assessor, Janet Whitten, is out today, but there are very few changes to discuss.

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$21,336; Dental is \$1,099; Life insurance is \$92; Long Term Disability is \$718. The total benefits are \$42,269.

Mr. Zigmont asked about line item 55250, Revaluation, which has the note "Independent appraiser - RiverWoods." Mr. Dean said we are required via tax settlement to hire an independent appraiser. We're working on finding an appraiser approved by both parties. 2024 is a revaluation year, but the cost is baked into the Contract Services budget with MRI.

Dr. Zwaan said at one point we had an in-house tax assessor. Is using MRI advantageous? Mr. Dean said Janet has the title Tax Assessor, while MRI provides measuring and listing services and revaluation.

Mr. Stevens said the new total is \$266,062

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Assessing budget of \$266,062. Mr. Gwynne seconded. Ms. Canada had left the meeting and did not vote. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Stevens said the total Finance number is \$766,498.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Finance budget of \$766,498. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 16. Debt Service

Mr. Dean said Debt service is up 38.2% due to four projects: Westside Drive Design, the Solar Array project, the Intersection Improvement program, and the portion of Westside Drive Construction from the General Fund. These are bonds approved by Town Meeting. We get the bonds and set up an amortization schedule. There are also some projects where the bonds are maturing and retiring, such as the String Bridge bond.

Mr. Zigmont asked why the Solar Array is moving to a revolving fund. Mr. Dean said we're contemplating a warrant article to make the Solar Array Revolving fund so that we can park the expenses and revenue in that area. We won't see that project's debt service in the General Fund if that's approved.

Mr. Kelly asked if we expect construction on these four projects in 2024. Mr. Dean said yes.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Debt Service budget of \$2,069,272. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 17. Inspections/Code Enforcement

Code Enforcement Officer Doug Eastman was present to discuss the Inspections and Code Enforcement budget.

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$42,825; Dental is \$2,199; Life Insurance is \$184; Long Term Disability is \$118. The benefits total is \$83,813.

Ms. Grazier said we've had an open position of Electrical Inspector for three years. In this budget it's recommended that it be pulled. We still have a need for this service, so Doug projected a need for \$10,000-15,000 for contract services one day a week. Mr. Eastman said he needs at least \$10,000. We have some big projects coming up. Mr. Zigmont said it should be \$15,000. Mr. Kelly asked if we've been using Contract Services for this role. Mr. Eastman said no, he [Mr. Eastman] has been doing it, but it's not efficient.

Mr. Elliott asked about succession planning in the Department. Mr. Dean said we have a consultant reviewing our organization including succession planning.

Ms. Grazier said being an Electrician pays a lot more than being an Inspector, so it's hard to find someone full time.

Mr. Gwynne asked if the contractor would be doing some planned easy stuff and Mr. Eastman would respond to emergencies. Mr. Eastman said hopefully this person is diversified and can do more than electrical so we can send him out on anything.

**MOTION:** Mr. Zigmont moved to create a line item at \$15,000 to Contract Services in Inspection and Code Enforcement to cover a one day a week part time electrical inspector. Ms. Soutter seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Stevens said the new total is \$279,825.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Inspections/Code Enforcement total of \$279,825. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 18. Economic Development

Economic Development Director Darren Winham was present to discuss the Economic Development budget.

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers. Laura Zogopoulos said Health Insurance is \$28,907; Dental is \$1,989; Life Insurance is \$92; and Long Term Disability is \$868. The benefits total is \$54,858.

Ms. Grazier said Darren is completing his classwork, so we're done budgeting for it.

Dr. Rowan asked about the Department's use of interns. Mr. Winham said he hasn't used interns lately. It seems like you can get them without paying them, and you don't have to go through the bureaucratic stuff. There are UNH students that can help. Dr. Zwaan said unpaid internships are frowned upon.

Dr. Zwaan asked how we compare to other municipalities in having an Economic Developer? It's been 10 years. Mr. Dean said there's an established Economic Development presence in the region, the SAIDs group. Some communities similar to us have Economic Development staff. We're trying to stay competitive in that area. If we did not have a presence, we would be falling backwards and not able to compete in terms of bringing in businesses and working with the businesses we have. It's been a great asset.

Dr. Zwaan asked if we poach businesses from other communities. Mr. Winham said no. When we don't have vacancies in town, he'll take the information and pass it to his colleagues, and they do the same for me. We work regionally.

Mr. Stevens said the new total is \$167,860.

**MOTION:** Dr. Rowan moved to approve the Economic Development budget of \$167,860, Ms. Soutter seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 19. Town Planner

Town Planner Dave Sharples and Natural Resources Planner/Sustainability Coordinator Kristin Murphy were present to discuss the Town Planning budget.

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers. Mr. Stevens said there is no health insurance; Dental is \$3,978; Life Insurance is \$184; and Long Term Disability is \$928. The total benefits are \$47,246.

Ms. Grazier said we can reduce line item 55091, Education/Training, from \$1,000 to \$500. The Department talked about hiring, but are not going to.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to update line item 55091, Education/Training, to \$500. Dr. Zwaan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Elliott asked about the budget for grant matching. Mr. Sharples said we got two grants recently but neither had a matching requirement. We haven't used it this year, but something could come up. Dr. Zwaan asked if that budget limits the grants we apply to, and Mr. Sharples said no, if a grant comes up that requires a larger match we'll do a warrant article.

Dr. Rowan asked if Mr. Sharples is the point person for projecting the impact of climate change. Mr. Sharples said the whole town needs to be moving in that direction. The DPW does storm culverts and infrastructure. He and Kristin did a climate action plan and reviewed our flood ordinances and increased the freeboard. Dr. Rowan asked if he's part of the networks discussing this regionally. Mr. Sharples said Ms. Murphy is more focused on that. Ms. Murphy said she's on the Coastal Adaptation Workgroup. In the future, this will have a big impact on our budgets. Mr. Zigmont said Dave and Kristin's default setting is environmentally oriented and forward-looking.

Mr. Kelly asked what RPC [the Rockingham Planning Commission] does for us. Mr. Sharples said they don't work a set number of hours, but they help me out with GIS and other projects. If it were bigger, they could contract with us or find money for a grant and apply on Exeter's behalf.

Mr. Elliott said regarding the GIS Software, are we hiring for a full time position? Ms. Roy said we're recruiting. Mr. Sharples said the GIS line isn't personnel, it's a portion of our ARC GIS license. We don't get billed until November, so it looks like it's unspent.

Ms. Grazier said everything is proposed level-funded. The Subcommittee recommends adopting the budget as presented.

Mr. Stevens said the new Planning total is \$301,174.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Planning budget of \$301,174. Mr. Elliott seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

## 20. Conservation Commission

Ms. Grazier said these lines are level funded. The Subcommittee recommends adopting the budget as presented.

Ms. Grazier asked about the grant. Ms. Murphy said Renay Allen of the Energy Committee came up with the concept. There's a lot of funding from the Biden administration for Energy Efficiency programs, especially with a DEIJ focus. Exeter has a huge community of manufactured housing parks. We applied for \$200,000 to fund energy efficient upgrades in four of our housing parks, specifically those owned by the residents. We'll offer \$2,000 to 100 residents for upgrades, which qualifies them for an additional \$15,000 from the program, at no cost to them. If they don't meet the low income threshold, they would still be able to apply on their own. Ms. Roy said this is money to help them in their own home, unlike a lot of the grants we get.

Mr. Zigmont asked about the “moose plate” grant. Ms. Murphy said we got a grant of \$20,000 for improvements to Raynes Barn. There will be an additional \$70,000 cost, but she is aware of a \$50,000 grant available which she will apply for.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the Conservation Commission budget of \$9,555. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 21. CIP Planning

Ms. Grazier said the two CIP projects are Raynes Barn, which is on the deferral list but now we have possible funding options, and the Capital Reserve Fund for ADA improvements.

Ms. Grazier said it sounds like if we do a portion of Raynes Barn in 2024, waiting on the rest won't impair the structural integrity. Mr. Zigmont asked if Moose Plate funding is contingent on matching, and Ms. Murphy said no. Ms. Grazier said that's \$20,000. Ms. Murphy said there's a T-Mobile Hometown grant with funding for community spaces. The last time we applied, we didn't have enough information about how the barn was used, but we have data on events and attendees so we have a stronger case now. Dr. Zwaan asked if it makes sense not to fund it. Mr. Dean said when we deferred this project, we didn't have the moose plate grant, but now it's coming back into play. We're dealing with an 8% budget increase; when we originally looked at the budget, it was 12.5%, we took pains to reduce that. Mr. Zigmont said part of what makes our community attractive is these historical elements. Dr. Zwaan asked the total cost of this project. Mr. Sharples said after the \$20,000 grant, it would be \$56,200.

Ms. Grazier said ADA improvements was reduced to \$25,000 primarily because it wasn't used in 2023. Why wasn't it used? Mr. Dean said we don't yet have a project identified. We just did one project downtown in the public restrooms, to install a universal changing table. That will take about half of the fund, at a cost of \$13,500.

Ms. Roy said the Department that would be helping us with projects is at 50% staff. There are a ton of projects that to save the town money we would do in-house but we don't have that staff.

Mr. Stevens said we put \$25,000 in and spent \$13,500, so there is \$12,000 left.

Ms. Roy said this is a capital reserve fund so it has to be on the warrant, no matter what the amount.

Ms. Grazier said the Renewable Energy expense is a \$1 placeholder

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Renewable Energy budget of \$1. Mr. Gwynne seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 22. Zoning Board of Adjustment

Mr. Zigmont said this budget is largely level-funded. There's a small increase in Salary and Wages, bringing Recording Secretaries up to an acceptable wage.

**MOTION:** Ms. Grazier moved to approve the ZBA budget of \$4,376. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 23. Historic District Commission

Ms. Grazier said this budget also had the Recording Secretaries cost change. Everything else is level-funded.

Dr. Zwaan asked why we're reducing grant matching. Mr. Sharples said it was in two different places, so instead we gave them \$2,500 in one line item in Planning.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the HDC budget of \$1,923. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 24. Heritage Commission

Ms. Grazier said this is the same story: more money for Recording Secretaries, everything else is status quo.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Heritage Commission budget of \$1,109. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 25. Sustainability Advisory Committee

Ms. Grazier said this is not a separate budget, it's a line item in the Planning budget, line item 55384.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the total Planning and Development budget of \$765,824. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

#### 26. Media & Communications

Mr. Dean said Bob Glowacky's position has shifted to Communications Coordinator. Mr. Zigmont said last year, a new Department was created but had no funding. This year there is a request to fund the Media Coordinator role.

Ms. Grazier asked for the health numbers. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$14,402, Dental is \$550, and Life Insurance is \$46. The total benefits are \$23,127.

Mr. Zigmont said EXTV and other outputs have been separated from IT as their own Department. Some funding comes from our Comcast licenses. Mr. Dean said Bob's position is now 50% General Fund, 50% CATV. This is the General Fund allocation. Dr. Zwaan asked if the numbers haven't changed, we just created a Department? Mr. Dean said the IT/EXTV Tech used to be in the IT budget, but we took it out. Now the IT Department is Steve Bailey and Andy Swanson, and Bob's position was reclassified into a Communications Coordinator. Dr. Zwaan asked if this was approved by the Select Board. Mr. Dean said yes, this was part of the MRI reclassification review which was approved by the Board. Dr. Zwaan asked if this was budget-neutral. Mr. Dean said it adds some dollars but it's not large. The IT budget is up \$4,000.

Mr. Kelly said this also covers the CATV section. Mr. Dean said the CATV fund is administered by the Select Board. We're moving a part time position to a full time position under Bob for full staffing of Government meetings. EXTV has had a lot of turnover; one way to retain is a position with benefits.

Ms. Grazier asked why this Department doesn't have line items for things like office supplies or travel reimbursement. Ms. Roy said some of those are in the Cable TV fund. We're starting small to see how it goes. In CATV, there is travel, conferences, and similar items.

Mr. Dean said the position is reporting to the Assistant Town Manager.

Mr. Stevens said the total Media/Communications budget is \$65,691.

**MOTION:** Mr. Zigmont moved to approve the Media/Communications budget of \$65,691. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

## 27. Information Technology

IT Coordinator Steve Bailey was present to discuss the Information Technology budget.

Ms. Grazier asked for the new health numbers. Mr. Stevens said Health Insurance is \$10,706; Dental is \$2,558; Life Insurance is \$184; Long Term Disability is \$920. The total benefits are \$56,675.

Ms. Grazier said line item 55048, Computer Software, had a slight decrease for renewed server licensing. Fees for education/training and dues increased slightly. There was a hypothetical conference with travel discussed but we're not going forward with that. Mr. Bailey said he doesn't think 2024 will be a good year for it. This is a May week-long cybersecurity conference.

Ms. Grazier said Network Supplies are down, since we deployed wireless access that reduces those costs. Mr. Bailey said our phone provider is moving us from their older to newer network, so we have to replace all of our phones and some Safety Complex network equipment. Because we're moving, the cost of each phone goes up by \$5 a month. There's an unknown cost of copper lines, such as old fax lines, elevator phone lines, or alarms, so we're looking to move them to a new service.

Ms. Grazier said for email, the costs of archiving have gone up. We continue to move to Office 365 licensing, which is a 5 year transition starting in 2023. The cost is \$1,700 this year; it depends on the number of computers we replace. This will increase by \$1,200-1,300 per year.

Dr. Zwaan asked if this covers all the phones for the town, specifically the landlines. Mr. Bailey said yes. Dr. Zwaan asked if it covers cell phones, and Mr. Bailey said no cell phones.

Ms. Grazier said all devices on a five year replacement cycle.

Mr. Zigmont said there's an increase in IT equipment due to the replacement of Chinese-branded cameras around town. Mr. Bailey said this is what the State chose to do, so we are going to try and follow suit. All but four cameras would be replaced. This is for security. These cameras have been known to talk to the internet, although we've removed that ability.

Mr. Kelly said regarding line item 57003, Computers, we typically replace some, this year we're replacing 8-10. Mr. Bailey said we will replace 6 desktops and 4 laptops this year. Mr. Kelly said 22 in 2024, is there a reason? Mr. Bailey said it depends on the year. Three of five years are heavier and two are light. It's done when the device is five years old. It's a straight five year replacement cycle. Mr. Kelly asked if some could be pushed off to the next year. Mr. Bailey said for 91-A requests, there could be an issue where a Select Board personal device could be taken away. Water/Sewer has two techs on call who each bring home a laptop to monitor the SCADA system. Windows 10 is going to be end of life soon, and these devices he's replacing are Windows 10.

Ms. Grazier said her first two BRC years we had huge budget increases because replacements were pushed off. Mr. Bailey said this isn't even 20% of our devices. We have 130 devices including the PD. There's one for every employee and some have two. This is a light year. We replaced 40-45 in 2021, but we could spread that replacement over two years since they're Windows 11 machines. Dr. Zwaan said regarding Windows 10, it's not just the computers but the operating system which will be obsolete.

Mr. Stevens said the total IT budget is \$343,406.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the IT budget of \$343,406. Mr. Gwynne seconded. The motion passed 8-0. .

## 28. Miscellaneous

Mr. Kelly said the miscellaneous budget has placeholders.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve a budget of \$4 for Miscellaneous. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Stevens said one thing we did was pull the hydrant maintenance fee out of Fire into General Government, and Miscellaneous is where it lands.

Mr. Kelly said we will discuss this again in two weeks.

Mr. Kelly said these Vehicle Replacement costs are existing leases, no proposed equipment.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve the existing lease budget of \$248,495. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Dr. Zwaan asked if we're happy with leases. He always buys his vehicles. Mr. Dean said we have a mixed stock of vehicles and equipment. We have pieces of equipment that cost \$150,000-200,000. To fund our vehicle replacement program, we use lease-purchase to keep up. We don't have too many active leases; they include the Engines 4 and 5 replacement, Fire SCBA replacement, Sidewalk Tractor 57, and a lease on a patrol motorcycle. We try to keep the schedule smooth so the impact year over year doesn't spike. Mr. Stevens said this is a financing mechanism. When you're done with the five year lease, you own the vehicle. Up until now, the rates have been favorable.

Mr. Kelly asked if we anticipate other additions to capital outlay. Mr. Stevens said no.

Mr. Elliott asked if we were going to address the chipper here instead of DPW. Mr. Kelly said it was approved as part of the Tree Maintenance budget. Mr. Dean said we put it in the Highway Department budget. Mr. Stevens said the bank isn't too favorable on \$87,000, it would be better just to purchase it.

**MOTION [withdrawn]:** Ms. Soutter moved a \$1 budget for Cemeteries. Mr. Gwynne seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to withdraw her motion and Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.



**MOTION:** Dr. Rowan moved to approve the Capital Outlay of \$6,488. Dr. Zwaan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Kelly asked if Payroll Taxes and Benefits goes down to zero now. Mr. Stevens said no, there's still a budget. Health reserve, Dental, Life insurance, and Long Term Disability go to zero, but Insurance Buyout is \$182,435, FICA is \$11,311, and Medicare is \$2,645. There are no changes to the remaining lines. The new budget is \$202,615. The benefits numbers adjusted in each of the Departments is coming out of here; it was 439,436

**MOTION:** Mr. Gwynne moved to approve the Payroll Taxes and Benefits budget of \$202,615. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Stevens said the Unemployment Compensation budget is \$2,341.

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Unemployment Compensation budget of \$2,341., Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Soutter moved to approve \$246,089 for Worker's Comp. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Mr. Stevens said Fleet insurance is \$9,443. Liability insurance is \$70,408. The total is \$82,852.

**MOTION:** Ms. Grazier moved to approve the Insurance budget of \$82,852. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 8-0.

Dr. Zwaan asked for the overall Benefits & Taxes total. Mr. Stevens said \$533,897.

Mr. Dean asked for preliminary remarks on the Police Station/Fire substation. Mr. Kelly said we will bring forward a CIP project during next week's discussion and then discuss it in depth on CIP night November 16.

Mr. Zigmont said last year, the Sustainability Committee pushed net zero conditions for that building. We would still be interested in making sure those elements are part of the plan, although building costs are going up everywhere.

Dr. Rowan said she requested a list from the Chiefs of the problems the building is intended to solve in liability, safety, security, and doing their job.

Mr. Elliott would like them to address the 60% of voters who voted it down. Mr. Gwynne said he voted no because he didn't know what we were trying to do with it. Mr. Chartrand said only 42% said no. 57.1% were in favor, but it needed a supermajority.

Ms. Grazier said it's not too early to start pushing information to voters. Dr. Zwaan said our current Police Station from the perspective of a person in distress is so inadequate. He thinks where the measure failed is on the Fire side, since historically there's been a resistance to building out the Fire capacity.

Ms. Grazier said we should focus on liability, response time, and staff. Ms. Soutter said Police and Fire could give email updates out like Parks and Rec and

Water/Sewer. Mr. Gwynne said the sleeping quarters of the FD are inadequate. Their ladder truck is on the side of the building and did \$30,000 of damage because of the small bay for it.

Mr. Elliott said he didn't vote for it because it's a \$17M asset for the town that will not be visible to the town. Downtown, they're part of the community. We should keep them downtown. Mr. Gwynne said Justin Pizon told him the issue is the train tracks; the fire and ambulances are on this side of the tracks and they've gotten stuck behind a train before. There was one situation where they couldn't get over the tracks in time.

Ms. Grazier said regarding access to these staff and Departments, the FD is in situ, they respond from that building. The Police are already dispersed in the community. They're demonstrating a strong mission of community policing. The interaction you're looking for in a central hub downtown is served by them being in the community. The response time to the High School, to Riverwoods, to Watson road, is terrifying.

Mr. Zigmont said the placement is a PR problem. Why hasn't professional PR been engaged? Mr. Kelly said we have a professional being engaged for Police and Fire communications. It can't be electioneering but it's information.

Mr. Dean said this project is in the same configuration it was in in FY23. We haven't updated the website or made a new video yet. We'll be updating information in the next 30 days.

Mr. Kelly said 42% did vote against it, whether it was the snowstorm or something else. Every project that is defeated the first time usually gets slam dunked the second time because we take something back. For the Library, we took away \$1M that was superfluous and it sailed through. For the Rec project, people were vehemently opposed, but the town showed a reversal of thinking. Is there anything like that we can take away? Even if it's \$250,000, it shows we're listening. Mr. Zigmont said could survey residents to find out why people voted no. Almost half of the voters said no.

## 29. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Dr. Zwann moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Soutter seconded. The motion passed 8-0. The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary