

Auburn Budget Committee Meeting
October 18, 2018
Auburn Town Hall

Members Present: Peter Miles, Mary Beth Lufkin, Kevin Downing, David Wesche, Paula Marzloff, Dan Carpenter, Alan Villeneuve and James Headd

Others Present: Town Administrator Bill Herman

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

David Wesche moved to elect Peter Miles as Chair of the Budget Committee. Seconded by Paula Marzloff. A vote was taken; all were in favor, the motion carried unanimously.

Jim Headd moved to elect Mary Beth Lufkin as Vice Chair of the Budget Committee. Seconded by Alan Villeneuve. A vote was taken; all were in favor, the motion carried unanimously.

2018 Tax Rate Presentation

Bill Herman provided the Committee with the breakdown of Auburn's 2018 tax rate as recently set by the NH Department of Revenue Administration (NHDRA). He noted the \$17.06 rate was significantly lower than last year's rate of \$21.15 per thousand valuation, but that is due to the revaluation of property which increased the property valuation throughout the community.

He indicated the new tax rate is inclusive of a partial interest payment on the school construction bond, in addition to a higher than normal overlay account, which happens during a revaluation year and a greater number of tax abatement applications are anticipated. This combination will have a positive impact on the 2019 tax rate when the full school bond payments of principle and interest come to fruition and will lessen the actual impact on the tax rate. Mr. Herman also noted the school portion of the tax rate was lower than first anticipated due to increased State Education Block Grant funds and a significant fund balance the School District returned to the taxpayers.

Mr. Herman noted the second issue tax bills were in process should be scheduled to be mailed during the last week of October.

2019 Town Budget

Bill Herman reported the Board of Selectmen had approved a slightly new budgeting process for 2018 which had all town departments, boards and commissions submit their budget requests several months earlier than normal to enable the Finance Director and Town Administrator to assemble an entire Town budget for the benefit of both the Selectmen and the Budget Committee in their work. With the entire picture known, both boards would then be able to know the big picture of the whole budget when they are meeting with the individual departments to review their pieces of the budget.

He presented to the Budget Committee a compiled Town budget for 2019 that totaled \$6,023,007, which compares to the 2018 approved budget of \$5,643,025. He noted the budget package represents all requests that were received and does not reflect any actions yet taken by the Board of Selectmen in their budget review process.

Mr. Herman also noted not included in the budget package is any funding for wage increases – either step increases or a COLA adjustment. The budget reflects the current rates of pay for all positions, and any potential adjustments would be coming forward likely in November from the Joint Personnel Board of the Board of Selectmen, Library Trustees and Police Commission. He further noted the Town is currently in negotiations with the Auburn Police Union, which could propose wage adjustments for police personnel.

Mr. Herman indicated in the work efforts to date, the Board of Selectmen have made some adjustments to various budget requests and he was confident the Budget Committee would see a budget of something less than \$6,000,000 as they got to work on the proposals.

The Budget Committee members felt this was a helpful way to begin the budget process and suggested it provided a level playing field for all departments, boards and commissions with the Budget Committee seeing the big picture before getting to work on the individual pieces.

General Committee Discussion on Approach to 2019 Budget

Peter Miles opened the discussion for the Committee on what its approach might be overall for the 2019 budget by suggesting he thought this might be a year to settle in and maintain current services without major increases. He felt with the recent revaluation and the approval of the school construction project, they should allow everything to settle into place for the coming year.

David Wesche indicated he would be interested in knowing what was budgeted for both the Town and the School District and what was ultimately spent. He was interested in determining what may not have been done or accomplished if there were large surpluses in order to determine if they are raising the right amount of money for the Town and the School District. Mr. Villeneuve reported during the past year the School

District turned back approximately \$650,000, while Mr. Herman reported the Town had a budget surplus of approximately \$159,000.

Mary Beth Lufkin asked whether restoring playing fields at the school property was part of the construction efforts. Mr. Villeneuve indicated the school project should include full-size soccer and softball fields, and possibly a baseball field as well. Several individuals noted such a provision would likely eliminate the need for future expansion of fields at the Eddows Recreational Fields property for the foreseeable future.

Dan Carpenter felt the Committee doesn't know where things are heading with the school bond, so folks should take it easy this year in terms of budgeting and spending. He also indicated he had never been a fan of over budgeting.

Kevin Downing reported he had a chance to look through the budget package and, in general, felt the proposals appeared to be within inflationary range with nothing that seemed dramatically out of place at this point.

Paula Marzloff felt she wanted to see what has been done during the past year and determine whether needs are being met before she passes judgment. She suggested level funding itself is not necessarily the best approach.

Mary Beth Lufkin asked the committee members that, as a Town, what type of community do we want to be. What are we trying to do with our tax dollars to improve our community or are we trying to just be vigilant with our tax dollars.

Kevin Downing indicated he was trying to balance the budget needs and requests with the sentiment Mrs. Marzloff had expressed, as well as those expressed by Mrs. Lufkin.

Paula Marzloff asked the Town Administrator if there has been determinations made on the trailer, truck and tools for parks & recreation in terms of where they are kept, who will be using them, etc. Mr. Herman indicated the trailer and tools that are currently in use are stored either at individuals' homes or in the self-storage unit the Town has rented. The Parks & Recreation Coordinator has an inventory of the equipment and where it is located. He felt if a truck is purchased, the Board of Selectmen will need to address operational questions as to where it is kept, who can use it, etc.

Alan Villeneuve noted Auburn doesn't really have a center of town, and he has been optimistic the multi-use path being proposed along Route 121 to connect various existing paths, bike routes and fire lanes would help to bring the community physically together. He also noted as part of the school construction project, the School Board is looking at establishing an outdoor stage in the center of the "U"-s-shape of the new school facility which could further help with that effort. The stage could not only be used for school events, but community events and programs as well.

Mary Beth Lufkin asked about the outcome of the community survey and facilitated meeting held earlier this year concerning the future of Parks & Recreation. Mr. Herman

reported a lot of good information came through that process and the Board of Selectmen and Parks & Recreation Commission are making some adjustments accordingly. Mr. Herman indicated he would circulate a report from the facilitated meeting to the Budget Committee members.

David Wesche expressed his thoughts the Committee needs to be careful of spending in general and be respectful of the taxpayers. He felt spending carefully meant supporting what we have to do and improving what we do. He added whatever we do should be holistic and benefit the majority of the community. He also felt the provision of athletic fields at the school is important.

Jim Headd noted the Town has grown tremendously since he first came to Auburn in the 1970's. He noted the Town had no ball fields then and he could remember when the Town got its first full-time police officer. He felt the processes have changed tremendously, has grown and has done so in a very favorable way.

Alan Villeneuve indicated he thought the Committee should also recognize the significant change in society that has taken place which now greatly limits the amount of volunteer involvement in many programs and efforts.

Dan Carpenter echoed the Auburn Historical Association has experienced some of that diminished volunteer involvement. He also offered the suggestion that perhaps the school district could look at the potential of restoring a pedestrian bridge where the Griffin Bridge had been to tie the Auburn Historical Association and AVS together. He noted the abutments remain in place. Mr. Villeneuve thought this was a great idea and should be looked at. He also indicated an effort should be made to acquire property that would tie the Griffin Free Public Library property with the Auburn Village School as well. He noted this could provide much needed parking for both entities.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Budget Committee will be held on Thursday, November 1st at 7:00 PM at the Town Hall.

Adjourn

Jim Headd moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:03 PM. Seconded by David Wesche. A vote was taken; all were in agreement, the motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:03 PM.