

TOWN OF GROTON
PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED BUDGET
February 4, 2020

In Attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Administrative Assistant)

Audience Members Present

John called the Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget and Warrant Articles to order at 6:00pm.

Budget

John reported that the Operating Budget increased by approximately \$144,000. The proposed budget was discussed by the following sections:

Executive

The proposed budget is \$62,775, an increase of \$1,842.00. John explained that there was a proposed merit increase as part of the evaluation process. Merit increases ranged from 0% to 3% for staff. The Moderator increased due to more elections and due to an increase in election wages.

Miles asked where the end point was for increases for wages for Town employees. Each position should have an end point and the only way to get beyond that would be a cost of living increase or an enhanced training that would make you that much more valuable. John explained there is a salary cap on each position that was part of the wage study that was done a few years ago. Miles asked if this is available to the public. John said that it is and it was online for a while. It is not online anymore but is still available to the public. We can put this back online.

Election, Registration, Vital Statistics

The proposed budget is \$59,975, an increase of \$4,671. There was an increase here were for merit increases as well.

The ballot clerks and checklist supervisors increased because there are more elections this year and due to an increase in election wages.

Pam mentioned that she is looking at the Deputy Town Clerk line and this has gone up a lot in the last few years. Pam said she doesn't know if Ruth recalls but at the time her prior deputy left there was quite a span of time when there wasn't a Deputy and Pam had a conversation with Ruth about it and Ruth mentioned she could handle the job on her own but they are required to have a Deputy. Pam said she understands she has to have a Deputy but if she can handle the work load she doesn't understand why the wages keep going up. Pam asked what the hourly rate for the Deputy is. Sara mentioned right now before her increase in March she makes \$12.50. Pam said if that line was \$6,000, at 12.50 an hour, that is 9.2 hours a week which she thinks is plenty of time especially if she doesn't really need help. Pam said if we increase this line to \$11,000 would be over 16 hours a week which puts the hours for that office over 40 hours and she feels that is not sustainable. Pam would like to see this line reduced to \$6,000. Ann said it went up in 2016 because that was when Laura left and Ann worked to train Ruth so more money was needed. Before that it was always somewhere around \$5,000-\$6000. Ann said she looked it up and could read the budget for the last 10 years. She read the budgets and they were always lower. John said the Select Board will look at this line.

Ann asked why the supplies/advertising election decreased by so much. Sara explained the only reason it was raised in 2019 was for the voting booth that was ordered. Since this was ordered it went back down and they felt \$200 was enough for the supplies/advertising for election.

Financial Administration

The proposed budget is \$24,160, which stayed the same.

Ann asked why we budget \$4,750 for auditing but we always spend \$3,750. Sara explained that \$3,750 is the cost for Melanson Heath to do the MS535. There are times if something doesn't add up in the MS535 that they would need to do more work which isn't included. Also, if something comes up in the Town throughout the year that we would need help with they have offered to help at a certain rate so the extra would cover if either of these were to happen. We have been lucky and have not needed it as of yet but keep in in there in case we do.

Legal Expenses

The proposed budget is \$11,000, which stayed the same.

A resident asked why we didn't lower this since we didn't use all of the legal last year. John explained this is a hard one to determine from year to year since we don't when we will need an attorney. We do have some court cases for junkyard that are coming up so we increased this line by \$1,000 and decreases the general legal by \$1,000. It is a category that is hard to change because one court case can cost the Town a lot of money.

A resident asked if why the planning and zoning are separate. It was explained that they have their own line for any planning or zoning legal issues and this legal line is for anything else that may come to the town.

Personnel Administration

The proposed budget is \$71,1000, which is a decrease of \$16,650 due to having a part time Police Chief.

Planning/Zoning

The proposed budget is \$6,626, an increase of \$849.

Ann asked why there is \$151.00 under Zoning advertising/notices. It was brought up that if it has to do with the zoning ordinance from last year before the town meeting that it should come out of the master plan and zoning line. Sara will look into this and if that is the case this will be reallocated.

General Government Buildings

The proposed budget is \$22,405, a decrease of \$1,700 for the Transfer Station since they completed the painting and decreasing the Town House.

Cemeteries

The proposed budget is \$5,802, a decrease of \$349 which is for supplies.

Miles asked if repairs for cemetery is contracted out. It is. Miles asked what is the anticipated for this year's work. Sara explained the cemetery notes are Bob Clay and Son for repairs to Rolfe Cemetery, tree and debris removal on River Road, Union and Rolfe Cemetery, some signage at River Road and landscaping for including tree planting and drainage.

Miles also asked if the contracted work was why what was budgeted and spent were exactly the same for repairs and maintenance and salaries/lawn care. John explained that they did contract out all of the work including the lawn care. He explained that Harley Putnam did some work on the gates and Bob Clay did some work on the cemeteries for tree removal, etc. Sara said that she believes his name is Rob Braley from Braley's helping hands was hired for the lawn care and clean up. John and Sara couldn't remember his first name but will look into this.

General Insurance

The proposed budget is \$14,532, a decrease of \$349 which was an increase in costs for 2020 for Property & Liability Insurance but a decrease for the Workmen's Compensation line.

Advertising and Regional Associations

The proposed budget is \$4,450, an increase of \$2,025 due to added the Groton Historical Society (GHS) and NLRA here instead of doing warrant articles every year. This has come up in the past at a few meetings as a recommendation to add to the budget so this was finally done.

Ann asked why GHS and NLRA were added here. John explained because of the regional associations.

Other General Government

The proposed budget is \$9,251, which is a decrease of \$400. The grants will be offset by revenues.

Police

The proposed budget is \$99,649, a decrease of \$8,099 which was in the salary due to a part time Police Chief and in getting rid of Special Operations Unit.

Miles asked whose decision it was to do away with the SOU. Sara explained that when the Town had meetings with the Sheriffs Department and the board for hiring the Police Chief, it was recommended by those agencies to remove this. They said we probably kept it because EJ was on the SOU but they said it was no longer needed. Then when the Police Chief came on he met with the Select Board and it was agreed to remove this. Miles said that is not accurate information, the SOU was here before EJ was on it. Miles said that there was a discussion at Town Meeting years ago as some people were opposed to the expense. Miles said what are we going to do if we need them. The Police Chief stated that State Police would cover for us and use their tactical team. Miles asked if there is a fee for this. The Police Chief said he didn't think so but would confirm this. Miles said we should because we shouldn't be able to use the SOU service if we are not paying for it. Tony mentioned that other towns use State Police Tactical and are not charged. The Chief has been trying to reach out to the SOU and can't get ahold of anyone. Miles concern is if we need them it was an insurance for the town to cover. Miles said that we should get clarification on this just in case it is needed. The Police Chief and John mentioned that the Chief would look into this to make sure there is no charge for the State Police Tactical team.

Pam asked how many hours the Chief of Police will be working. Sara explained the offer letter stated 25-29 hours.

Miles asked if the gas line was correct with only \$221.00 being spent. It was explained that this is correct as the cruiser was only used to move it from one place to another since we didn't have a Police Department in 2019.

Fire and Ambulance

The proposed budget is \$102,651, an increase of \$1,301 which is for the \$1,400 increase for Lakes Region Mutual Aid.

Ann asked about the Fire Chief Stipend and asked if the Fire Chief responds to the Town when they reach out. He wasn't always available and the Select Board met with him and told him they need to be more available. Pam asked if this position is appointed. John said yes by the Select Board. They are aware of the lack of response and are working on it.

Miles asked about the Contracted Services for Rumney and why it was over in 2019. It was explained that a bill came in after we closed out 2018. The Select Board met with them and Tony can confirm that they are responding more to calls and assisting Hebron more than they have been.

Pam asked about Lakes Region Mutual Aid and how it keeps increasing. Tony explained they just did upgrade on radio towers, there is a flat fee for hazardous materials, insurance charges, labor, etc. There is a formula that is used. Tony mentioned that this is definitely needed and no way around it.

Miles said that the Fire Capital Reserve Fund is at a standstill. We are committed with Hebron so he asked what would we use this fund for. John mentioned they have only thought about hydrants. Miles asked if this money can be transferred to the Town Garage and he didn't see any money being put into the garage this year. It was explained that there is \$25,000 being proposed to put into the Capital Reserve Fund. The Select Board said we will reach out to the DRA to see what can be done but since it isn't on the warrant this year, it will have to be done next year.

Emergency Management

The proposed budget is \$1,278, an increase of \$375 which is due to stipends for the EMD and Deputy. Pam asked who is the emergency management director. John said Bill Oakley and Patti Oakley is the deputy. Sara explained they have been very helpful and involved.

Highway Administration

The proposed budget is \$83,965, an increase of \$4,748 which is in the Road Agent Wages and the assistant wages due to merit increases.

Miles said that the math is a merit increase of almost 9% and wanted to know if this is because he was compared to what other towns are paying. He said it is nothing against Bubba as he knows he is doing a great job. John said it is for the amount of work being done and yes, comparing to other towns. This was part of the wage study as well and still falls within the range.

Highways and Streets

The proposed budget is \$80,301, which stayed the same.

Miles said we have been contracting out a bunch of work but he thinks we should make a commitment to either contract out or stay the way it is with the Town doing the work. Bubba mentioned that we have had a lot of storms so when we put the contracted services line on the budget, it was to test it and see how it goes. We couldn't test this because all money was spent on the storm in 2019 and not on the other work that was planned on. We are trying to get back to doing the work but in a lot of cases we don't have the equipment needed. In the past, maintenance wasn't always done and they fell behind and are trying to catch up. By next year or the year after Bubba feels they will have caught up and be in better shape. John said as the Select Board they are also trying to find the balance between this.

A resident asked why the vehicle maintenance is still high if we want to get a new truck. It was explained it will go down but not this year since we have the Dodge. It just came out of the shop and it was over \$7,000.00 which is almost half of this budget line already. Bubbas said the Dodge is what has cost us so much and he believes it really was a lemon. A resident stated they hope we are not replacing it with another Dodge. We are not planning on it.

Streets and Lighting

The proposed budget is \$1,100, which stayed the same as last year.

Sanitation – Monitoring

The proposed budget is \$9,000, which is an increase of \$2,625 due to the new PFAS testing that has to be done.

Solid Waste Disposal

The proposed budget is \$76,765, an increase of \$11,504 due to wages for merit increases and attributed to the increase in transportation costs/solid waste but the recycle costs went down.

It was asked if we are doing any recycling. It was explained we are still recycling aluminum, scrap metal, batteries, electronics, etc. We never really were recycling the rest of the stuff but we were just paying for it.

It was asked why the wages was over last year. Norm explained that Richard was out a lot so when he was out the Highway covered and their pay is more.

Health Administration

The proposed budget is \$1,588, which stayed the same as last year.

Miles said we have been putting money aside for the water to be tested and we really should test this. We will look into this and have it tested.

Health Agencies and Hospitals

The proposed budget is \$4,693, an increase of \$38 which was because Pemi Baker went up \$38.

Welfare

The proposed budget is \$5,544, which was a decrease of \$1,500 for vendor payment. We did some research and since 2014 we have been around \$2,000. We didn't want to lower it to that amount since even though we didn't use the entire budget last year for the vendor payments that we still didn't decrease the vendor payments by too much. If someone qualifies for assistance, we are required to provide it and are not able to predict what each year will bring.

Culture and Recreation

The proposed budget is \$8,186, a decrease of \$374.

Parks and Recreation

The proposed budget is \$6,239, an increase of \$250 due to adding a section for Old Home Day.

Miles asked if anyone else used the electrical. It was explained that there were some parties but they didn't use the electrical. Miles said that if it isn't being used why are we paying for it.

Someone mentioned we could we rent it. Pam said she likes that we have the electrical and she doesn't think that residents should have to pay.

Miles said there were talks about it being used for other things and he doesn't like when money is wasted and feels like this could be a waste. Sara mentioned for Old Home Day alone is worth it due to not having to get the gas for the generators, the lights, etc.

Dawn said a lot of people use the park and she drives by all the time and it is always in use.

Miles asked about the new line for Old Home Day and why it was there. John explained that we want to have a fund because we depend on the donation only right now and if we don't get it, we wouldn't be able to have Old Home Day. Pam said if the town wants Old Home Day, they should have the money for it like other towns but we will always try for the donation.

Pam asked how much Groton uses the Tapply Thompson Community Center. It was explained that it is used for after school and summer programs. Sara will reach out to see how much Groton uses it. Dawn said there are adult classes too that Groton can use.

Library

The proposed budget is \$2, a decrease of \$499 due to using the Hebron Library. There is a contract but it is paid out of the library fund.

Patriotic Purposes

The proposed budget is \$100, which stayed the same as last year.

Conservation

The proposed budget is \$1,845, a decrease of \$125 due to workshops.

Warrant Articles

The proposed Warrant Articles were reviewed:

Article 1: The Town Officials

Article 2: Operating Budget \$766,796

Article 3: \$250,000 for Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Grant

This is for the purpose of ensuring the availability of matching funds for a NBRC Grant the Town applied for regarding the Sculptured Rocks Road paving project. The project total cost is estimated to be \$500,000.00 with the 50% federal share being \$250,000.00 and the Town's 50% share being \$250,000.00.

Bubba explained this would be underdrain, culverts and road being ground and paved from the beginning to right past the state park. There is about 6-8 culverts that will be replaced; there is a part of the road that is all just on ledge so this part of the road would be raised to bring it all above ledge with drainage on each side of the road and get bigger culverts; Sara and I talked to Senator Guida to see if there was any state money for that road since most of the traffic is due to the State Park; Bubba met with State agencies who agreed work needed to be done but wouldn't give money; Bubba and Sara went to meeting they all wanted internet and other items and we thought it was a pipe dream; Sara said she thinks storms have helped us because we have had HSEM, FEMA and other state agencies out and they are appalled at the condition of the road. Bubba and Tony said that if this doesn't pass, we won't get this money again. John

said this would put all paved roads in decent shape.

Bubba said he thinks that he would like to put the Fire CRF Money into the Disaster Relief Fund because we have used almost all of this money and if there is another storm we will be in trouble.

Article 4: \$69,000 for previously established Capital Reserve Funds

Town House CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2019 balance: \$47,192.85): \$5,000
Disaster Relief CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2019 balance: \$5,135.52): \$25,000
Heavy Equipment CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2019 balance: \$62,085.72): \$5,000
Atwell/Orange Brook CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2019 balance: \$6,220.41): \$2,000
Assessing Reval CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2019 balance: \$27,623.77): \$7,000
Public Works CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2019 balance: \$46,624.98): \$25,000
Total Capital Reserve Funds \$69,000

Article 5: \$100,000 for repair/reconstruction of North Groton Road

This would be to finish the work on North Groton Road. John mentioned this would be putting the final coat from Helens to Halls Brook. Bubba mentioned that we did a leveling course and will do a wear course on it. The Roads this year have had a lot of frost heaves damage this year and this is the most cost-effective way to handle the road and save the roads. The roads that we started with are deteriorating so we need to look at how we can keep the roads in good condition and take care of the roads we have even after work is done. They used to do work and let it go for 25 years but this cannot be done anymore.

Pam said in light of the increase in taxes, and the increase in the budget, she thinks we should talk at town meeting about postponing this one year. Bubba said he would not recommend to and he feels if we don't cover this and if we wait a year or two, we could waste what we did for work. Pam said if this wasn't done it would level fund the budget. John said he understands this as well, and this was the Select Boards concern as well, but they feel what was presented is important. Tony said that the coat that is on it just takes the rough spots out and this will bond it. If not bonded it could bust out so it wouldn't be cost effective not to. Tony agrees it is up to the Town and if they don't vote in favor then we obviously won't do it.

Miles asked how much was retained in the fund balance. Sara went and got the information and it is \$160,281 which was 5.41%. The minimum they recommend is 5% and the Select Board applied as much as they could to keep the tax rate down.

Article 6: \$130,000 New Truck

This would be for a new Dump Truck with plow and wing for \$130,000.00. There is currently a little over \$18,000.00 in the CRF that we could use. We have put a lot of money into the Dodge. The Dodge would also be traded in towards this cost. Also, we have applied for a USDA grant for \$50,000.00 that if we are awarded would go towards this.

This would replace the Dodge. The amount showing in the total is \$130,000.00 even though other money would be applied. DRA helped with the wording and explained we have to word it as if we don't have any other amounts being applied, even though the grant may be applied and the trade in but they are all what ifs and not set amounts.

Article 7: \$25,000 repair of Groton roads

This is for the repair of Groton roads. It was previously for Groton paved roads but the paved was removed so it can be used on all of Groton town-maintained roads including gravel roads, ditching, etc.

Ann recommended adding this to the budget. It was agreed to talk about this next year.

Article 8: \$13,785 Slabs for Dumpsters at the Transfer Station

Slabs at Transfer Station: Norm submitted a warrant article for the construction of a slabs for dumpsters at the Transfer Station. John mentioned one of the issues at the Transfer Station is that our trash goes by weight and the rain weighs things down so eventually a roof will go over them to keep the rain and snow off. This will save the town money. It can sometimes be a ton more or so. Norm said that when they pack them down and when the companies have to move the dumpsters they can't get back into place. If they are on the slabs, they can move them and clean them out and will help when the roofs are installed in the future.

A resident asked if we could use a tarp to cover them. It was explained this wouldn't work because the snow, rain, ice gets on it and is hard to remove or ends up in the dumpster anyway.

Article 9: \$10,400 Demolition of Old Library and Town Office

The Town voted to allow the town to demo the old library/town office building. We got a quote for \$10,400.00 to do so.

It was asked if the town has looked at ways to get rid of it at no cost- we have looked at it in many ways; it was asked about the fire department- we looked into it too many reasons not to for training- wires, near river, etc. This is a low quote. There is a cat in the basement so there was a concern to make sure the cat gets out.

Article 10: Contract with Hebron for Library Services pursuant to RSA 202-A:4-b for one year

This was submitted by the Library Trustees which is for the same contract as last year. There will be no funds from the Town's budget for this; the funds will come from the Library Trustees account.

A resident asked how much the contract is for. It is \$2,000 and a lot of residents use the Hebron Library.

Article 11 By Petition: Resolution, Act on Climate Pollution

By petition of 25 or more eligible voters of the town of Groton, NH, we the town of Groton hereby call upon our State and Federal elected representatives to enact carbon-pricing legislation to protect New Hampshire from the costs and environmental risks of continued climate inaction. To protect households, we support a Carbon Fee and Dividend approach that charges fossil fuel producers for their carbon pollution and rebates the money collected to all residents on an equal basis. Enacting a Carbon Cash-Back program decreases long-term fossil-fuel dependence, aids in the economic transition for energy consumers, and keeps local energy dollars in New Hampshire's economy. Carbon Cash-Back has been championed by US economists (Jan 17, 2019 WSJ) as the most effective and fair way to deliver rapid reductions in harmful carbon emissions at the scale required for our safety.

We expect our representatives to lead in this critical moment for the health and well-being of our citizens and for the protection of New Hampshire's natural resources upon which we all rely.

The record of the vote approving this article shall be transmitted by written notice to Groton's State Legislators, to the Governor of New Hampshire, to Groton's Congressional Delegation, and to the President of the United States, informing them of the instructions from their constituents, by Groton's Select Board, within 30 days of this vote. (Submitted by Petition)

Dawn spoke to this as she submitted this. She read a handout that she also gave to the residents. The information on the handout was as follows:

Question: What is Carbon Fee and Dividend?

Answer: Carbon Fee and Dividend is a policy proposal intended to charge producers for the costs of burning fossil fuels that are borne by society. Economists say it is the best first step to reduce the risk of catastrophic climate change.

CCL's Carbon Fee and Dividend proposal [1] works like this:

- A fee is placed on fossil fuels at the first point of sale, as near as possible to the well, mine, or port of entry. This fee starts at \$15 per ton of CO₂-equivalent emissions, and increases each year by \$10 per ton. This will require far less bureaucracy than pollution-point (power plants, factories, etc.) monitoring and enforcement.
- All of the net proceeds are then divided up and provided to American households, equally per person, as a monthly "carbon dividend." About 58 percent of taxpayers would receive more in their dividend payments than higher energy prices would cost them. [2]
- A border carbon adjustment (BCA) is placed on carbon-intensive goods imported from or exported to countries without an equivalent price on carbon. This adjustment discourages businesses from moving to more permissive regimes and encourages other nations to adopt similar carbon pricing.

A predictably increasing carbon fee will send a clear market signal that will unleash innovation and investment in technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It will also encourage climate-friendly consumer behavior while helping families cope with the cost of the transition.

Dawn said when she had her printing business, she tried to stay environmentally friendly. We all have to heat our houses and drive our cars the dividend would help offset these things and puts the choice in the consumer

John believes there is an issue in the carbon. The fee will be put on everything produced with fossil fuel so the cost of living will go up so how do we know the dividend will cover this Dawn said the research shows 50% will get a higher dividend. It was mentioned that there will be an admin fee to collect which would be by the government.

John said there are other ways to reduce your carbon footprint, we waste so much in this world. Dawn said she agrees with John and when she first heard she wasn't in favor of this but our citizens now have the option to buy better items. She feels this is one tool in the toolbox and we need to let the state and federal agencies know we care.

A resident said the challenge she sees is we have no control of the dividend. They say monthly but our outlay will increase which means we will go to cheaper products made in other countries.

It was asked if it is imported only? No, it isn't.

It was asked if other towns are doing this and it was explained that there are many other towns that are doing this. A resident said that Sununu is against this.

There were questions on the dividends and it was agreed that it is very confusing since there is no exact on the amounts that would be received.

John said that what he is going to say isn't actually pertains to this. He feels we are using global warming as way to drive business such as electric cars, organics, etc. We do want to protect the environment and we do need to be careful but there are other ways. John said he will definitely read this and get more information before the vote as there is a lot of good information there.

Pam asked that since it mentions fossil fuel producers, that term is open ended. Does this count wood and those that cut the wood and sell it to us? It was explained that it doesn't, oil is fossil fuel but wood isn't a fossil fuel although it does release carbon.

Article 12: Transact any other business that may legally come before the Town

Deliberation

The Selectmen deliberated on the following items.

- The only recommended change was for the Deputy to be changed to \$6,000. The Select Board and Ruth talked and agreed to lower it to \$9,000 and see what the townspeople say at Town Meeting. Ruth will speak to this at Town Meeting.
- It was agreed that Sara will make the change and let the Select Board know when it is ready to be signed. Also, the MS-636 will need to be signed. **John motioned to come in and sign the warrant and the MS-636 once it is ready, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to close the public hearing at 7:52pm, Ron 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant