

Bennington Budget Hearing
January 10, 2023 6:00 PM
Pierce Elementary School
Meeting Minutes

Present: Chairman, James Cleary, Tom James, David Foster

Moderator: John Cronin

Moderator Cronin opened the meeting at 6:00 pm explaining to those present how the meeting will move forward. Reading each budget line, bottom line's and if residents had any questions that would be the time to ask them.

A sign in sheet was passed around for those present to sign.

Budgets were moving along with no questions until General Government Buildings. The hydrant flushing and repairs was questioned. Chairman Cleary explained the funds are for the town buildings and repairs that may be needed. Rather than spread the cost among each department, it was decided to keep the cost in the TH Building Repairs/Maintenance line.

Property Liability Insurance premiums were briefly discussed. The Town Administrator will look into ways to reduce the insurance premium. It was also discussed some of the payouts that have recently taken place, making the insurance premium increase.

The cost of the Water and Sewer budget was briefly discussed. The need to increase rates for a variety of reasons was discussed, primarily grants and funding options would immediately be denied due to the current low usage rates. Water Commissioner, Tyler Howe discussed the lagoon, the need to increase the rates for the users and a new permit that has been issued for the lagoon.

Moving on Crystle Bullard asked about the Fishing Derby. The Derby is always the second Saturday in April. The Derby will be better advertised in the future.

The only question for the Library was from John Baybutt, he asked about the purchase of new books every year. Karen Belcher explained the requirement for a percentage of controversial books needing to be on the shelf and available and this requirement being Library rules. There is a review committee which goes over library books annually. Molly Eppig discussed books requested by patrons are a need. The Librarian and her assistant choose to oblige the patrons.

Again, Jill Wilmoth stated there is a policy to review the books on the shelf periodically. Ultimately, it is up to the Librarians and the Trustees to sign off on books.

Chairman Cleary explained the Edward French Scholarship Fund has pretty much zeroed out. Going forward the funds will be budgeted in the general fund.

Moderator Cronin discussed the Bruce Edes scholarship, which is also available to any student in the Contoocook Valley region. It is for those seeking community improvements and outdoorsmanship programs/projects. Over the years there have been some great candidates. Cronin mentioned this scholarship should also be advertised more. Scout Masters, Schools, Churches and Youth Groups would be great avenues to make aware of this scholarship.

Bethany Craig reported the Edward French Scholarship has \$119,000; the Bruce Edes Scholarship has \$44,000.

Highway Department was discussed – John Manley asked what were the high expenditures on Highway Heavy equipment. Road Agent, Matt Blanchard explained he is trading the orange truck for a mid-size CV International. It is in between the 1 ton and a full-size truck. Ron Clough discussed why he would like to see a larger vehicle purchased. In his opinion, a 1 ton would be a better option.

John Baybutt asked about the washout on Gillis Hill and if it was covered by FEMA? He further asked about the drainage at the top of the road. Keith Nason replied, saying he looked into that and it is not a large enough claim for funding from FEMA. Road Agent, Matt Blanchard explained the culvert at the top of the hill has been upgraded to accommodate future storms, the culvert that was there was under size.

Karen Belcher asked what the plans for the roads in 2023 are? Road Agent, Matt Blanchard said he has presented a few options to the Selectboard, nothing has been made 100% final yet as to which roads will be done first. Blanchard did say he is going to finish Curtis Farm Road to Pine Meadows.

Keith Nason asked about putting the road jobs out to bid, discussion followed.

Karen Belcher asked about the fire truck – Fire Chief, Dave Foster stated it would be here in 2025 if everything goes as planned.

The additional \$8,000 budgeted under TH Water Maintenance was explained by Chairman Cleary. Ron Clough asked what is the local use and do we give the locals an opportunity to bid the projects. Tyler Howe responded, there are 30 hydrants and then they need maintenance. Tyler

further stated the projects do go out to bid to locals, when available JCL often does the work. The bridge project was a different project, that was done by the State.

Non-profits being incorporated into one warrant article or keep them independent was discussed. Chairman Cleary said he is on the fence and would like to see what residents think about combining them into one article.

Moderator Cronin replied that the 8-10 independent warrant articles makes counting ballots take longer. Those who count ballots are mostly elder and do like to get the count done as soon as possible.

It was asked if we could get a sense of the meeting with a show of hands who supports separating articles vs. consolidating them into one article that is broken down. A hand vote showed 8 would like them to remain separate, 9 would like them consolidated. Selectmen noted this and will discuss this on Tuesday at their next Selectboard meeting.

The \$45,000 for Deferred Maintenance was discussed. Chairman Cleary explained it is for roads that need repair, it could take 10+ years before we get caught up. Putting the funds into the operating budget was discussed or add it into the Road Rehab CRF? This will also be discussed at the next Selectboard meeting.

Crystle Bullard asked if any money could be appropriated for the Elementary School Playground? Brief discussion followed. It was felt that since the town sends over \$200,000/month to ConVal, the Town provides plenty of support already.

Moderator Cronin stated the budget is up just about 3% and thanked everyone for attending the meeting who were present.

With no further questions or comments, the meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm. The Deliberative Session will be held at Pierce Elementary School, 6:00 pm on Wednesday, February 8, 2023.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra Davidson
Town Administrator