

GILFORD BUDGET COMMITTEE MINUTES
November 29, 2007
6:30 p.m.
Gilford Town Hall

Members Present: Doug Lambert, Skip Murphy, John O'Brien, Bob Brent, Sue Greene, Dick Hickok, Bill Phillips, Margo Weeks, Gus Benavides, Dale Dormody, Terry Stewart and Phyllis Corrigan

Members Absent: None

Also in attendance was Assistant Town Administrator Debra Shackett and Recording Secretary, Melinda Ferreira.

The Budget Committee recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Hickok welcomed the Committee to the night's meeting to review the Fire Department Budget and Outside Agencies. He then recapped the Committee's upcoming meeting dates to review the School Budget now that Committee members had received their 3-ring binders containing said Budget.

Next, Chairman Hickok turned the meeting over to Dale Dormody who presented Committee members with a handout of his Sub-Committee's findings. He and John O'Brien had met with Fire Chief Jim Hayes on November 5th to go over the Fire Department Budget. Dale Dormody highlighted some non-discretionary spending items, such as Full-Time Wages which was down by 3.55% due to two long time employees leaving and being replaced by newer, lower paid staff. The Fire Inspector line item had doubled to \$11,000 due to a full year's wages versus only a half year in 2007. Discussion ensued over why overtime was a substantial chunk of the overall wages. Chief Hayes explained this was due to limited on-duty staffing which required off-duty staff to be called in to cover shift vacancies, training and call back coverage. Doug Lambert then inquired as to the various duties of general firefighters versus the Fire Inspector when it came to fire safety inspections. Chief Hayes informed the Committee that regular firefighters could only do general fire safety & new construction visits, not inspections. The Fire Inspector must do a formal plan review and detailed code compliance inspection of new and previous construction. Discussion then moved onto the Dues & Memberships line items as well as some Committee members questioning the benefit of belonging to so many different associations. The Chief rationalized the costs with reduced costs of training and seminars while also increasing the professional development of staff.

Moving on to the Emergency Management portion of the Public Safety Budget, it was stated that costs related to forest fire prevention were down 37%. This was due to a reduction in PT wages as well as the Forestry Truck line item, which is expected to only require normal maintenance this year.

Under Capital Projects, a \$214,000 future ambulance purchase was discussed at length with \$110,000 already in reserve and an additional \$104,000 to be raised in 2008. \$5000 for a new combustible gas indicator was talked about under New Fire Equipment as well as Fire Station Furnishings & Equipment. The Sub-Committee stated a \$500 overhead projector mounting bracket was not essential and could be removed from the budget. After a short discussion with other Committee members, the Sub-Committee stated they could go either way with the item.

The Alvah Wilson Fire Pond under Other Improvements was then discussed as well as the status of various other fire ponds in Town. Fire Chief Jim Hayes is currently looking into a finer scope of work for his proposal and more definitive pricing for the Alvah Wilson Fire Pond as a preliminary estimate came in quite higher than anticipated.

Debate subsequently moved onto a new Town Vehicle and whether there was really a need for one that could perhaps be shared between departments. Discussion ensued.

Terry Stewart motioned to approve \$1,073,020 for the Fire Department Operating Budget and was seconded by Phyllis Corrigan. Motion carried.

Moving on to the Emergency Management Budget, Phyllis Corrigan motioned to approve \$5,650, which did not include the \$3,330 for Red Cross that was up for discussion later on this evening. She was seconded by Doug Lambert. Motion carried.

Lastly, Dale Dormody motioned to approve the four Fire Department related line items, less \$500 for the overhead projector mount in the New Fire Equipment line, for a total of \$247,940 in this Capital Projects Budget. He was seconded by Skip Murphy. Motion carried.

Chairman Hickok then moved discussion over to the much anticipated 'Outside Agencies'. Several handouts had been passed out to Committee members. Selectman Benavides began by stating that the Board of Selectmen had received, at their previous evening's meeting, a written request by Doug Lambert, as a citizen of Gilford, to remove the appropriations from the budget. Discussion ensued. John O'Brien subsequently informed the Committee of their work group's findings on the subject. Dale Dormody, Skip Murphy and John O'Brien had met on November 19th to review the reports received in response to the Budget Committee's letters sent to outside agencies requesting further information. The work group was unable to come to a consensus regarding funding of these agencies; therefore, agreed to submit the reports to the Budget Committee for its' review and to suggest that the Committee, as a whole, request that the Board of Selectmen write a warrant article (or articles) so that Gilford voters may make their own decision.

Assistant Town Administrator Debra Shackett informed the Committee that a recommendation was still going to be needed from the Budget Committee for the upcoming public hearing and recommended that the Committee vote first. The Committee could then recommend to Selectmen that they create one or more warrant articles.

Lengthy debate ensued as to whose responsibility it should be to deal with the appropriation of seven social service agencies totaling \$81,483. The seven agencies include the Youth Services Bureau, Lakes Region Comm. Health & Hospice, Lakes Region Family Services, Community Action Program, New Beginnings, Genesis MHC and the Red Cross. The Committee was split with some members insisting taxpayer money should not go towards 'charitable organizations', adding that these organizations should be given voluntary donations, not property tax dollars. Other members were heartfelt in their opinions that these were worthy organizations which saved the Town money in other areas by offering fuel assistance and other services to Gilford residents who may otherwise use Welfare services; not to mention services such as hospice care. Yet other members felt it was the Budget Committee's fiscal responsibility to analyze the work of each agency and deem its' appropriateness. A few members were concerned that if brought before the citizens, it would be solely an emotional vote and that there should first be education of exactly how these services are administered and at what cost.

Further discussion ensued as to whether to propose to Selectmen that these line items be grouped together in one warrant article or be separate articles. Assistant Town Administrator Debra Shackett again reminded the Committee that either way, the Budget Committee's recommendation would be needed.

Doug Lambert motioned to remove the \$81,483 for the seven previously mentioned charitable organizations from the Budget and to recommend to the Board of Selectmen that they include them in a warrant article instead. He was seconded by Skip Murphy. Selectman Benavides abstained. Discussion ensued.

An amended motion was made by Skip Murphy to separate the organizations into individual warrant articles. Doug Lambert seconded the motion. Discussion ensued. Motion failed.

Terry Stewart motioned again to remove the \$81,483 from the Budget and recommend to Selectmen that they create one warrant article to include these seven agencies. He was seconded by Bob Brent. Selectman Benavides abstained. Discussion ensued. Motion carried.

Phyllis Corrigan then motioned to approve the meeting minutes of November 15, 2007 and was seconded by Skip Murphy. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Melinda N. Ferreira
Recording Secretary