

GILFORD BUDGET COMMITTEE MINUTES
January 18, 2007
6:30 p.m.
Gilford Town Hall
Conference Room A

Members Present: Doug Lambert, Bob Brent, Dick Hickok, Bill Phillips, Sean Murphy, Connie Grant, Sue Greene, John O'Brien, Paul Blandford, Skip Murphy and Phyllis Corrigan

The Budget Committee recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Hickok began by stating that this meeting is part of the budget process, being the first meeting after the School District and Town public hearings. He advised the Committee members that tonight's meeting would consider the Town budget first, then the School District budget. He further stated that his notes from the Public Hearing on Tuesday, January 16th, indicate that there are three (3) items that need to be considered. Those items are the Police Department UPS System, three outside agencies and the Gunstock Acres Village Water District.

Phyllis Corrigan asked for an explanation of the Recreation Fund warrant article. Assistant Town Administrator Shackett stated that she would explain this after the three items mentioned above, although there is no dollar amount involved and it does not need a recommendation from the Budget Committee.

Town Administrator Juris proceeded to explain the recent townwide power outage and how it has affected the Police Department's communication equipment. He further stated that this situation is considered to be an emergency and the unit must be replaced.

Sue Greene moved to recommend an additional \$5,132.00 under the Police Department Radio Maintenance line item. Bob Brent seconded.

Mr. Brent then asked when the unit would be purchased and Town Administrator Juris stated that it needs to be purchased now. Assistant Town Administrator Shackett provided additional information on how the spending process occurs at this time of year and that the State statute does allow some spending, prior to Town Meeting. Selectman Grant stated that she recalls the Police Budget being very tight, so she agrees that this request should be supported. Brief discussion ensued on the technical aspects of the equipment replacement.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated a unanimous affirmative vote. Motion carried.

Chairman Hickok stated that the next area to be discussed deals with outside agencies – specifically the American Red Cross, New Beginnings and Genesis Mental Health. He reminded Committee members that the public did make an appeal at Tuesday night's meeting to reconsider funding these agencies. Bill Phillips moved to place \$1 in the line item for each agency. Bob Brent seconded. Doug Lambert voiced concern that this was not the intent of the Budget Committee's vote to reinstate funding for these agencies, since he feels that it is not the proper use of property taxes. Mr. Lambert reinforced his position that all of the votes taken by the Budget Committee have been "good" votes and he will stand behind all of them.

Extensive discussion ensued on the matter of what the \$1 in each line item signifies and that action could be taken at the Deliberative Session to change the vote and reinstate the funding. Phyllis Corrigan pointed out that NH is the worst of the 50 states in terms of donations and this could be considered as a reason to fund the non-profit agencies.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated 7 yes and 2 no. Motion carried.

The last subject to be considered in the Town budget is the Gunstock Acres Village Water District. John O'Brien, who is also a Water Commissioner, advised the Committee that the District just received approval for a \$26,000 grant for security equipment for their wells. Chairman Hickok advised Mr. O'Brien that it would be helpful for the Budget Committee to have this information much sooner so that it can be a part of the ongoing process.

Bill Phillips moved to recommend \$299,579 for the Gunstock Acres Village Water District budget. Bob Brent seconded.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated a unanimous affirmative vote. Motion carried.

Assistant Town Administrator Shackett advised Committee members that the MS-7 form will be available for signature on Monday or Tuesday of next week. She then provided an explanation of the Recreation Fund warrant article for Mrs. Corrigan.

Bob Brent thanked Town Administrator Juris and Assistant Town Administrator Shackett for their hard work and professionalism during the budget process.

At 7:03 p.m., the Committee commenced the School District portion of the meeting. Chairman Hickok stated that the School District budget also has three items to review – football, support staff benefits and a warrant article on the Village sidewalk.

Bill Phillips moved to recommend \$26,804 to fund the School District's football program for 2007-2008. Sean Murphy seconded.

Mr. Phillips then provided an explanation of his rationale for funding the program, as well as the amount of funding for the program. The \$26,804 reflects a reduction for the part-time grounds keeper and 2 busses. Mr. Phillips expressed his opinion that the 2003 minutes should not have been brought into today's issues. He also stated concern with funding for the program if it is not supported by taxpayers. He reminded Committee members of some of the comments made by the football players at last week's meeting, which express many positive aspects of the program.

Bob Brent then provided an explanation of his position on the football program. He stated that it was a very difficult decision for him, and during the course of budget deliberations he changed his mind.

Extensive discussion ensued on the matter of the football program being presented to the voters as a separate warrant article. Doug Lambert stated that he stands behind his vote and the School Board should carry through with the word of previously elected Board members. John O'Brien suggested that the Committee look at more than just money. He is concerned with the tactics being used and is concerned that the students will be hurt. He expressed the positive

aspects of a football program in building comradeship for the entire school.

Sue Greene feels that the Friends of Football will fund the program if the School District does not. She further stated that it was promised to be a warrant article if it was brought before the voters. Connie Grant stated that she supports the School District and has received a great deal of input from members of the public on this issue. She stated that primarily, taxpayers want the chance to vote. Phyllis Corrigan stated that although she was not at the School District Public Hearing last week, she understands that the meeting was very bitter. She also expressed concern with the lack of interest in a Risk Behavior Study that took place last year, where students indicated participation in drugs, alcohol and weapons.

Bob Brent stated that he feels football is a good program, but he is not happy with the process that has occurred. More discussion ensued on the matter of how this vote could affect students in the program. Connie Grant reiterated her position that people want the chance to vote.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated 3 yes and 7 no. Motion failed.

Chairman Hickok stated that the next issue to be discussed is that of support staff health benefits. Connie Grant moved to restore \$34,320 for health benefits for support staff. Sean Murphy seconded. Bob Brent stated that he wants to send a message to the School Board on this issue and he stands behind his vote. Paul Blandford stated that the School Board has listened to the Budget Committee and has made many budget cuts prior to Budget Committee review.

Doug Lambert feels that it is not difficult to enact this small change, because as costs go up, people should contribute towards the cost of health insurance. He further stated that compromises have been made and he would like to move the issue forward to the voters at the Deliberative Session. Skip Murphy stated that he stands behind his vote as well. Bob Brent reminded Committee members that the original reduction was for \$100,000, so the \$34,320 is a compromise.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated 3 yes and 8 no. Motion failed.

The Budget Committee then reviewed the Village Sidewalk Petition Warrant Article, which will install sidewalks on Alvah Wilson Road. Chairman Hickok stated that \$33,676 would need to be raised by taxation to complete the project.

Connie Grant moved to recommend the Village Sidewalk Petition Warrant Article. Sean Murphy seconded.

Doug Lambert stated that he has an issue with funding this article. Although he appreciates the hard work done by the students, he does not see the need for the sidewalk on Alvah Wilson Road. Discussion ensued on the matter of funding for this project, which is being partially funded by a grant. John O'Brien pointed out that this is a good learning experience for the students. Sean Murphy agreed and also pointed out the safety issues involved.

Brief discussion ensued on snow removal and which students walk to school. Connie Grant praised the students for their fundraising efforts and feels it is important to complete the project.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated 5 yes and 4 no. Motion carried.

At the completion of the School District budget, Chairman Hickok inquired if the Committee members would like to address the recent petition warrant article to remove the Budget Committee. A very lengthy discussion period ensued, with varied positions on whether or not the Committee should prepare a written response for the newspaper. Several Committee members stated that they were proud of the work they accomplished and it is important for the public to know the function of the Budget Committee. Among the other topics covered was the possibility of a code of ethics being developed for Town boards and committees.

Skip Murphy moved for the Budget Committee to compose a letter to the newspaper supporting the Budget Committee and their function in Town government. John O'Brien seconded.

A vote on the motion, by a show of hands, indicated 5 yes and 2 no. Motion carried. Paul Blandford abstained.

The Budget Committee approved the minutes of the December 14, 2006, December 21, 2006 and December 28, 2006 Budget Committee meetings.

Sean Murphy advised Committee members that he would not be seeking re-election this March. The Budget Committee thanked him for his eight (8) years of service.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p. m. The next Budget Committee meeting will be Thursday, January 25, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at Gilford Town Hall, to review the draft letter to the newspaper supporting the Budget Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra J. Bailey
Administrative Secretary