

Kingston Municipal Budget Committee
Public Meeting
Kingston Fire Station - Meeting Room
November 12, 2023 6:00 PM

Members in attendance:

Trish Tidd, Chair
Rick Russman, Vice Chair
Stacy Dion, Secretary
Claudine Dias
John Pramberg
Kim Donahue
Gary Finerty

Members absent:

Nick Hilfer
Annemarie Roth
Chuck Hart, BOS Representative

Other attendees:

Susan Ayer, Administrative Assistant to the Selectmen
Ernie Landry, Heritage Commission
Paul Butler, Recreation Department
Graham Pellerin, Fire Chief
Paula Mahoney, Finance & Human Resources
Cindy Mulcahy, Recording Secretary

Trish called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Rick moved to approve the minutes of the last meeting and Claudine asked for a revision of a line item referencing the Town Clerk section. John seconded the motion, with the revision. All in favor.

NEW BUSINESS:

The Trustees of the Trust Funds and Cemeteries were scheduled to present tonight but Brad was unavailable. A motion was made by Stacy to move to the Trustees presentation to 11/19/23, and Rick seconded. All in favor.

The Historical Museum Committee is on tonight's agenda, but already presented on November 1.

Prepared by Cindy Mulcahy

It was discovered during the meeting that there were technical issues with the broadcast. These issues will be fixed for future meetings.

DEPARTMENT PRESENTATIONS:

Heritage Commission (4590): Ernie noted that overall spending has decreased, and that the Commission strives to maximize its relatively small budget. He pointed out that the Commission was able to leverage some significant grants and donations (about \$100,000 over 10 years), and that some citizen sponsorship facilitated repair of the library windows.

- *Salaries (4590-13):* Ernie requested an increase to this line item as someone has been hired to record the meeting minutes.
- *Postage (4590-05):* Ernie requested an increase to this line item for a mailing being sent to homeowners about preservation of their older or historic homes.

Fire Department (4220): Graham noted that the Department is feeling understaffed and is relying heavily on mutual aid. Most of the increases requested deal with salaries, both full-time and incidental (call personnel and per diems). Graham noted that the Department needs 8 full-time employees for 24/7 coverage (besides himself and Kelly, the administrator, who is also an EMT). This is a minimal standard based upon the number of shifts and the consideration that two people are needed to operate an ambulance. Staffing issues frequently arise with people who are less tethered to the Department (not full-time). When asked by John if the hiring of two new people was necessary now, Graham pointed out that the Department is just trying to catch up at this point. Rick noted that the future of hiring looks like a long-term issue.

The Department is trying to increase efficiency and raise revenue wherever possible. The Department has recently reinstated a practice where a bill is sent to the driver of a vehicle in any car accident involving criminal activity. If the accident involves an OUI, the driver must also make restitution to the Town. One of the firefighters is also being trained in paramedic school, which would enable the Department to charge more money for those calls. There are also going to be more charges for inspections (solid fuels inspections are the only ones being currently assessed). Life safety, assembly permit and fire alarm inspections are examples of what could be collected. These revenues would go into the General Fund to enhance revenue.

- *Salaries - Full-Time Firefighter (4220-S2):* This line item increased due to the recent hiring of two new full-timers. The Department will do a warrant article for two new people to potentially be hired in March (this money is not shown in budget). The amount will be about \$130,000.
- *Salaries - Overtime (4220-S3):* This line item increased because of pay-scale changes and accrual of vacation time.
- *Salaries - Secretaries/EMT (4220-S3):* This line item increased.
- *Salaries - Call Personnel (4220-S1):* It is requested that this line item stay the same for

padding, especially if the new hire warrant article is not approved. It was noted that a new call member makes only \$9.25/hour. This issue is being worked on via the Wage Matrix work group.

- *Per diem (4220-S5)*: This line item decreased from last year and may drop more next year depending upon circumstances. These employees make \$20.26/hour, as opposed to \$22.00/hour for a full-time firefighter. Per diems were brought in a few years ago to bridge the gap when the Department lost a number of call personnel and could not guarantee an ambulance around the clock. It is an uphill battle to attract and retain per diems: as an example, Danville offers \$27.00/hour.
- *Ambulance Supplies (4220-01)* : This line item increased.
- *Comstar (4220-04)*: This line item is only used if needed. If the Department is busy with calls, the money comes in as revenue (last year was roughly \$300,000). The Department's ambulance billing rates were raised about 7% on 11/10/23. If an ambulance is called to a facility such as All American, the patient is billed and Medicare/Medicaid ensures at least 70% payment.
- *Uniforms (4220-24)*: This line item will increase as two new people have been recently hired and the Department hopes to hire two more in March 2024.
- *Electric (4220-26)* This line item is being looked at. Two services come in: one for the building and one for the fire pump. The fire pump is currently very expensive and Graham will be contacting Until about the issue.
- *Heat (4220-25)*: This line item is running higher than expected and the service company is scheduled for 11/13/23 to do a run-through of the system and diagnose problem areas. One of the four zones of radiant heat in the bays has never worked.

Emergency Management (4290): This budget stays the same and covers items such as Seabrook Station Nuclear Plant drills. Any money not used goes back into General Fund.

- *Salaries (4220:S1)*: The fluctuation in this line item is due to the transition of personnel in the Finance Department.

Parks & Recreation (4520): Paul noted that although the overall budget has not changed a lot, there is a need for more money for the Senior Lunches. The Summer Field Trips accounts (4520-11 and 4520-10) have been moved into a revolving fund to have the camp pay for the camp. The camp gets 62-65 kids per week during summer (150 total kids). The cost is \$170 per week for Kingston residents and \$210 per week non-residents, with a 50% discount for additional children from a family (25% for non-residents).

- *Senior Lunch Program (4520-23)*: Paul requested that this line item increase to \$4,000 due to the program's popularity (there is always a wait list).
- *Details (4520-25)*: This new line item is for the events at Halloween, Christmas and Easter. Events are now held at the Recreation Center, not on the Plains. It was noted that Town events are not assessed cruiser fees, as opposed to a utility company or other outside entity. These funds go back into the Public Service Detail Fund.
- *Halloween (4520-04)*: This line item needs to increase slightly and covers lawn animals, decorations, supplies, food and drink for Trunk or Treat. This does not include candy.

Prepared by Cindy Mulcahy

OLD BUSINESS:

As of this meeting, the Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) has only issued tax rates for 60 out of the 221 New Hampshire towns. Tammy sent out a notice on 11/10/23 to this effect, and that the rates should be set within two weeks. Kingston is in a district, so rates also hinge on information from Newton and the school systems. Kim noted that 69% of the town tax rate is related to school spending. Once the tax rate is determined, Paula will adjust budget numbers to increase if warrant articles hit the budget and not the trust fund.

Claudine will have a face-to-face meeting with Brad (The Trustees of the Trust Funds and Cemeteries) to get budget numbers, including the balances of all the Capital Reserve Funds, before the final department head meeting on 11/19/23.

January 15 is the deadline for warrant articles and they need to go to Department of Revenue Administration for review. Rick judged that \$150,000-200,000 requests will be presented. Stacy will ask the three big department heads (Fire, Police and Highway Maintenance) for a wish list of potential warrant articles for review at the 11/19/23 meeting.

Trish requested that Default Budget number be available for comparison by the 12/13/23 meeting. Trish will also follow up with departments on some action items (i.e. salt cost).

John noted that overall, taxes are going up too much too quickly and that it appears that all the cuts made last year have not created any negative impact. Rick again suggested that each department head should not be micromanaged and should decide which line item to cut. Stacy noted that the Budget Committee's function is to present a budget that is fair to both the taxpayers and to the Town.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, 11/15/23 at 7:00PM at Town Hall. This is a joint meeting of the Select Board and Budget Committee. It is anticipated that Pay for Performance (PFP) will be a key topic.

The Sunday, 11/19/23 meeting starts at 5:00PM at Town Hall. If there is time, some action items and other line item trimming issues will be reviewed.

Stacy moved to conclude the meeting at 7:44, Kim seconded. All in favor.

Prepared by Cindy Mulcahy