

TOWN OF GROTON
PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED BUDGET
February 3, 2021

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 of \$792,367 which increased by \$27,571.00 which the majority of this increase was from moving Groton Paved Roads to the Highway Budget per the Townspeople's recommendation since it has been a warrant article every year and is needed. The proposed budget was discussed by the following sections:

General Government

John mention that the General Government totals \$292,122 which increased by \$2,046 from last year. This consists of Executive, Election, Registration, Vital Statistics, Financial Administration, Legal Expenses, Personnel Administration, Planning and Zoning, General Government Buildings, Cemeteries, General Insurance, Advertising and Regional and Other General Government. The increases in this section come from the merit increases.

Executive

The proposed budget is \$63,689, an increase of \$914.00. John explained that there was a proposed merit increase as part of the evaluation process. Merit increases ranged from 0% to 3% for staff.

Pam Hamel said that she noticed that there are quite a few lines that we were over budget but there was no increase for this year to reflect that, for example telephone and internet was more but this wasn't increased.

It was explained that the payroll is over for almost everyone because of the way the year ended so there was an extra week of payroll in 2020 that won't be there for 2021. She also explained that some of the bills from 2019 were paid in 2020 due to when 2019 was closed out to do the end of year reporting and when the bills were received so for some things like the telephone, internet, electric, etc. there was an extra bill in 2020 from 2019 that won't be there for 2021.

Pam also mentioned that computer maintenance was more than what was budgeted. It was explained that the carpet installation was done in 2020 and when this was budgeted for the computer maintenance was not taken into consideration and the computers had to be moved before the carpets were installed and then moved back after. This will not be a concern for 2021 as there will not be any carpets installed.

A resident asked why there is hiring expenses under executive and they wanted to know if the Town is planning on making changes. It was explained that this line is for when hiring for all departments when people are hired and if background checks, etc. are done. Right now, we have a full staff but if it is decided to hire a part time Police Officer, or if someone leaves the Town and we have to hire a replacement this line will be needed. You never know what could come up.

Election, Registration, Vital Statistics

The proposed budget is \$56,548, a decrease of \$1,427. There was an increase here were for merit increases as well. The ballot clerks and checklist supervisors decreased because there are less elections this year and due to a decrease in election wages.

Ann asked if the Town Clerk Tax Collector expenses line was over budget due to going to the credit card and the ACH charges and fees. This was confirmed that is the reason for the increase.

A resident asked if the phone line under Town Clerk/Tax Collector is a separate line than the phone line listed under executive. It was explained that it is. We get billed separately for each phone line and internet which is the Select Board office, the Town Clerk/Tax Collector's office, the Police Department, the Transfer Station, the Highway Department and there is a line for the security system. So, each department will have the phone under their budget.

Miles pointed out that he went through all of the wages lines and it appears for most of them it is a 3% wage increase but the Town Clerk/Tax Collector Salary was around 4.5%. It was agreed that this should have been 3% as well which would be \$918.00 increase which would bring this line to \$31,524.00 so this will be corrected.

Deb Johnson asked if the Select Board sees a need for increases if need to go to electronically for the Town meeting. John said that due to emergency order #83, the Town can delay voting to the second Tuesday of April, May, June, or July and may postpone the business or deliberative session of the annual meeting to one or more dates later on. Therefore, the Selectmen decided that they want to keep the elections on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 and postpone the deliberative session until the second Saturday in May, which is May 8, 2021. John explained that if we cannot have the meeting inside due to COVID-19 we will be having it outside at the park and if needed we can rent tents. The voting will still be done in March and will be done inside like the other elections that have been done and have worked just fine. Deb said what about the voting on the bond. John mentioned it would be done in May and we have checked with the bond counsel and are okay to change it.

Financial Administration

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

Legal Expenses

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

Personnel Administration

The proposed budget is \$75,700, which is an increase of \$4,600 due to increase in Retirement and in Health Insurance.

Pam said that it is her understanding that the NHRS will be increasing. Sara said that it will be increasing which is why the line was increased and that the increases don't go into effect until 7/1/2021 so it isn't for the entire year. It was explained that the amount we were over in 2021 was for the extra paycheck and for Bubba working so many hours for FEMA, storm damages, and grant projects which will not be as much in 2021. He ended up working more than the hours we plan on this. It was explained that any hours we worked on the FEMA we didn't get reimbursed from FEMA so this was offset. This is the same for the FICA/Medicare line. Pam said that we don't pay Social Security for those that have NHRS. Sara explained that is still the case but we do pay Medicare.

Sherry asked if we pay FEMA or if they pay us for what is done. Sara explained that we don't pay FEMA any money but the way it works is FEMA will give the cost for what it is to fix the damages. Out of that cost FEMA pays 75% and the Town is responsible for 25%. The smaller projects, which were under the \$100,000.00 threshold do get the 75% paid to the Town right away and the Town can use those funds for the project. The larger projects, over the \$100,000.00 threshold do not pay up front, it is a reimbursement system so the Town has to pay for the entire work and then submit proof of payment in order to be reimbursed the 75%. That is why some parts of the budget look higher but it is offset by the FEMA reimbursement. Bubba explained that we do pay for this but we are reimbursed 75% and we are reimbursed for an time we spent on the administrative side of it as well. John also mentioned that they don't immediately give us the money either, it takes a lot of time and follow up to request the reimbursements.

Planning/Zoning

The proposed budget is \$6,816, an increase of \$190.

General Government Buildings

The proposed budget is \$22,900, a decrease of \$495.

A resident asked if we could look at lowering the heat. It was explained that the cost of oil/fuel is increasing as we speak so we don't want to decrease this and then get into a situation that we can't afford it. They also recommended lowering the Town Garage maintenance. John mentioned we can't really lower the town garage as we don't know what repairs would need to be made especially if we don't move the building. John said they can look at this and see if there is any where they can make changes.

Bill Jolly asks where the extra money goes that isn't spent from the budget. It was explained that it goes back to the general fund. Bill asked how these funds are used. John mentioned that those funds are used to offset the taxes. We apply money to the tax rate to lower it.

Miles said that he knows units were installed for air conditioning and he asked if it can be used towards heat as well. John said it can. Miles asked if we should look at this going forward for heat savings. John mentioned that we noticed an increase in the electric bill so far from using these for heat so we are addressing that. They are more designed to compliment the heat system then to be the heat system so if we need to get the heat up faster, we can use both of them. These were installed more for the cooling aspect since we are considered a cooling station. A resident mentioned that the mini splits are an electric element so it takes more to heat it up. Sara explained that the company explained that when it starts to get cooler outside you can use the mini splits to take the chill off but they are not meant for the extreme cold weather like we get up here. They said it would take too much electricity to make it work to heat it where we would need it to be.

Cemeteries

The proposed budget is \$5,152, a decrease of \$650 which was mostly under the River Road Cemetery.

General Insurance

The proposed budget is \$14,446, a decrease of \$86 which was an increase in costs for 2021 for Property & Liability Insurance but a decrease for the Workmen's Compensation line.

A resident asked why did workers comp go down. Sara explained that it didn't actually go down but there was a credit from previous year that brought this cost down.

Advertising and Regional Associations

The proposed budget is \$4,450, which stayed the same as last year.

Other General Government

The proposed budget is \$7,261, which is a decrease of \$1,990. The grants line decreased and will be offset by revenues.

Slim asked what the Forestry line is used for. Sara explained that when we get report of cuts, we have a Forester that goes out to make sure that they reported exactly what was cut, that it matches up to the values they are reporting, the forms are filled out correctly, etc.

Police

The proposed budget is \$95,103, a decrease of \$4,546 which was due to the decrease in prosecutor charges.

A resident asked why the prosecution costs went down. We still get the same coverage ins services but is a better value.

Slim asked why part time still in there as he thought that it was agreed to not hire a part time officer. John said that the Town never said they wouldn't do a part time officer it was just that we struggled to find help in the past but it was left in there in case we do find help. Chief Bagan said that he is looking to see if he can find help to fill in the gaps of when he cannot be here and to help with coverage. Tony said that since Chief came in and was new last year, this gives him the chance to know where to find help. John said that if we are going to have a Police Department that it would be nice to have at least two people, a Chief and a part time officer to allow for decent coverage. Tony explained that Chief only works 25-29 hours.

Miles mentioned that he would like to request the opportunity to circle back on the budget in its entirety because he anticipates making a grand bargain by the end of the night.

Miles mentioned for anyone who doesn't know, he is a retired Police Officer himself. As Joe Pivrotto was fond of saying there is not a lot of heavy lifting as far as police work is concerned here in Groton. Miles asked if this Police Chief has been able to adequately perform the duties and handle everything necessary up this point. The Select Board agreed that he is. Miles said that people need to remember that if there is not a police officer available for Groton that the State Police will respond. Miles said what he has seen of the Chief up to this point he likes but he doesn't know him very well. Miles said that any officer that applies themselves as they should in the Town should be able to handle for the Town of 593 people. Miles said as he recalls they have addressed this several times over the years and since he has moved here there has been at least two if not three attempts to completely abolish the police department. He doesn't think the part time line should be funded at all and that is one of the things he is looking to eliminate which is the \$18,750.00.

John mentioned this line can be changed to \$1 but that would be up to someone to amend it at Town Meeting and they can vote on this at Town Meeting. John said that they need to keep in mind that it can take the State Police take a long time to show up, sometimes a few hours or even the next day to follow up. Slim said that they have tested this and they do show up quickly. John said that is only if they are in the area but if not, it will take time but having officers in Town more often allows for quicker response times. John said that he wasn't all for the Police Department in the past so he hears what they are saying but since we didn't abolish the Police Department, you never know when the emergency will come up so if you have a Police Department you might as well have a Police Department but the Select Board will

listen to the Townspeople and what they want. Tony wanted to add that he is on the Fire Department and they have waited 1-2 hours for the State Police to respond to accidents and stuff. Slim said that Nick said at last year's meeting that there are troopers in Plymouth that will respond. Tony said that from experience in both Hebron and Groton they wait at least an hour. John said he thinks at the meeting last year they were referring to a serious situation like an active shooter or something then they will definitely respond. John said from the beginning that we are a small town and most people have their own protection and don't have a lot to worry about but since we do have a department, we should make sure it is providing coverage.

A resident wanted to respond to the comment about everyone having their own protection, if we choose to use that we would need an officer there to respond. She doesn't think this is the best comment to use to show the need of this. She had an instance where they had to call because something was going on at the neighbors and it took a long time.

Tony Tavares asked if we are advertising for a part time officer yet. It was explained this has not been posted yet so Tony said maybe we should. Tony also added that he had a situation a couple years back where police were needed and our Chief was out of Town. He called 911 and state police only responded by phone which wasn't what they needed for that situation. Chief Bagan said that he is looking around and talking to other departments but it may be hard. He would like to get someone who is full time certified that we don't have to put through the academy and that will be able to cover by himself which may be hard to fill. Chief said he does the best with the hours he is on but he thinks the Town could benefit from having more coverage.

Sherry asked if he knows any part time officers in other towns that may want to do it. He said that is what he is working on passing he word around.

Pam said you would be paying the person \$20/hr. for 18 hours a week so it adds up and a lot of times it isn't when you need coverage so we would still need the State Police. Even more than that there are other items that cost when hiring which are the uniforms, weapons, social security, FICA, which also adds up and is under other budget lines.

A resident said they would rather think of the Police Department as proactive instead of reactive so they don't just show up when there is a problem. It is more important to eliminate the problem. A part time officer would give us more hours on the road in town which would be beneficial for the Town.

Miles asked the Chief if there is active mutual aid with other towns. Chief Bagan said there is. Miles asked if Chief would respond to calls when he isn't on duty, is he on call? Chief Bagan said he is for emergencies for serious incidents such as fatal accidents, risk of life, shootings, etc.

Miles said that his recollection is that the town historically provided the Board of Selectmen with two options. To have a part time department with a part time chief and part time officer or a full time chief. In the past we have been burned when we paid to send someone through the academy and then he left which happens all of the time when you don't have a contractual agreement and even those are flimsy.

Slim asked how it would work with one cruiser. John explained they would work opposite times so they would share the cruiser.

A resident shared that his daughter was in an accident and State Police showed up. He said we haven't had the best coverage in the past. John said we cannot keep comparing the past we have to look at what we have now and we are confident that in the case of an emergency Chief Bagan will be there.

Bill said we will never have a full-time department. When he was a part time officer, they had pagers back then and the officer would agree to take the call and they would get an extra pay for being on call. Also, they split the responsibility with neighboring towns. Bill is glad that Mike is here but doesn't think we need another officer because there will still be a good chance that the state police are going to have to respond to calls.

A resident asked why the equipment line is over. Sara explained that is because Chief Bagan ordered radar signs. He was way under in his budget so the Select Board approved him to order these which would put him over in this line but is still way under for his overall budget. John mentioned that because we don't have complete coverage in Town, they thought the signs would help to make people aware of their speed and slow down. Chief Bagan brought out one of the signs for the people to see. He said these were not the most expensive ones, they were the middle of the line but the most durable ones. He stated that it has been proven to help keep the speed down. They allow him to post them at different locations. The resident asked why they didn't wait until next year. John mentioned since the money was already budgeted and considered for taxes it was better to do it this year instead of raising the money again next year for it.

A resident asked how much is in the unreserved fund balance from last year. It was explained we do not have the exact number but the Select Board used a lot of the money to reduce the tax rate so we are way under what we have had in the past. Pam mentioned that the NH PDIP account has about \$380,000.00 in it. Sara mentioned that there are different accounts and terminology that confuses people. There is the unreserved fund balance also can be called the Unassigned fund balance which are the amounts that are available for any purpose which is what the Select Board used to reduce the tax rate. The general fund is all funds not reported in another fund. This money is either in our Meredith Village Savings bank (MVSb) where we pay bills out of or is put into the PDIP account that Pam just mentioned where it gains interest and when needed gets transferred out to pay bills. Sara and Pam explained that the unreserved fund balance money is rolled up in the money we have in our PDIP/ MVSb accounts, it is not extra money which is where people get confused. The unreserved fund balance looks at the money we have budgeted, or have to spend, and the money we bring in to see how much we could apply towards the tax rate or other items if needed. John said that it is confusing and even more confusing is what we vote on in March, well May this year, we don't set the tax rate for until November for December due date.

Bill asked if that \$380,000.00 goes towards this budget. Sara explained that money will be used to pay bills. Once the money we have in MVSb gets low, the Treasurer will transfer the money out of PDIP to MVSb to help pay the bills which is what we budgeted for. This is money that will be used. We like to keep it in PDIP as long as we can but have to transfer it out when needed. John mentioned that the PDIP account gains more interest so we keep it there as long as we can. Tony mentioned that we pay \$80,000.00 towards the school alone each month which isn't in the operating budget. John explained that we approve this budget and then when we set the tax rate it looks at the budget, warrant, school bill, etc. and it looks at our revenues to say this is what needs to be raised in taxes. Their number is always higher so the Select Board then looks at the unreserved fund balance to see how much money could be applied so that we don't have to raise as much from taxes. Bill asked if this is discussed at Town Meeting. John and Tony mentioned that when the tax rate is set, we do discuss it in the Select Board meeting so people know what the tax rate is and how much we applied from the unreserved funds

balance. Pam said if you look at the front page of the budget, last years approved budget was \$1,362,981. The taxes you just paid were to raise that amount but only \$1,266,338.43 was spent so the additional \$100,000.00 is known as the unreserved fund balance since it was money that was raised and can be applied to the tax rate. Sara explained that it isn't an additional \$100,000.00 in the fund balance than what is in our accounts, it is the same money but shows the amount of money we have that we could apply to the tax rate.

Slim asked who is the Animal Control for the Town which shows \$500.00. Sara explained that our Police Department is Animal Control and this money is if we have to pay one of the shelters for taking an animal or any other costs related to Animal Control.

Sherry asked why there is only \$1 under Special Operations Unit. John explained that is because we used to have money in there but we are no longer using it but keep the \$1 in case we need it in the future. Chief Bagan explained that the State supplies this so it is redundant for the Town to pay for it.

A resident ask why we didn't decrease the gasoline line for the cruiser. It was explained that gas was over \$4.00 a few years back so even though we have been around \$2.00 a gallon now it is already increasing and it will keep going up.

Fire and Ambulance

The proposed budget is \$101,604, a decrease of \$1,047 which is for the decrease of the Fire Stipend and the decrease in equipment.

John mentioned that the Select Board eliminated the Fire Chief position and we use the Fire Chiefs from the neighboring towns which is why that changed to \$1.00.

Sara mentioned that Rumney was over due to the last bill not getting here before we closed out 2019. We even asked for it before we closed it out but didn't get it in time. This year Sara made sure that we got all bills for 2020 before the close out so all bills were paid this year on top of the last bill from 2019 so this will not be a problem this year.

Miles said he knows we have had problems in the past and asked if Rumney is getting better with their ability to respond. Tony spoke to this as he has been working with Rumney closely and for Fire they are responding a lot more and the relationship has been a lot better. Hebron does the transport for the entire town. Miles asked if it is fair to say it is better than it was and Tony said yes.

Sherry asked Tony to clarify the Rumney coverage. Rumney does respond for Fire and EMS first responder coverage and they are responsible for Halls Brook Road and North. Hebron does transports for the entire Town and also assists with Fire all over the Town but if it is on the Rumney side the Rumney Fire Chief is in charge of the scene and Hebron is in charge on their side. Hebron does transport coverage for the entire town. Rumney only transports in extreme situations. They have a licensed ambulance for these cases.

Emergency Management

The proposed budget is \$1,278, which stayed the same as last year.

Highway Administration

The proposed budget is \$85,330, an increase of \$1,365 which is in the Road Agent Wages due to merit increases.

Highways and Streets

The proposed budget is \$106,301, which is an increase of \$26,000 which is due to moving Groton Roads to this budget instead of being a warrant article due to feedback from the residents at Town Meeting and an increase in salt, sand, deicer.

Pam asked if the overages in contracted services is due to the extra work that was done above our regular work. Sara explained that the overages were due to FEMA work and the grant work. Most of it was offset by FEMA or the Grant money but we have to show it. This won't be an issue this year because the grant work is mostly complete and the remainder of the FEMA work has a warrant article to cover this.

Miles asked if the bulk of the overage was from contracted services, equipment rentals, or were they even. Bubba said it was more towards contracted services for the roadwork for FEMA storm damages. It was an unusual year so we cannot use it to judge for future years.

A resident asked why the material under. Bubba and Sara explained that he tried to keep some lines under since he had to go over for contracted services and other lines. There were also other projects that were not done due to the FEMA projects and grants taking up so much time so normally the material would have been used towards these projects. John mentioned he couldn't go over on the bottom line so since he went over on some lines he had to go under on others. Bubba said they are in great shape as far as the roads go compared to where we were three years ago but it also does cost to maintain these roads to keep them in the condition they are in.

Deb asked what the \$25,000 for Groton Roads consists of. Tony mentioned it would be anything for road work. This could be crack filling, ditching, maintenance of the roads, etc. This was a warrant article every year since we can remember so it was agreed to move this to the budget since it has been on the warrant every year and has been used every year. Pam and Sara said it was a warrant article for as long as they can remember.

A resident asked if the warrant article explained exactly what it was for. It was explained that it was not. John mentioned that for warrant articles you have to use it for exactly what it says it is for so you don't want to limit yourself. John said if you look at the road work that has been done you can tell it is being used. Tony said this is no different than what we did in the past, it will be the same exact thing but it will be in the budget instead of a warrant article. Tony said the Select Board and Bubba always update the townspeople in the Select Board meetings about what work is being done. Sara explained that if you look at the expenditure line on the budget it is shown in there last year and this year but this year it will be part of the operating budget instead of the warrant articles. The resident asked why not add it to the other lines. John said because they would want it to go to the Groton paved roads and not the other lines.

Ann said it was her idea to move to budget since it is on there every year as a warrant article. She had been asking for the last four years and it is finally being done. Ann read the warrant article from the past which states "To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000)** for the repair of Groton roads."

It was recommended to change Groton Roads to Groton Road Repairs and Maintenance to cover everything.

A resident asked where does snow plowing come out of. It was explained it comes out of the wages line since it is Bubba and his guys that do the plowing. Bubba said the only separate budget for that would be the sand and salt line.

Miles asked if the assistants were eligible for wages as well. It was explained that they will all get increases.

Miles asked if the uniforms were exactly \$500.00. It was explained that it was. They ordered with the Transfer Station so \$500.00 came from the Highway and the rest was the Transfer Station.

Miles asked if the culverts were exactly \$1,500.00. It was explained that it was.

It was mentioned that the overages were mentioned so they wanted to make sure it was truly spent on these items. Sara explained we kept everything true to each line, so if one is over, it is over for that exact line and what it represents and same if it is under or the exact amount it is true to that budget line.

Miles asked if the tree cutting was exactly \$3,500.00. It was explained that we told TLC we only had \$3,500.00 and he did what he could for that amount.

Miles wanted to discuss the assistant's wages line. Both last year and this year the line is for \$31,000.00 but last year there was only \$19,442.48 which leaves almost \$11,000.00 that wasn't used. Back before we started getting money from the wind farm, that was all the town could do for the repair of all of the roads. They would typically take the worse sections and shim it and if there was money left over, they would shim another section. He believes it started at \$20,000.00 for Groton Road and then at some point was increased to \$25,000.00. Once we started getting money from the windfarm, they created a road committee which was made up of an engineer, a Select Board representative and the rest was townspeople and the Road Agent. They made recommendations and based on the past Road agent recommendations. They did the North Groton Road Project where at the time it was recommended to dig 3 feet down. The current board took a different approach to not dig down so deep. Miles feels the Groton Roads budget line in his opinion is a relic of the past because the Select Board has said that the roads are in excellent shape and they don't anticipate having to spend any unexpected monies at least this year. Miles said he understands that John had an issue with the school budget when they had some monies that shouldn't have been recurring expenses and he feels this is the same thing. He feels we don't need the extra money and thinks the money in the other lines of the budget is more than adequate to address the needs that we have on a regular basis based on the road work that has been done and will be done this year. He thinks it is money that should no longer be allocated. If there is something unexpected that comes up there is significant money we can rely on and we didn't expend \$11,000.00 from assistant's wage line anyway so we should eliminate that. He said going forward he would recommend that Select Board open a Groton Paved Road Capital Reserve Fund to allocate monies on an ongoing basis to prepare the Town for the time when we need to resurface or repair the roads.

John asked how much it is for crack filling. Bubba said it was about \$5,000.00.

Bubba would like to say that Ann wasn't the only one that wanted to move this and brought it up at the Town meeting. There was lot of people that said it needed to be in the budget. Bubba said that if people here do not think we need money to maintain the roads to keep them in the good condition then we shouldn't be putting any more money into the roads and should have kept them in the condition they were in. Bubba said he has been going to a lot of classes and it takes a lot more than they think to maintain the roads. The roads are the next largest asset to what makes your house what it's worth. You need to take care of the roads like you do your house, most people maintain their homes so they stay in good condition. If you don't take care of the roads with maintenance then they won't last. It used to be that they would just do the work and leave it for 20-25 years and then rebuild it again but it costs so much more now. It costs about \$400,000.00 to \$500,000.00 to rebuild a mile of road now so it is more to replace the road entirely than just trying to maintain it. There is a lot to it. The other problem with asphalt roads

is that asphalt has lost its elasticity so it more brittle than it used to be. The last class he went to shows that after 7 years the roadways start to break down if you don't maintain them. Also, some of the Groton Road money was actually used for was to go over the work that was done many years ago. It was found out that digging down that deep wasn't doing what they thought and the road was still seeing damage a few years later.

Miles said he is not saying that we shouldn't maintain the roads but he thinks it should be a Capital Reserve Fund. He thinks at least for this year he doesn't see the need this year since the roads are in good shape.

Tony said that one thing that isn't in the budget is road grading and we have had to grade the roads because of wash outs. You would have to hire this out which is thousands of dollars and all dirt roads should be graded every year and need to be treated which is road maintenance. Tony said he is not for removing this, he feels it is needed. He said Miles can amend this at town meeting but every year the townspeople vote for it and every year it is used. He said they trust Bubba to use this money in the best way and they monitor how it is used. He said if they find out this year, we don't need it then we can reduce it next year but the Townspeople said they wanted this in the budget which is why it is there.

John said that we are where we are at with the roads because of all the work and money we have put into the roads. If we don't maintain these, even for just a year, we will slip back dramatically and will have to pay twice the price to get it back to where you were. That money has been spent wisely that last four to five years and we need to maintain that process. Crack filling alone is \$5,000.00 and we need to maintain the ditches they can get clogged up which causes issues with the roads. By not maintaining them can cause a wash out which could cost a lot more to repair than to just maintain it. John said it is critical to keep that money in there and in the past residents have wanted to increase this line even more.

Miles said that again he is not saying we shouldn't maintain the roads. He said regarding the grading of the roads, the Town has a York rake that should help in some regards to maintain the gravel roads. There is an equipment rental line if we need a grader. There is also a material line that can be used.

A resident recommended changing wording to Groton Road to Groton Roads repair and maintenance so people understand it is to maintain the quality of the roads that we have today. She said that the townspeople do vote in favor of this each year so it is needed but the wording could help clarify it better. The Select Board agreed that we can change this wording.

Tony said that if we get to a point where we don't need this amount of money, we can change it each year.

Streets and Lighting

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

Sanitation – Monitoring

The proposed budget is \$6,000, which is a decrease of \$3,000 due to not needing the full PAF testing this year.

Solid Waste Disposal

The proposed budget is \$84,907, an increase of \$8,142 due to wages for merit increases and attributed to the increase in transportation costs.

Virginia asked what the recycle revenue was this year. Sara explained there was a little over \$2,700.00 in recycle revenue.

Pam asked if this was a big year for tire disposal. John explained that we had to clean up a property in Town that had a lot of tires. He said if we settle the suit or if they sell the property, we will be able to get the costs back.

Pam asked why the Porta potty was over budget. It was explained it was due to damages. Norm said the wind storm blew it into the compactor. Sara explained we didn't have good luck porta potties this year in town. The porta potty at the park was also over because of vandalism and people stealing the hand sanitizer.

Miles asked about the wage line and why it is more than a 3% increase in wages. Sara explained this is for the 3% increase but also budgeting for two people to work at a time on Saturdays in the Summer. George Evers was hired as a part time but this summer with all of the home projects there was times that both George and Richard were needed there at the same time. Norm explained that in April they went from 60 to 80 people a day and by May they were over 100 a day and in the summer some days there was over 120 people there so they needed more than one person working at a time. Norm said people are generating more trash than they ever have before due to more people being up here at their second homes and because of people working from home or doing school from home.

Norm mentioned that the transportation costs are up due to these same reasons due to COVID-19. Sara mentioned that NRRA was sending emails and all transfer stations were up in their transportation costs due to home projects and being home due to COVID-19. Norm said there is also an increase in cardboard due to a lot of people doing online ordering which adds to the weight. We get charged by tonnage and by the trips.

Norm said he thinks that they took in over \$6,000.00 in revenue for recycling, fees, etc. which all goes back into the general fund.

A resident mentioned that the fees have gone up this year. Bubba and Norm explained that the costs for the town to dispose of those items went up so our costs had to go up.

Health Administration

The proposed budget is \$1,553, a decrease of \$35 due to water testing costs.

Health Agencies and Hospitals

The proposed budget is \$4,707, an increase of \$14 which was because Pemi Baker went up \$14.

Miles mentioned that he noticed the water testing was finally done so he was wondering what the results were. Sara mentioned that Dave Leone works with the State for his water testing so he came and took the samples for us. We got the results back and the water testing passed, all was good.

Welfare

The proposed budget is \$4,676, which was a decrease of \$868 for vendor payment and for Tri-County Community Action decreasing.

Culture and Recreation

The proposed budget is \$7,686, a decrease of \$500.

Parks and Recreation

The proposed budget is \$5,736, a decrease of \$500 which is due to the maintenance of parks.

Miles asked why the Old Home Day shows they used their money even though there wasn't Old Home Day. Sara explained that the Old Home Day Committee requested the funds to be deposited into the Old Home Day account and the Select Board approved this.

A resident asked if the Old Home Day money from last year is going into their fund that they can use this year, why are we allocating more money this year. Sara explained that there isn't a lot of money in their fund and each year Old Home Day costs more money than what people think. We used to be able to do the fireworks for cheap and the road agent did it but we have since found out that can't be done that way anymore and we would have to hire a professional which costs money. Also, each year Groton Wind is kind enough to provide community support to help with Old Home Day but we don't know if they will always be able to help so this gives the additional funds and the opportunity to do these things.

Library

The proposed budget is \$2, which stayed the same as last year.

Patriotic Purposes

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

Conservation

The proposed budget is \$1,845, which stayed the same as last year.

Miles asked about the Conservation Commission using their entire funds. Sara explained that they used some money but whatever they didn't use they requested the money so they could put it into their conservation account. Sara said that when they asked for this, she looked into it since it was the first time this was requested since she has been here. There is an RSA that allows the Conservation Commission to put what they don't use for the entire budget into the Conservation Fund. This was done a long time ago and they can just submit a request, it does not need to be a warrant article every year.

Miles asked what the Select Boards status is on a fishing derby this year. John said this is up to COVID-19 but we are hoping to do this but it is too early to say right now. Tony mentioned that there is a warrant article on the bridge which will be discussed a little later.

A resident asked what the balance of the Old Home Day Fund and The Conservation Funds were but we didn't have that information right in front of us. We can get the updated numbers for the next meeting. It was also explained that the information will be in the Town Report as well under the Treasurers report. Ann had last year's town report so we were able to tell them at the end of 2019 there was \$3,850.01 for Old Home Day and we added \$750.00 this year.

Warrant Articles

The proposed Warrant Articles were reviewed:

Article 1: The Town Officials

The open positions are as follows:

- Selectman- 3 Year Term
- Town Clerk- 3 Year Term

- Planning Board- 2 positions for 3 Year Terms
- Local Auditor- 1 Year Term
- Trustee of the Trust Fund- 3 Year Term
- Library Trustee- 2 Year Term

Article 2: Bond for Public Works Building

To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one million eighty-three thousand nine hundred eighty four dollars (\$1,083,984.00)** to design and construct a new Department of Public Works building, and to authorize the issuance of **six hundred eight-five thousand dollars (\$685,000)** of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA 33); to authorize the Selectmen to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; to authorize the Selectmen to apply for, obtain and accept federal, state or other aid, if any, which may be available for said project and to comply with all laws applicable to said project; and to authorize the Selectmen to take any other action or to pass any other vote relative thereto. The remaining appropriation will be funded through an anticipated **two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000)** USDA grant, and the withdrawal of **one hundred forty-eight thousand nine hundred eight four dollars (\$148,984)** from the Public Works Capital Reserve Fund. Further, to raise and appropriate from taxation up to \$100,000 for the first year's debt service payment.

Recommendations required (3/5 ballot vote required)

This will be a separate public hearing so we will skip this one and come back to it. It was explained that there are three public hearings and each one has to be opened and closed separately so we will come back to this one during the bond and building public hearings.

Article 3: Operating Budget \$792,367

This will be amended to reflect the change to the town clerks wage line.

Article 4: Discontinue Capital Reserve Funds

To see if the town will vote to discontinue the following CAPITAL RESERVE AND/OR EXPENDABLE TRUST FUNDS. Said funds and accumulated interest to date of withdrawal, are to be transferred to the municipality's general fund. (Majority vote required)

- Fire & Equipment Capital Reserve Fund (Dec. 31, 2020 balance: \$64,650.96)
- Perambulation Non-Capital Reserve Fund (Dec. 31, 2020 balance: \$34,247.08)

John mentioned that this was recommended by a Town resident, and they thought it was a good idea, to close these funds and put them towards the Public Works Capital Reserve Fund, as you will see in the next article.

Article 5: \$155,894 for previously established Capital Reserve Funds

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one hundred fifty-five thousand eight hundred ninety-four dollars (\$155,894)** to be added to the previously established Capital Reserve Funds. The Selectmen recommend this special article. (Majority vote required)

Disaster Relief CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2020 balance: \$30,180.29): \$50,000

Assessing Reval CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2020 balance: \$34,800.42): \$7,000

Public Works CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2020 balance: \$60,051.95): \$98,894 *note: this amount is the total amount from the discontinued Capital Reserve Funds together

Total Capital Reserve Funds \$155,894

Ann asked about the money from the previous article. That money will go back into the Capital Reserve Fund but then we are raising it again in this article. John explained it is the amount from closing those funds. Sara explained that we cannot just transfer money from one Capital Reserve to another. When you close a capital reserve fund the amount has to go back into the Capital Reserve Fund so that is why we have to list it as raising it again for article 5. DRA requires it to be done this way since the money from article 4 has to go into the general fund.

Miles asked for clarification on this so John went over the information again and explained it will eventually be offset by article 4 but DRA requires it to be done this way. Sara explained that if we didn't have to use all of the money, we did from the unreserved fund balance to offset the taxes, we would have had enough money in the unreserved fund balance that we wouldn't have had to raise this amount but since we don't have enough to cover this, we do have to raise it this year, and article 4 will go into the general fund which goes towards the unreserved fund balance in the future.

A resident asked if we are putting \$98,894 into it, why does article 2 say \$148,894 is coming from the Public Works Capital Reserve Fund. Sara explained that there is already money in the Capital Reserve Fund so the Select Board agreed to take \$50,000.00 out of there to put with the \$98,894 which makes the \$148,894.

Bill suggested putting these into two different warrant articles because he sees a risk of them all getting voted down together. He is concerned that if someone wants to vote down the Disaster Relief money then they may vote down the entire article. It was explained that the Capital Reserves used to be separated out into their own individual warrant articles and the Townspeople wanted to put them all together. The article can be amended so we will just pay attention and listen to what people are wanting to do. If someone wants to amend the article, they can amend just one of the Capital Reserve Funds or more than one of them.

John explained that if someone amends it and only keeps that \$98,894 that amount has to go to the Public Works Capital Reserve Fund because that is the way it is written.

Tony explained that if it gets amended it will be a discussion and everyone will be involved to make sure that it gets amended correctly.

A resident asked again if we are raising the \$98,894. John explained it again and explained that it is all technicalities of how it is written. She also said that the town she lived in previously they did a breakdown for how much each warrant article would affect their taxes. John said that is too risky because we don't set the tax rate until November so this wouldn't be accurate.

Tony asked if we can put a note next to this stating this will be offset by the \$98,984 under article 4. Sara explained that she had that note in there and DRA made her remove it since the money is actually going back to the general fund because it cannot be transferred over. John explained that when we write the warrant it goes to the attorney for approval and they make changes. Sara explained it also goes to the DRA and for the case or Article 2 it also went to the bond counsel for review.

Miles asked if we are raising the \$98,894 in both article 4 and article 5. Article 4 there is no money being raised and that money is going to the general fund. Article 5 the money is being raised because it cannot be transferred over from one account to another. It has to go back to the general fund and then raised

again. Someone commented that this money isn't being raised then. Sara explained that it is being raised in Article 5 but Article 4 will go to the general fund. Pam explained that the bottom line is that it is being raised in the taxes but it is being offset by article 4 when it goes back to the general fund will be a revenue offset.

Miles stated that in the letter about the building that is dated February 2, 2021, the letter states that \$50,000.00 will be coming from the Public Works Capital Reserve Fund and it looks like there was a little over \$10,000.00 that wasn't put towards it to be retained in the Public Works Capital Reserve Fund. John explained that the Select Board didn't want to use it all and wanted to keep some money in the account if something else was to come up that they needed the money for in regards to the Public Works Building.

A resident said that they thought the last building was 3 million dollars and wanted to know what this building will cost. John explained this building will be about \$1,083,984.00 but the last building wasn't 3 million it was around 1.4 million. John said we are not at the building discussion yet so we will wait until we are there to discuss this further.

Article 6: River Road Project

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one hundred ten thousand dollars (\$110,000)** for repair/reconstruction of the River Road project. (submitted by the Highway Department and Road Committee)

Slim said that he is the only one from town that went to the meeting with the dam committee on the River Road dam project. Slim said he asked what road they will be using and who was going to fix the road once the project is done. He said they are hoping to get this dam done this year so he thinks we should delay the work to the road. Bubba said he looked into it after Slim told him all of this and he talked to them and they are not going in off of the Town road so we will be all set. Bubba said this project could be a few more years so we cannot wait for this to be done.

Slim mentioned that Dorchester plows River Road for us and we do Cheever Road. They are not happy about the condition of the road and what it is doing to the plows and the residents are not happy with the condition of the road.

Tony said if they do end up going that way and they damage it they will be responsible to bring it back to the condition it was at before so we should still do this. This road is in rough shape and needs to be worked on.

Article 7: FEMA Match

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one hundred thirty-five thousand five hundred ninety-three dollars (\$135,593)** to repair damages received due to a severe storm in July 2019 with **one hundred one thousand six hundred ninety-five dollars (\$101,695)** to come from FEMA and the remaining **thirty-three thousand eight hundred ninety-eight dollars (\$33,898)**, the Town's 25% portion of the cost, to come from general taxation.

Pam asked what work this is for. Sara and Bubba explained it is for work to be completed on Edgar Albert, Province and Sculptured Rocks Roads. Bubba said this was work they couldn't get tot this work due to other projects and Sara explained we also didn't have the money for our share until we raise it.

Tony Tavares asked if the roads should be added to the article. It was explained this is the wording from DRA that we have used in the past for other FEMA funds. John explained that we cannot use FEMA funds towards any other roads but these anyway. Tony said we can explain this at Town meeting.

Article 8: Bridge to Conservation Pond

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **four thousand nine hundred seventy-five dollars (\$4,975)** for the repair of the bridge that leads to the Town Conservation Pond.

Miles asked if this is a matter of fixing it with pressure treated wood instead of hemlock. John said yes that is the case.

A resident asked why not use the Conservation Funds towards this. John explained that it is a town bridge and is town land. Sara explained that the Select Board did meet with the Conservation Commission about this but their fund is there to help the town acquire conservation land so they didn't feel comfortable taking the majority of their funds for the bridge. Slim said that the question came up from the beginning about who owns the bridge and the land and the Town owns it. Slim said that Sara found information that the Town owns the land which is now conservation land that was entrusted to the Conservation Commission.

A resident asked why we should put in the bridge if it is only used for the fishing derby that the Conservation Commission puts on. It was explained that residents use the bridge and land there for other purposes as well. The resident said if only the Conservation Commission benefits from it, they should pay for it. It was explained the Town benefits from it not just the Conservation Commission.

A resident asked how much is in the Conservation Fund. We didn't have the exact amount but the town report from last year shows at the end of 2019 there was \$6,536.57 and then we put another \$1,200.00 into it this year. We will get the exact amount for the next meeting.

A resident wanted to change the wording to make the Conservation Commission responsible for some. Sara explained you cannot make the conservation commission pay for it or require them to use their funds. Sara explained this is the quote we received so if you change the amount, we won't have enough to repair the bridge. Tony Tavares said they could amend the article to change the amount but not to change the meaning if the article.

John said that at the Town meeting they can vote for or against it or amend the article as they see fit.

Article 9: Excavation to prepare for slabs at Transfer Station

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **three thousand two hundred dollars (\$3,200)** for excavation services to prepare for the construction of the concrete slabs at the Transfer Station. (submitted by the Transfer Station Supervisor)

Ann said that Article 8 passed last year for \$13,785 for the construction of the slabs so she was wondering why we need more money. John explained that was for the cement work. Sara said that last year they thought that amount covered everything but when they went to do the project it was pointed out that the \$13,785 only covered the cement work and not for the excavation. We have encumbered the funds from last year for the work but had to get quotes on the dirt work which needs to be done before the cement work.

Miles asked why the highway can't do the dirt work because if you hire someone it will cost more and they will factor in a profit. John said that if the ground is not compacted properly or sloped correctly the concrete will crack and fail.

Bill asked if there would be crushed gravel going under it. Tony mentioned that it will be compacted and have crushed gravel but we wanted it contracted out in the case something happens to the cement, the Town cannot be blamed and we have someone that we can go back to and to make sure it is done correctly and someone else is responsible if something fails.

It was asked if this is going over garbage. Tony explained that it is not and it is going where the dumpsters are now.

Miles said there are lines to rent roller etc. so he still doesn't understand why the highway department can't do it. John said that the amount that would be saved by doing it ourselves isn't worth the risk of this not being done properly, it could fail so it is better to hire a professional. This way it can go back on the professional.

Bill said he can speak to this. He said that all of the force from all of the tonnage from the dumpsters will be on these slabs so it has to have a certain amount of compaction to hold it so that it doesn't crack. Bill asked if it is under one contract or two separate contracts. Tony explained it is two separate contracts. John said that if it failed, we would go after whoever we needed to in order to get it fixed. This would be the same way we went after the logger that did damage to the road.

Norm said that nobody here was around when the facility was built so we don't know exactly what is underneath the dirt. The contractor is shooting for the worst-case scenario so it may not cost that much but he won't know until he gets in there. The ultimate goal is to put a cover over these dumpsters to keep the snow and the rain off in the next few years to save on the tonnage so this has to be done right for that as well. This will save the town some money over time.

Miles asked about the concrete and if it is being done by a professional who is doing it to par. Norm said it is being done by a professional and has all the specs for it. Miles said concrete will always crack. Bill said it will always crack because that is the nature of concrete but you are watching for a significant failure and if the ground isn't done right this will happen.

Article 10: River Road Cemetery layout

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **three thousand dollars (\$3,000)** for the purpose of grave mapping layout of the Jenny DeCoste Annex at River Road Cemetery; perform research in soil, water, elevation or restrictions in grave layout; establish burial rights for each grave and procedure for interment; establish policy and procedure for memorial placement; establish and study the cost of land development to help set fee for future grave sales; review Perpetual Care funds currently established and future needs from grave sales. (submitted by the Cemetery Trustees)

Miles asked if this is a priority. He asked if this could wait until next year. It was explained that this is a priority due to lack of room at other cemeteries.

Article 11: Conservation Commission portion of Timber Tax

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **two hundred forty-six dollars (\$246)** for deposit in the Conservation Fund. Fund to be offset by **two hundred forty-six dollars (\$246)** from unassigned fund

balance. This sum represents 3% of the Timber Tax revenue for 2020. (submitted by the Conservation Commission) (Majority vote required)

A resident asked why the Select Board approved this article. John mentioned that they are okay with the Conservation Commission getting this 3%. Slim mentioned that it isn't costing the town anything since it is not being raised and is coming for the unassigned fund balance. The resident said it is 3% that could have gone into the general fund.

A resident mentioned that they are still waiting for the Town Pound signs to go up. Slim mentioned they have them but are not putting them up until the Town Garage is decided on and if it is being built then they will wait until after that because they don't want them destroyed.

Article 12: 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.

John mentioned that the Selectmen do not recommend this article. This is something that was done in the past but there are not that many people from the Town that go there to use the library. Since we do this, Hebron has asked what Groton's interest would be in pitching in for a new library that they want to build.

Sherry said she was a trustee when Elizabeth was there and when this was started. This was started because we were told our library wasn't really a library and we should work with another town for library use so they went with Hebron to see if it would work.

Sara mentioned that not that many people are using it and at Town Meeting the Library Trustees will speak to this. They were not sure if they wanted to submit the article this year but decided to put it in and let the Town vote on it. With the amount they are paying, we are not getting enough people using it. Sara said that Groton can use the Minot Sleeper Library in Bristol at no charge so there are other options.

Tony Tavares said that the Plymouth Library is available as well for a fee for all residents and free for senior residents.

Article 13: Voting times

To see if the Town will vote to change all voting times for State, Federal, Newfound Area School District, and Town elections to take place from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on all election days. These are the current polling hours for town elections; all other elections have polling hours of 8:00am to 7:00pm.

Ruth asked if they want this for all elections. The Select Board said they want it for all elections.

Ruth said it will make it difficult for the ones that come out early. Bill Jolly said that it will make it hard for those that work during the day.

Bubba said that the reason for this was it is a long day for those working it. Sara said they are here past 7pm to stay for the counting, sometimes they are here until midnight. There are not a lot of volunteers for this.

Tony said that reason they wanted to was even with the last election that had higher numbers there were times when there were lulls and he feels this will keep it more constant. Hebron has been doing 11-7 for many years. Pam said Hebron had lines this year.

Bill asked if it can go past 7:00pm. Tony said they wouldn't want to do that because they will be here even later. Tony Tavares said you can stay later but the counting process takes longer and will be too late.

Ruth asked if this is okay to change this for federal election. Tony Tavares said you can as long as the Town votes for it. Sara said that the attorney reviewed this as well and as long as the Town votes in favor of it then we can change it.

Deb said that for people that work full time they will not be able to come and will have to vote on an absentee ballot.

Article 14: RSA 80:80

To see if the Town will vote pursuant to RSA 80:80 to authorize the Selectmen to dispose of property acquired by tax deed by as justice may require, in addition to disposing it by public auction, advertised sealed bids. This authority shall continue indefinitely and remain in effect until rescinded by a vote of the municipal Town meeting.

Sara explained that this is similar to what has been passed by the Town in the past but all towns are doing this again because there was a change to add in "as justice may require" so that if needed the town will be covered if needed to do it another way. Right now, the language is similar but just didn't have the "as justice may require" which will cover realtors, auction, and any other way.

Tony Tavares pointed out a typo that Sara will correct.

Article 15: Sale of Town owned property

To see if the town will vote to authorize the selectmen to dispose of the following tax deeded properties by listing them with a realtor for sale, or otherwise as justice may require and allowing the selectmen to negotiate the terms of sale, including but not limited to the sale price.

A resident asked for the location and acres. This was provided as follows:

- Map 1 Lot 91- 5.11 acres on North Groton Road
- Map 2 Lot 26- 8.5 acres on Old Rumney Road
- Map 7 Lot 36- 47 acres on North Groton Road
- Map 10 Lot 12- .55 acres on Halls Brook Road
- Map 10 Lot 22- 50 acres on Old Rumney Road
- Map 10 Lot 29- 5 acres on Halls Brook Road
- Map 10 Lot 40- 1 acre on Halls Brook Road

A resident asked if these are all tax deeded properties. It was confirmed that yes, they are tax deeded properties that the Town has had for many years.

A resident asked why using a realtor and not by action. It was explained that you are covered using a realtor. Miles said when he was a Selectman it was decided it was better to use a realtor to get the most money for the Town as properties usually sell dirt cheap in an auction.

Slim asked if Map 10 Lot 22 is the holding lot. Pam said it is and this is the land that we wanted to trade with Green Acres for the land across from the Transfer Station couldn't find a clean deed. We will have to look into this.

Miles pointed out that this should say as justice may require as well since that is what Article 14 says. Sara will make this change.

Article 16: Transact any other business that may legally come before the Town

Deliberation

The Selectmen deliberated on the following items.

- The only change the Select Board want to make to the budget is to the Town Clerk wages to reflect the 3% making it \$31,525. Sara will make this change and will then update the warrant to reflect the correct operating budget under warrant article 3.
- The Select Board did not want to raise any other amounts, such as the FICA, etc. as they think we should be okay with Bubba not working as many hours this year on FEMA items and Grant items and we don't have the extra paychecks for everyone in there.
- The Select Board agreed that if the townspeople want any other changes to the amounts then they can do an amendment at Town Meeting.
- It was agreed that Sara will make the changes 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 on the Proposed Budget and Warrant Articles at 8:40pm, Ron 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant