

**Newfields Budget Hearing Minutes
January 9, 2024**

Attendees: Chairman Michael Sununu, Hobby Harmon and Mike Kessler.

Others: Police Chief Young and Town Residents

Chairman Sununu called the meeting to order at 7:01pm. The purpose of this meeting is to present the proposed operating budget and warrant articles. The Department of Revenue will give us final approval on the wording of the warrant articles. The Deliberative Session will be held Tuesday February 6, 2024 and amendments may be made at that time.

The operating budget was reviewed line by line.

Executive: Items in Executive include the salaries and payrolls of town office employees, Select Board and other town officials. Last year was \$168,380 and this year \$175,824.

Elections & Vital Statistics: This year's increase to \$15,600 is due to four elections; Presidential Primary in January, Town Election on March 12, State Primary in September, and General Election in November.

Steve Yevich asked about our fiscal year. Michael indicated that the town operates on a calendar year from January to December and we are working on fiscal year 2024.

Financial Administration: \$27,715- This line includes stipends for the Treasurer and Deputy Treasurer plus expenses for accounting software.

Revaluation of Property: \$21,750-Includes Assessor's contract which was put out to bid this year.

Legal Expense: The Town is not anticipating upcoming legal issues in 2024 and has reduced the line to \$18,000.

Planning and Zoning: \$14,250-Planning Board expenses including the contract for the Town Planner.

General Government Buildings: \$31,414-Repairs and maintenance for the Library and Town Hall, utilities such as electricity, phones, internet and oil. Increased this year by approximately \$8,200.

Win Fream asked if this line included money for remediation at the Library. Michael indicated that remediation for the removal of asbestos was encumbered and not included in this line.

Cemeteries: \$31,515-Amount is the same as last year.

Insurance: Rates this year have decreased due to credits received from Primex that were applied to the 2024 invoices. Next year the rate will go back up.

Advertising & Regional: \$5,150-Association dues and memberships for town departments.

Other General Government: This line has increased to \$33,200 and is for town contracts for the website, computers, scanning, software, office supplies and postage.

Police: Police budget has increased to \$724,890. Michael indicated that the increases are for personnel costs and retaining current coverage and police force. Several Police Departments in the Seacoast area are having difficulty employing police personnel and we are fortunate to have a full staff. Chief Young also noted that cruiser maintenance and gasoline has increased.

Jane Walsh asked about full time vs. part time. Wayne stated that the department has four full time officers and 5 part time officers.

Debbie Pawlencio announced that today is National Law Enforcement Day and she thanked the Police Department for their service.

Jason Michelson asked about police details and how they played into the budget. Chief Young said that details do not come out of the police budget. In the last two years, the PD has made over \$100,000 from police details and the money was used to purchase two cruisers. Using the detail money prevents having to raise money through taxation for the new cruisers. Hoby extended his thanks to Wayne for a job well done.

Chris Davis said that when a detail is done out of town, the other town is paying for the detail and to have the cruiser there.

Ambulance: \$5,100- Ambulance services with the Town of Newmarket through Comstar.

Fire Department: The Fire Department budget has decreased slightly to \$172,890. Jane McCadden asked why there was no increase. Michael indicated that the Newfields Fire Department is still a volunteer fire department. The budget used to be \$75,000 per year but now there is compensation given to volunteers for on-call services. A full-time department would be very costly.

Steve Coes asked the Fire Chief how the compensation program worked out last year. Jeff Buxton said it is working well. They have not gained any new members but there is more of a response to work on-call at night. There has been one application for membership over the past year. He would like to get some new members. The State is now providing on-line courses, so anyone interested does not have to take time out of their schedule to get certified. This makes it much easier to get certified. The Town pays for all training costs and there is no cost to the volunteers.

Building Inspection: \$6,000-Fees paid to the building inspector.

Emergency Management: \$15,000-Amount is the same as last year and is used for Seabrook drills and training and radios.

Highways & Streets: -This line has increased to \$420,600 due to the paving schedule the Town has tried to maintain. The costs for materials determine how many miles of road get paved each year. This year's plan is to pave Old Lee Road to the end. This line item is expected to be \$450-

500K in the upcoming years. A lot of neighborhood roads are deteriorating, and a new topcoat is needed.

Michael said the Town tries to pave at least one mile yearly. There are 17 miles of roads in town and under one mile per year has been paved. It fluctuates depending on the cost of materials.

Route 85 and Route 87 are State roads and not included in highways and streets.

Michael indicated that the Town encumbered \$23,600 from 2023 to put toward the 2024 paving and road work that did not get completed last year.

Jane Walsh asked if the budget includes funds for sidewalks. Michael said there is only money for sidewalk repairs in the budget. The Town has a separate sidewalk fund, with little money in it, dedicated to sidewalks only. The sidewalk fund is for all sidewalk construction in Town.

Street Lighting: \$5,500- This amount is less than last year due to electric prices coming down. We also are beginning to reap the savings from converting our street lighting to LED's.

Sanitation: This year the Board has broken down the line items in detail under sanitation.

Recycling: \$5,200- This line includes the disposal of the recycling and the trucking costs.

Solid Waste Collection: \$103,205- The fee for trucking costs to pick up the trash.

Solid Waste Disposal: \$60,020-The fees to dispose of the trash.

Solid Waste- HHW and Fall Cleanup: \$1450- Fee for the Household Hazardous Waste Day held at the Exeter Town Garage. This year there will be no Fall Cleanup.

Sanitation Fees-Newmarket Transfer Station: \$8,037 -The fee paid to the Town of Newmarket to allow Newfields residents to use the Newmarket transfer station.

The \$5,200 in recycling will cover the cost of biweekly recycling until March when we vote on a warrant article to continue recycling.

Phyllis Mackey asked about the fees for Newmarket Transfer Station. Michael explained the \$8,037 was included in Solid Waste Disposal before and now it is separate and not included with trash disposal fees.

This budget is calculated without the cost of recycling for the entire year and the trash disposal fees are higher with the assumption that a greater amount of tonnage would be solid waste due to not having recycling. The difference between the \$103,205 proposed and the actual \$79,500 is the recycling that will now be solid waste. Michael reiterated that this budget assumes that the recycling will go into the trash. Last year the Town had almost 580 tons of solid waste and 120 tons of recycling. The Town pays \$212.00 per ton for solid waste and \$550.00 per ton for recycling.

Jack McCadden asked how much the Town will save by doing away with recycling. Michael said about \$30,000.

Greg Corson questioned whether the warrant article of \$15,000 would be enough to pay for recycling for the remainder of the year. Michael said the cost is half because we will no longer have to pay for the additional trucking by going to biweekly pickup.

Jack McCadden asked how much is being saved by limiting the trash to 120 gallons. Michael indicated it would be about \$2,000. ELM informed the Board that there are several locations that put out extensive amounts of trash and it's not fair to others in Town.

Hoby Harmon added that the trash contract with ELM started in 2023. The contract calls for 120 gallons of trash which can be three contractor bags or twelve kitchen bags. This is the contract, and we are attempting to tighten up on it. We have been seeing two trash cans and three contractor bags or twenty trash bags. The rules have not changed. We understand there is more trash during the holidays which is reasonable. He also mentioned that sometime the trucks arrive at different times of the day and there is no need to panic. If they can't complete the route on Monday they get it done the next day.

Nicole Cooper asked how many households are putting out too much trash. Michael said there are about 12 households and if it continues it will have to be addressed directly.

Scott Saltman says it seems like a reasonable decision to go to every other week recycling. He doesn't understand why it is not being added into the budget. Michael explained that in 2023 we had an 8% increase, and we are looking at another substantial increase for 2024 with the warrant articles being presented. It is the Board's job to present a fiscally prudent budget. If the money for recycling was added to the budget, it could be removed at the Deliberative. The warrant article will allow the town to take a vote on the issue and make the determination.

Health Agencies: \$4,500 -These are donations made by the Town to non-profit agencies.

Direct Assistance (Welfare): \$4,000 – This is the same amount as last year. Hoby stated we have been fortunate to have some outside organizations assist us. The Exeter Lions Club was able to provide residents with assistance, over the past 3 years, with oil, electric and propane for heating.

Parks and Recreation: \$2,600-These funds are for the moving of town parks and the town landing.

Library: \$73,134 – Library operating expenses up slightly over last year.

Patriotic Purposes: \$500- This money is used to purchase flags for the cemeteries.

Celebration: \$9,290- Fees for the 175th Anniversary celebration in May 2024.

Admin & Natural Resources: \$4,350- Conservation Funds used for administering and monitoring conservation easements.

Long Term Bond: \$60,000- Bond payment which will be paid off in 2026.

Bond Interest: \$5,020-Down slightly this year.

The budget bottom line is \$2,092,446.

Jane Walsh asked if unspent money goes back to the taxpayers. Michael explained spending cannot exceed the bottom-line operating budget of \$2,092,446. The budget is guidance on how the money will be spent. At Deliberative this number may change if amendments are made. Money cannot be spent unless it has been discussed at the budget hearing. Unspent money goes into the undesignated fund balance which may be used to offset the tax rate or go towards warrant articles. For example, the fire truck's final payment will come from the undesignated fund balance and no money needs to be raised by taxation.

Rugg Property Acquisition

Article 1. By Citizens Petition: Shall the Town of Newfields vote to authorize the Board of Selectmen to acquire +/-101 acres of property located off Piscassic Road near Bassett Lane in the Town of Newfields (a portion of Newfields Tax Map 205 Lot 2) for the purposes of expanding the town-owned Inland Acres Town Forest, and preserving open space, trails, public outdoor recreation, drinking water supplies, and wildlife habitat; to raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$3,700,000 for the acquisition (not to exceed fair market value); to be funded by up to \$2.5 million from a Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) loan to the Town (with up to 20% or \$500,000 in principal forgiveness and up to 80% or \$2,000,000 to be repaid by the Town) and \$1.2 million or more in other grants or gifts; to authorize the Selectmen to apply for, obtain, accept, and pass through a CWSRF loan and any federal or state grants or private gifts which may be available for said project; and all in collaboration with and facilitated by conservation organizations. This approval will not lapse until the property is acquired or by the end of 2025, whichever is sooner. Not recommended by Select Board 0-3. (Requires 3/5 ballot vote)

Munch Marek asked if the grants for the bond warrant article are guaranteed. Michael said two grant applications have been filed to date but not awarded. The Board was asked why they opposed Article 1.

Michael Sununu said he has a problem with the value, and this is a lot of money to be spending. In addition, the school is asking for 1.9 million for a parking lot and driveway. He would love to buy the land, but he feels it is too much money.

Hoby said he had an issue with the initial appraisal and there will be an additional appraisal done. He is also concerned with the value of the land and the tax impact. He would like to know what Exeter is doing. He is not ready to commit to the project and feels more exploring should be done before moving forward.

Mike Kessler said there are too many unknowns, and he would like more information.

Jeff Buxton explained that when we purchased the conservation easement on the Piscassic Greenway there was an approved subdivision ready to be built with 130 homes. In this case there is no approved plan. If this moves forward, there will be no plans.

Hoby said we have no idea how many houses could be built on the Rugg property without an approved plan. The projected numbers are based on a preliminary design without assessment or analysis of ledge or wetlands.

Jane Walsh asked what happens if both Article 1 and Article 4 pass. Michael said he does not know the answer. In his opinion Article 1 empowers the Board to move forward with applying for the loan.

Jeff Couture commented that wetlands were taken into consideration on the Rugg property preliminary design, and it was unfair to make such a statement. Hobby agreed that wetlands were depicted on the conceptual plan.

Anthony Ten Haagen said an engineer provided a conceptual design to the Planning Board and it was declined by the Board.

Michael, a member of the Planning Board, clarified that they did not decline the plan. They requested a formal plan be presented. It has been done before and the developer did a complete approved plan.

Jeff Couture reminded us that Rugg's did not approach the Planning Board with the intention of developing it. It was with the intention of conserving the land.

There will be a bond hearing on January 16, 2024, at 7pm at the Town Hall to discuss the bond in more detail.

Operating Budget

Article 2. Shall the Town of Newfields raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$2,092,446 Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$1,972,247 which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Town of Newfields or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. Select Board recommends the \$2,092,446 as set forth on said budget 3-0.

No questions or comments.

Reinstate Biweekly Curbside Recycling

Article 3. By Citizens Petition: Shall the Town of Newfields vote to raise and appropriate \$15,000 (fifteen thousand dollars) to continue biweekly curbside recycling. Understanding the importance of being fiscally responsible, we support reducing curbside recycling to every other week instead of weekly. This money is to be utilized solely for the purpose of curbside recycling. Not recommended by Select Board 1-2.

Steve asked if the \$15,000 was for the extra costs of pickup. Michael said the \$15,000 is the differential provided by the service provider by going to biweekly collection.

Study of Rugg Property Acquisition

Article 4. By Citizens Petition: To see if the voters of Newfields, NH support the future purchase of approximately 101 +/- acres of land (Rugg property) located off Piscassic Road near Bassett Lane (a portion of Newfields Tax Map 205, Lot 2) for the purpose of expanding the Town owned "Inland Acres Town Forest". The approximate cost of acquisition to the Town of

Newfields is \$3,700,000 less any grant(s) to include a long-term interest-bearing bond that may be floated by the Town of Newfields. To request that the Select Board review the project, including evaluation of funding options (bonds and grants), the ramifications of Exeter failing to purchase what would then become a landlocked 47 acres +/- plot that is surrounded by Newfields and Exeter conserved forest thus resulting in a de-facto expansion of the Exeter Town Forest at “no cost” to Exeter. The Select Board will also determine the divisibility (or lack thereof) of the entire parcel and said impact on the viability of the project. All other considerations shall be considered. The Board shall report to the Town its findings as to purchase considerations. Recommended by Select Board 2-0, 1-Abstention.

Steve Coes asked why there is no money in the warrant article for the investigative work. Michael indicated this was a petitioned warrant article. Greg Corson said a time and date should be added to the article, also.

Win Fream asked if a citizen’s petition can be changed at the deliberative session. Moderator John Hayden said a petitioned warrant article may be changed as long as the intent does not change.

Win Fream asked if Article 1 and Article 4 were linked. They are not linked.

Anthony Ten Haagen said he is not speaking for the Rugg’s but knows they do not support Article 4. He also said the Ruggs will sell the land for development if it passes. Steve Coes asked if money can be added to Article 4 at the deliberative session. Michael said a dollar amount in a warrant article may be zeroed out but a warrant article with no money cannot have money added to it.

John Hayden commented that there was some misconception in the past about modifying a citizen’s petition. We thought it had to remain as proposed, but it is not true. He agreed that money may not be added to a warrant article proposed with no money. A citizen’s petition may change providing the subject does not change.

Greg asked why one Select Board member abstained from supporting. Michael Sununu indicated that it was he who abstained, and he did so because of how it is written and how it may impact Article 1.

Scott Saltman asked if Article 4 failed, would the Select Board still undertake a study. Michael said if the article failed, they would not move forward with a study.

Jamie Bell Couture wondered who would fund the study with no money appropriated in the warrant article.

Mike Kessler received several phone calls and there are a lot of questions that remain unanswered. This would be an opportunity to get more information about the purchase. Hoby also would like to obtain more knowledge and continue to explore. Not enough knowledge to make an intelligent decision.

Anthony Ten Haagen asked Hoby and Mike Kessler if they realized the landowner will develop the property if this Article passes. They were not aware of that and find it interesting that if it passes, they will develop the property.

Future Purchase of Fire Truck Capital Reserve

Article 5. Shall the Town of Newfields raise and appropriate the sum of \$50,000 to be added to the Fire Truck Capital Reserve Fund previously established, for the future purchase of a new fire truck. Recommended by Select Board 3-0. (Majority vote required)

There were no comments or questions.

Fire Department Equipment Capital Reserve

Article 6. Shall the Town of Newfields raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,000 to be added to the Fire Department Equipment Capital Reserve Fund, previously established? Recommended by Select Board 3-0. (Majority vote required)

There were no comments or questions.

Non-Lapsing Fire Truck Payment

Article 7. Shall the Town of Newfields raise and appropriate the sum of \$200,000 for the purpose of providing the funds for the final payment for a new fire truck to be funded by \$200,000 from the December 31, 2023 fund balance. This appropriation will have no impact on property taxes. This scheduled Warrant Article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32.7 section VI. It will not lapse until the fire truck purchase is completed or by December 31, 2027, whichever is sooner. Recommended by Select Board 3-0. (Majority vote required)

Michael said we are moving forward with buying a new fire truck. There is \$490,00 in the capital reserve fund and a new truck cost is up to \$800,000. This warrant article will allow us to make a final payment on the fire truck when it is delivered. We would use funds from the undesignated fund balance. Steve Coes commented that it is money already raised that was not spent. Michael agreed.

Jeff Buxton indicated that the new fire truck will fit fine in the fire station and they will be getting rid of 2 trucks.

175th Town Celebration

Article 8. Shall the Town of Newfields raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000 for the 175th Town Celebration festivities? Recommended by Select Board 3-0. (Majority vote required)

The celebration will occur in May of 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue McKinnon