**Auburn Budget Committee Meeting**

**October 5, 2023**

**Stritch Meeting Room**

**Approved Minutes**

**7:00 PM**

**Members Present:** Chairman Peter Miles, Dan Carpenter, Joanne Linxweiler, Paula Marzloff, School Board Representative Alan Villeneuve and Selectman Representative Keith Leclair

**Others Present:** Finance Assistant Mimi Friolet, Town Administrator Chris Sterndale, and Nancy Hoijer, Recording Secretary

**I. Call to Order**

Chairman Miles called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

**II. Introductions**

Chairman Miles introduced the members who were present.

**III. Election of Officers**

***Mr. Villeneuve motioned to appoint Peter Miles as Chairman. Ms. Marzloff seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor, the motion passed unanimously.***

The Committee agreed they would table appointing a Vice-Chair until the next meeting.

**IV. Approval of Minutes**

* January 12, 2023

***Mr. Leclair motioned to approve the January 12, 2023 meeting minutes. Mr. Carpenter seconded the motion. A vote was taken, Mr. Villeneuve abstained. The motion passed 5-0-1.***

**V. Town Update, Q3 Recap*,* Budget Preview**

Town Administrator Sterndale passed out proposed new format examples for the line-by-line spreadsheets and asked for feedback from the Committee. Mr. Carpenter noted he liked the space for narratives. Mrs. Linxweiler noted she likes the grid lines.

Mr. Sterndale asked the Committee if they preferred to have full blown back up documents from departments and the Committee indicated the department head should have that information when presenting but did not have to provide pages upon pages of copies of detailed information to the Committee.

Mr. Sterndale explained that line items would now have payroll and overtime broken out. He encouraged department heads, especially police and fire departments who have the most overtime, to consider the number of hours needed and for department heads to actively manage the hours and track overtime and part-time hours which are more variable. Mrs. Friolet noted the hours would be used to estimate the numbers and the spreadsheet will show FICA, Social Security and Medicaid. Mr. Sterndale noted he hoped to have COLA (Cost of Living Adjustments) and Step Increases sooner.

Mr. Villeneuve asked about Police Union and Joint Personnel Board presentations and Mr. Sterndale indicated those would be not much different.

Mrs. Marzloff asked about benefits and Mr. Sterndale indicated they would have the same presentation as last year.

Mr. Sterndale noted stipends for elected officials will be shown and that he has encouraged more deliberation in putting an expense in the line where it belongs rather than where there are funds available so they may be tracked better, and the Town will have a good, dependable historic record.

Mr. Sterndale indicated line numbers would be shortened for the purpose of the budget review process.

Mr. Sterndale recapped FY 2023 to date. He noted the Town is 3/4 or 75% of the way through its budget year with 70% spent, typical for this time of year. He noted vacancies for a full-time police officer still deployed and with the fire department having three full-time firefighter/EMTs where four are budgeted since July 1st while trying to hire the fourth (inclusive of payroll and benefits). Less expensive part-time officers are filling that position in the meantime. Mr. Sterndale noted some uncertainty over the next 18 months with some positions retiring upstairs.

Mr. Sterndale reported fuel and utilities were down and under budget. Highway saw a lot of weather events and had a lot of salt and plowing expenses which burned up most of their budget without the second half of winter here yet. The Selectmen elected not to touch emergency funds until they see how that plays out.

Mr. Sterndale reported on the revenue side rooms and meals tax is still unknown from the state and FEMA has not declared any reimbursement for the June and July rainstorms. The Highway Block Grant is unknown but was $140,000 in 2023 and is expected to be smaller in 2024. ARPA is running out but a lot of maintenance work has been caught up without taxation.

Mr. Sterndale discussed drivers for next year’s budget. Inflation is approximately 3-4% now. Electric prices are expected to increase. The two new firefighters will be paid for the full year as well as the two new full-time positions for library and recreation. Severance School activities will be a full year. The final bond payment will have been made for the fire rescue vehicle. The Warrant Articles will likely replenish existing funds such as planning for the five-year re-evaluation process. There will be four elections. The state selected approved ballot machines and tablets for check in. The police department has their canine unit and handler in school now. Hours will be added to the Town Clerk window with staffing so they can be open 28-30 hours per week. The Deputy Clerk will be trained in the event the Clerk retires. Parks & Recreation will be making improvements to the Pickleball courts. Senior trips are popular and sell out quickly so those will be expanded. The library is planning an expansion to 8,000 SF, with approval in 2024 and construction in 2025, with an estimated cost of $6 million dollars, with $5 million to be bonded (estimated) and the rest in fundraising. Mr. Leclair noted that Mr. Sterndale ran a bond estimate for 20 years at 3.5% and the result is .25/thousand on the tax rate.

Ms. Marzloff asked if there were a lot of walk-in registrations since many can be done online and Mr. Sterndale indicated he will have Mrs. Sylvia get the numbers. First time registrations must be done in person and there is a fee for renewing online which discourages some.

Mr. Villeneuve asked if the library had operating numbers yet and Mr. Leclair indicated he requested them for staffing and energy consumption. Mr. Villeneuve asked how many programs the library was currently not able to offer. Mr. Sterndale noted if the Selectmen put this on the warrant article there would be a public hearing for the bond funding in January.

Mr. Carpenter asked about the transition from the Road Agent position and Mr. Leclair explained the Committee with Dennis McCarthy, Alan Cote, Steve Hodgen and Road Agent Dross which has been meeting. They recommended a two person staff to begin with, a manager and a laborer and purchasing two F-350 trucks with plows (without taxation). Laborers can fill potholes, trim trees, replace signage and save costs but it will take time to quantify the savings. Two to three plow contractors could be supplemented by employees. Ms. Marzloff noted there are costs to own and maintain a fleet as opposed to using subcontractors. She asked how this would affect the Town’s insurance having employees doing the work and the ost of benefits. Mr. Leclair noted he would talk to Primex. Mr. Sterndale explained how the rates are set using the number of full-time police officers, total payroll, population. Mr. Leclair noted that subcontractors pay all of those expenses and bakes in a profit. Mr. Sterndale noted the Committee would see a new line item with $1 as a placeholder in Highway payroll.

Mr. Leclair explained that the Town has the ability to appoint the position but if Mr. Dross wants to continue he could. Also he expects the manager to deal with bidding and managing contracts rather than summer construction and roadwork.

**VI. School Update, FY233 Recap**

Mr. Villeneuve reported that budget review has just started at the school. Paraprofessionals want to form a union and negotiate a contract which will have legal fees associated. He noted SPED averages caused the tax rate to go down but will be up next year because the relief is gone. They are looking at staffing positions such as School Resource Officer. Students are doing well.

Mrs. Marzloff asked when teacher contract negotiations will be, and Mr. Villeneuve indicated not for a couple of years. He noted a strategic plan has been built for employees which he referred to as portrait of a learner. There will be two retirements, but no one left otherwise. Busing is getting straightened out with the new bus company.

**VII. Meeting Calendar**

Town Administrator Sterndale provided the proposed meeting calendar. Mr. Villeneuve doubted the School would be ready to meet on November 9th. The Committee agreed to remove that date and keep the December 7, 2023 date. Mr. Villeneuve indicated he would have some information to present on November 30th. Mr. Sterndale recommended having any bond discussions on January 11th.

**VIII. Adjourn**

***Mrs. Marzloff moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 PM, seconded by Mr. Carpenter. A vote was taken; all were in agreement, the motion carried unanimously.***

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy J. Hoijer,

Recording Secretary

*Note: Any person with a disability who wishes to attend this public meeting and needs to be provided a reasonable accommodation in order to participate, please call the Town Hall (603) 483-5052, or contact the Committee Secretary so that arrangements can be made.*