# Update on Rindge's Budget

As part of preparing for the Budget, I discovered that the town is working from several different version's of last year's budget.

These versions live in different places which has created inaccuracies and difficulty accurately projecting this year's numbers. For example: the version published in the Official Town Report is incorrect and replete with errors.

These small, but widespread inaccuracies include incorrect social security and medicare calculations, some incorrect retirement contributions, and even a few salary numbers that do not match (as we saw with our Tax Collector, Andrea, at last week's Joint meeting). As far as the budget goes, I would characterize these errors as individually minor but collectively significant.

The errors appear to stem from
1. **Inconsistent source documents**
2. **Inaccurate calculations**
3. **A lack of integration between exported Excel documents and Rindge's budgeting software (BS&A) (*this means in the past if a change was made to one, it was not applied to the other)**
4. **Inconsistent updates (or in some cases non-updates) of information when employees leave, are let go, newly hired or given a raise.**
5. **A lack of process at the outset of budgeting which I will address separately momentarily.**

Essentially – this all boils down to the fact that we have no centralized personnel master sheet for wages, step changes, health and retirement benefits. A town needs one in order to ensure that the future is based on accurate and definitive information.

Now that we know where we are, I'd like to talk about "next steps." There are 3 broad categories of steps which I will label, "buckets."

**Bucket 1 – Process and Budget Requests:**

Beginning in August we will implement a new process for department heads to submit their budgets. Right now, we have 1/3$^{rd}$ submitting hand written notes, 1/3$^{rd}$ submitting their own versions of spreadsheets that differ from how the budgeting software computes them (Our Library Director last week was an example of this category), and another 1/3$^{rd}$ that used alternative templates altogether.

I'm not sure yet which way to standardize will work best for us, but over the coming months I will develop a process with consistency in mind such that all department heads submit in the same way and format. This will allow us to keep better record of information and also ensure errors won't abound. By starting the budget process a little earlier in August, we can get ahead of the curve and I can also spend time with any department head or committee that might need any help learning the process we create.

**Bucket 2 – Centralized Personnel Master Sheet:**

We need to create a Master Personnel Spreadsheet where all employment and employee data will live. This will itemize each Full and Part Time Rindge employee  and list out the following for them:

- A.) The town's social security / Medicare obligation
- B.) The Town's contributions to their retirements
- C.) The Town's Health insurance contributions
- D.) Complete salary data, history and dates of change to any of the above.

From this master spreadsheet, we can ensure data is correct, reliable and build budgets we can defend. Unfortunately, this will be a heavy lift and I'm anticipating it will take 80-120 hours.

**Bucket 3 – Moving forward with this year's budget:**
Roberta has located one document which has fewer errors than others. We've checked it and many of the errors are not there. I still have to review retirement and health benefits to see if those are accurate. The issue is that this is not the same document that we published in the Town Report and may not be the same versions others have been working from.

For now, I have placed that new column on the revised spreadsheet for tonight. It is "COLUMN D". I then revised the calculations in column "F" and "G". Again, there may be some errors in here, but I would say tonight's draft is better baseline to use for the discussions.

Finally, after tonight's meeting I'm going to begin building this year's budget from scratch. To do this, I will have to re-meet with many of the department heads and then recalculate many of the wages/benefits lines as well. Like the master spreadsheet, this will take a while to do but we need to begin compiling this now so future budgets are reliable and accurate.

That concludes my update. I spoke with Dan Whitney earlier in the week and I believe he agrees that it's better to go forward toward reliability and future accuracy even if the process to get there may be a painful interim slog.