

Town Meeting

3-11-2023

Mike Tibideau: Moderator

- Pledge
- Presentation: Elaine Higgins presented the Spirit of America Award to Wilson Hess.
 - Wilson thanked the town for the award.
- Steve Bennett: Waldo County Municipal Devotion: Spirit of America. Awarded to Ron Price for his service to the town of Freedom.
- Mike Tibideau read the results from the municipal election: Ryan Willette was elected as a selectman.
 - Article #3: approved no discussion
 - Article #4: approved no discussion
 - Article #5: approved no discussion
 - Article #6: approved
 - Ron Porter: asked if the 7% was by state rule. Ron Price stated that the state gives a range up to 8% by state law. The tax anticipated note % is currently at 3%. Steve Bennett stated that the cost of getting approved for the tax anticipation note could be about \$2000. The note allows us to pay the bills until the taxes are collected.
 - Article #7:
 - Lynn Hadyniak asked what overlay is. Steve Bennett responded by suggesting that people turn to the Tax Commitment Form on page 7 in the town report. Line 23 is the amount of overlay. She asked what overlay means. He referred to the spreadsheet on page 9. Steve Bennett pointed out that this year only 11.4% of the taxes were unpaid by the end of the year. Elaine Higgins explained that overlay is what is left over after the bills are paid.
 - Rene Oulette: asked how much money would be left over. Ron Price stated that we do not know what the overlay will be until the taxes are collected. He stated that there is a range.
 - Lynn Hydiniak: asked if that is the only account abatements come out of. Ron Price said yes.
 - Article #8: approved no discussion
 - Article #9:
 - Laura Greeley: member of the budget committee. She was not in favor of the budget committee's recommendation. She stated that she is not in favor of increasing government. She stated that our books are in a mess and need to be fixed. She wanted to remind everyone that there is a new law that freezes senior citizens property taxes. She feels that due to this there needs to be constraint in our local budget. The governor said we would be reimbursed but only 50%. She is concerned that the increases

will be passed on to younger families that cannot afford it. She suggests that the town show constraint in their budget.

- Lynn Hydiniak: questioned the increase and elimination of various lines. She reviewed the lines and asked about what positions would be filled.
 - Steve Bennett: Stated that the positions were changed to reflect what is now happening at the town level. They were combined to reflect what is currently happening. These were based on the recommendations of the auditor.
- Lynn Hydiniak pointed out that there was a misprint.
- Ron Price stated that there is one treasurer and one clerk that is receiving the amounts stated.
- Tom : stated that the amount for the town clerk and town treasurer were Why are both these positions doubled from last year. He was concerned about the salary amount being so high.
- Ron Price responded that the pay was initially \$18,000. It was originally less hours for the position. The salary was far less than what it would cost to hire a person qualified to do the job. It is difficult to hire a qualified person to do the job.
- xxxxx : Stated that it is not that much of an increase.
- Wilson Hess: the town clerk line is actually town clerk and town treasurer and the treasurer line is the town clerk and town treasurer line. He proposed that the lines be corrected to reflect what is actually happening.
- Ron Price stated that the concerns were not part of the article and that it does not need to be a changed. It is merely the explanation that needs to be amended.
- The moderator: questioned what needed to be amended.
- Steve Bennett: defined why he wrote it the way he did. He suggested it be left the way it is.
- Wilson Hess: He asked that after the motion on the amendment that they entertain a motion to change the way the salaries are listed.
- Laura Greeley: stated that we are adding 7 hours to our 2 employees and nearly doubling salaries.
- Lynn Hydiniak: asked for clarification that in addition to their responsibilities what are we expecting of the employees per week.
 - Ron Price: 32 -35 hours per week, the assessor and others are contract employees.
- Xxxx: feels that the line items are confusing and we should be clear about what we are doing.
- Tyler Hydiniak: asked that people speak louder. He asked if budget committee member Greeley would like to see the amount amended and to what amount and why.
- Laura Greeley responded that she felt that we should have spent our money on a professional that could manage the budget and our books.

Her suggestion was that we should have gotten more outside help. Her main concern is an increase in our taxes.

- Prentice Grassi: it was a difficult discussion and difficult decisions. Wages were a difficult discussion. The selectmen have a lot of confidence in the town employees. He was eventually in favor of increasing wages for town employees.
 - Steve Bennett: The way the positions are printed in the warrant is to reflect the way it was budgeted last year and also to reflect the way its is budgeted for next year. In response to the tax questions he referred to a tax spreadsheet on page 9 and that everyone look at the committed taxes in column 5. In 2014, the committed taxes for all three areas of our budget, town, county and school was \$1,047,158. Last year that line was \$1,190,322, an increase of only \$143,164. That works out to an increase of 1.7% increase per year over 8 years. Prior to that, from 2001 to 2014, the average rate of increaser was 11% per year during a period of historically low inflation. Assuming that if the budget is passed as presented, he believes that our budget increase this year will be 2.5% over last year. At the end of the report there is the audit, page 102. Total fund balance = \$564,487 is greater than he expected. Unassigned balance is \$320,597. That can be used this year and is about 2-3 months of the town's bills. Using some of this along with other revenue, he believes will keep the increase in the tax budget to around 2.5%
 - Laura Greeley: responded saying that at the end of the last budget meeting our increase would have been 23%. She stated that the lowest the budget committee had gotten to was 6.5 %. She would like to see the 100,000 be used to reduce taxes.
 - XXXX: 17.5% pay raise for the town treasurer. He asked what other towns wages are and how this compares. He stated that the increase on the overall increase was 12.6% over last years budget.
 - Ron Price requested to move the question.
- Article 9:
 - The moderator suggested that Wilson tell the group exactly what he would like to see.
 - Wilson stated: In salaries and wages we see the amount and the wages for the last year. This be modified in the future for those positions to follow the conventions that the positions serve.
 - Article 10: approved no discussion
 - Article 11: approved no discussion
 - Article 12:
 - Tyler Hydinak: asked for an explanation in the increase in contracted services line.
 - Travis Price explained that the contracted services line was increased for the repair of a truck over 5 years.

- Ron Price reported that this is for payments for the leases and the amount covers the lease payments
- Lynn Hydiniak: asked about the total and that the budget committee is asking for a larger total than is listed on page 22.
 - Steve Bennett suggested looking on page 92 and reported that the difference was due to a surplus in the budget that was applied to the other amount.
- Lynn Hadyniak pointed out the discrepancy and that the language of the article did not reflect this.
- Steve Bennett stated that they need the town approval.
- Craig Turner: stated that the amount was less than needed and asked for clarification.
- Wilson Hess: stated that in his experience the Public Works Department knows how much they will spend for winter roads.
- Travis Price stated that they have rarely gone over budget on winter roads. He stated that we do not treat the 6 miles of dirt roads the same as the paved roads.
- Craig Turner questioned the wages.
- Travis Price stated that we are voting on the final number.
- Lynn Hydiniak asked for an explanation of winter roads maintenance and that it is tripling and asked what that line covers.
- Travis Proce stated that is covers unexpected weather events.
- Noah Dillard: asked how many people are on the winter roads payroll.
- Travis reported that there is a ground maintenance person and 2 town other public works employees.
- Ron Porter: this is an 19.5% increase.
- Prentice Grassi: road work is going to get done and some projects have been outstanding for years. The goal is to get taxes down and roads done.
- XXXX: was happy to see something on the Mitchell Road. She asked what C.S.. stands for. Crushed stone was the response.
- Scott Holmes: asked how many plow trucks we have.
 - Travis: 4,7,8,6,3 are plow trucks of various sizes.
- Article 13: approved no discussion
- Article 14: approved no discussion
- Article 15: approved no discussion
- Article 16: approved no discussion
- Article 17:
 - XXXX: trend toward creating capital reserve accounts, developing savings accounts for the various departments. Why wouldn't the money go to the general town account.
 - Steve Bennet responded and stated that the solid waste revenue's purpose would be to work on the trucks down the road. \$15,000 going back. \$13,000 to general fund to reduce the taxes.

- XXXX: who decides where unspent funds for a budgeted account go. Her questions was in regards to each of the reserve accounts.
- Laura Greeley responded that we tend to put a higher budget on some things that the money is not used and it is like funding a small savings account for each department to spend as they need. She feels it takes away input from the people on how the money is spent.
- Ron Price responded that this is the way we typically do it so that any extra money at the end of the year goes into a capital reserve account. So money can be distributed within their account to cover expenses within that department, that may have been unanticipated. Otherwise, it requires a town meeting to decide where the funds go.
- Prentice Grassi stated that the budget committee reviews what is spent
- Rene Oulette asked how much is currently in the capital reserve account at this time \$28691.
- Steve Bennet reviewed the amounts.

- Article 18:

- Tyler Hydiniak: there had been discussion about how our books and financial record keeping is a mess. He asked if someone could define the mess and what it is in reference to.
- Ron Price responded that the problem went back to 2019. The system we were using with payroll and other town accounts. Through a town vote we started doing things for our employees and the data that was added into the program was erroneous and was not put in correctly. The book keeping program was not accurate. With covid the problem got worse. The people doing the work were not trained at that time. Outside help was sought. We lost 2 treasurers. The IRS portion is figured out and we are working on fixing the programming errors. There was not misappropriation of funds. “garage in garbage out”. He feels that the problem should be sorted out within another month. The program we are using is used by most municipalities. We have hired an auditor to figure out the problem.
- Joe Paire: He suggested that people come to the other meetings to discuss concerns before the town meeting
- Laura Greely: suggested that we do a Facebook live of all of the town meetings to help with transparency.

- Article 19:

- Restorative Justice asked to speak
 - Hanlon Kelly: work across the county and in all midcoast counties. Harm repair: those who cause harm and those who have been harmed. Anyone can go on the website and ask for assistance
 - Community Justice Hubb: to support the community. Steering team. Holding listening circles on safety and belonging. 14 meetings so far. Farwells 3-5pm in Thorndike

- Brochures and annual reports are available
- Lynn Hydiniak asked what SWFCC stands for and why no money was appropriated?
- Elaine Higgins stated that it is no longer necessary that is why the amount is 0. Other means have been sought.
- April Turner: asked if the amounts suggested are the amounts that were requested.
- Steven Bennett: said there were a few.
- Ron Price stated that there were very few that were changed specifically.
- April asked about the baseball league.
- Laura Greeley responded that the baseball league was not decreased.
- Wilson Hess asked about the money for the Waldo County Fund
- Lynn Hydiniak asked about the Knox Booster Larabee field
 - Trevor Ripley responded and explained the work that is being done. The field is available for all Waldo County residents.
 - Meredith Coffin asked about the Unity Public Library
 - Steve reported that they requested the amount and that it is based on the number of residents in Freedom.
- Trevor Ripley: asked that if we are going to continue to give this amount of money that we should have the budget committee let the citizens know what amounts they can request.
- Steve responded that it would be a discussion better suited for another meeting and Trevor agreed.
- Travis Price: the public works has been working on the local field and that Mitchell roofing helped with the dug outs. He volunteered his time to help as well.
- Cindy Abbott stated that the Freedom Rec. committee helped with funding the field as well.
- Ben Feeney: spoke on our local field. He will try to keep people apprised of what the needs are.
- Article 20:
 - Kim Holmes ; asked why the town made the decision to move to Unity Ambulance instead of Delta. She noted that over half the time Unity does not have a crew. She is concerned and feels that the \$11,000 to Delta is worth it. She feels Unity will not have the coverage that we need.
 - Wilson Hess asked that we honor the fire chief and that he is an extraordinary asset to Freedom. He feels we are getting tremendous service for the money we spend.
 - Tyler Hydiniak: felt that Kim's comments should be entertained under article 34.
- Article 21: approved no discussion
- Article 22:
 - Lynn Hydiniak: asked why we get money from the Town of Knox, it was responded that we provide them with fire protection.

- Prentice Grassi: asked about the ambulance coverage. He feels that it is an important question. He feels that this money could be put toward the ambulance.
 - Jim Waterman: explained what this money would be used for. He referred to page 18. He stated it will show that his budget was under last year and that the excess money was placed in the fire department budget. The money is paying for leases for replacement vehicles. Central Maine Cost recovery also brings in money to the fire department.
 - Rene Oulette: Asked when he anticipates replacing any of the fire department vehicles.
 - Jim Waterman: oldest vehicle is a 2000. It is suggested that they be replaced every 20 years. Ours are approaching that but have low mileage. If we keep them in good shape they should last another 10 years. We may need to replace turnout gear due to PFAS.
 - Wilson Hess: is in favor of the motion. The capital improvement fund provides us with the money to keep up the equipment.
- Article 23: approved no discussion
- Article 24:
 - Lynn Hydiniak: asked about the turnout gear and if that was listed in his budget line.
 - Jim Waterman reported that it costs \$2100 for each set of turnout gear, comes out of his capital reserve account.
- Article 25: approved no discussion
- Article 26:
 - XXXX asked who was appointing and the response was the select board.
 - Wilson Hess says he does not support this article but he respects the select board's desire to professionalize the department. He feels this is a small town and the last vestiges of democracy. He understands that we need qualified personnel. He would prefer that the persons holding these positions be responsible to the town's people.
 - Lynn Hydiniak: she stated that in article 26 that it makes one of the positions appointed.
 - The town treasurer is currently appointed.
 - Elaine Higgins stated that the reason they want this position appointed is so that we can have accountability within the office and that the employee can be vetted and if there is a problem the person can have consequences. She feels it should be a trained professional and not a personality contest.
 - Tyler Hydiniak: agrees with this article. This article allows for accountability to the town. The citizens of the town can interact with the selectmen at any time. It should be a competent qualified person.
 - Lynn Hydiniak: appointed/hiring, vetting the person. Will there be a committee within the town to hire this person so that the most qualified person be hired.

- Steve Bennett: he had not thought about this but it is a good idea. It is not about the people currently holding the positions it is about having qualified people in the position moving forward. The job is complicated and we need someone who can do the job. The town runs over \$1.5 million through the town books every year and that it should be run like a business.
- XXXX: asked if the town has a hiring policy?
- Steve Bennett responded no and stated that we have written over 30 policies in the last eight years and will be writing more.
- Ron stated that there should be a hiring process so that candidates can be vetted and that it should be more than just a popularity contest.
- Steve followed up that with an election only process, you get what you get.
- XXXX : she would like to amend this proposal to have a hiring process.
- Ron Clay: with elections the way they are now, you get what you get. He is not in favor of this proposal.-I don't think Tom said that.
- Scot Holmes: He is not in favor of this proposal. He asked why we are even voting on this again.
- Sandra Abbott Scott: she would like to know where it would be advertised and where it would be posted?
- Ron Price stated that at this time there is no residency requirement, and we would not want that in our hiring criteria because it would decrease our pool of people. MMA has an area to advertise, it could be done on the internet and associated sites. He would like a wide circle to attract the correct person.
- Laura Greeley: if we vote this down we will be in a predicament. Currently our clerk and treasurer are the same person.
- Ron Price pointed out that it is a yearly appointment.
- Steve Bennett referred to former auditors reports that said we need to keep the positions separate. Different people for accounts payable and accounts receivable. He would like these two positions separated moving forward.
- Ripley: This does not make sense at this time and is not in favor.
- Alyssa : We need to get the correct people in the right spots. He is not in favor of this article.
- Kim Holmes: the select board members are elected for a 3 year term. The treasurer's term is one year. Why does the select board want it to be an appointed position.
- Lynn Hydiniak: appointed/hiring and only for 1 year, she feels this would need to be reworded. She was under the impression we were going to hire a person and if they were doing their job they would stay on the job.
- Steve Bennett: agreed with Lynn and said this would be addressed in the hiring policy.

- Lynn Hydiniak: an employee of the town is responsible to the select board.
- Reeny Oulette would like to offer that we remove town clerk and treasurer from this amendment.
 - Ammendment:
 - Lynn Hydiniak asked for clarification
 - Rennee Oulette clarified.
 - Wilson Hess: although Cindy has multiple positions at this time, those positions would be discrete.
- Xxx : that is what it is at this time but would not be that way in the future.
- Ron Price: small town and we may not be able to get people to do all these things as separate jobs. He is not in favor of this amendment. There is a process to relieving a person of the job.
- Laura Greely: if it is not appointed the town clerk is being paid at conflicting salaries. She feels it creates a discrepancy in the town pay.
- Steve Bennett: stated that Cindy has been covering the position due to the past treasurer resigning. Our books are a mess but there is no evidence of wrong-doing.
- Moderator clarified the amendment.
- XXXX : Feels that we should instruct the selectmen to revisit this amendment. Would like to see it passed over.
- XXXX : asked for clarification on if the positions were combined. Asked what was actually on the ballot.
- Wilson Hess: asked if the positions were going to combined and if it was a single position.
- Steve Bennett: agreed that Wilson made a good point. He said to create a policy would be a good compromise.
- Trudy Price: she talked about it being a one-year appointment. She also stated that being appointed each year is better for the employee than having to run for election every year.
- Lynn Hydiniak: because the positions were listed separately and we could have written in names. These are all separate positions and they should be separate. She is in favor in postponing it.
- Article 27: approved no discussion
- Article 28:
 - XXX: asked if there was a budget for this last year.
- Article 29:
 - Tyler Hydiniak: is there a policy on what constitutes an emergency.
 - Ron Price: stated that we would work with the county emergency management agencies. It is a select board decision but they would solicit guidance if it was not specific to the town.
- Article 30:
 - XXXX : asked if this was a public or private bid in the past.
 - Ron Price stated that it is a sealed bid.

- XXXX :asked if we had any foreclosures last year.
 - Select board stated no.
- Article 31:
- Article 32:
 - Luara Greeley: uncertainty of the senior real estate, could help our younger families with the increasing taxes. To ease the tax burden for younger families. She would like to make a motion to change the wording from to apply up to 100000 to apply at least 100000.
 - Tyler Hydiniak: if there is a budget committee members has an objection he would like to hear.
 - Steve Bennett “at least” is too open ended.
 - Laura Greely rescinded her previous amendment and asked to “apply 100,000.”
 - XXXX: asked what is the undesignated fund.
 - Steve Bennett clarified the difference between designated and undesignated funds. He is concerned about spending the money in case something comes up. For example this past year, the garbage compactor needed more repairs than what was budgeted for, and that without a Capital Reserve Account or “designated fund, the Solid Waste line would have been over budget.
 - XXXX: stated that the word allow be used as opposed to saying require.
 - Lynn Hydiniak: asked for clarification
 - XXXX : stated that it locks the money.
 - Ron Price clarified that any money that does not get spent lands in the undesignated fund account. Money cannot be taken out of that fund without a town meeting. Our payment to the school is about \$56,0000 per month. \$150,000 per month to meet our expenses.
 - Laura Greeley: summer road work, Ron was agreeable to spending down the money if we were willing to do the Raven Road. She thinks we should work to lower taxes. She would like caution with the budget.
 - Ron Price: responded that he is in favor of the road work because we are not keeping up with our infra structure. He feels that we are not keeping up and that the Raven Road needed work 10 years ago and has still not been done.
 - Travis Price: nothing was paved from 2013-2017. The budget for paving continues to being cut and is not following a schedule. The Raven Road has not been done in over 10 years.
 - Prentice Grassi: these are the kind of discussions that occur at the budget committee meetings. This is a complex issues and we are

responsible as towns people to leave the amendment as it is and leave it to the selectmen.

- XXXX: He responded to Travis' comment about the roads. He feels that the road discussions should be handled in the budget committee meetings. He agrees that the roads need to be done.
- Elaine Higgins: made a motion to end debate.
- Article 33: approved no discussion
- Article 34
 - Tyler Hydiniak: on behalf of Kim Holmes: why were the towns people not talked to when the ambulance decision was made.
 - Ron Price responded: 2 presentations were provided by both Delta and Unity. Delta has not been doing the best job and was now going to charge the town \$10,000. The select board was impressed with Unity and that it would better meet the town's needs. The agreement with Unity was not contractual.
 - Lynn Hydiniak: asked about payment to Unity. There is no charge to the town. The charge is to the individual
 - XXXX": stated that Unity was an issue in the past. Asked if he has an option as to who responds when he calls 911.
 - Ron Price: stated that if you call 911 Unity will respond but you can ask for a different vendor.
 - Jim Waterman clarified why the decision was made.
 - Lynn Hydiniak: asked about Unity being volunteer vs full time employees. Ron Price responded that they have 36 employees.
 - XXXX : stated that he is not opposed to the Unity Ambulance and he feels that the signage on the Roads be improved.
 - Jim Waterman encouraged this person to report any signage issues, but stated that the GPS was a bigger issue.
 - XXXX : is there a value to our current contract and lease agreements. Is there a limit.
 - Laura Greeley: does not agree with renewing this amendment.
 - XXXX: frozen taxes for seniors. He stated that it is his understanding that the amount difference would be made up. Maine state law only requires for 50%
- Article 35: approved no discussion
- Article 36
 - Scott asked if the meeting can be brought back to the grange hall as it is more comfortable.
 - Welcomed Ryan to the select board.