

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
MEETING MINUTES  
January 11, 2023**

**Present:** Bob Hamilton, Chairman, Marybeth Quill, Vice Chair, Karl Pruter, Selectman, Lori Rautiola, Town Administrator, Laurie May, Finance Director, members of the public

The meeting was called to order at the Town Office on January 11, 2022 at 3:30 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Bob announced the Board will not be taking public comment due to time constraints and that public comment will take place during the Budget Hearing.

Bob stated it was brought to the Board's attention by Tom Coneys, that the December 29<sup>th</sup> and January 4<sup>th</sup> meetings were not properly noticed as required by NH RSA 91:A. While it was noticed on the Town's website and on the "Life in Rindge" Facebook page it was not on any other prominent public location. NH Municipal Association feels that we were deficient in posting the meetings and has referred us to Town Counsel on the issue, this Board will attempt to remedy any motions made and votes taken in good faith at the two previous meetings in order to continue efficient operations of the Town of Rindge.

The motions made at the December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023 meeting were to purchase a plow truck; allow Lori Rautiola to sign on behalf of the Board by Karl Pruter, and to enter into a nonpublic session and seal the minutes of that nonpublic meeting by Bob Hamilton. Marybeth Quill was unable to attend that meeting, and Bob stated it was up to Marybeth to vote or not on the re-motions or to abstain.

Bob stated the next four motions are pertinent to the December 29, 2022 meeting. Karl moved to allow Highway Director, Mike Cloutier to purchase the International CV515 truck as quoted in the amount of \$170,950 from ARPA funds. Karl also moved to allow Lori Rautiola to sign on behalf of the Board.

Bob stated "I move to enter nonpublic session, pursuant to 91-A 3:II (b) hiring. Bob also moved to seal the minutes of the nonpublic session as it could adversely affect the outcome." The motions made at the January 4, 2023 meeting were to enter into a nonpublic session and to seal those minutes. The next two motions were pertinent to the January 4, 2023 meeting. Marybeth was present: Bob moved to enter into nonpublic session pursuant to RSA91-A 3:II (b) hiring. Bob also moved to seal the minutes of the nonpublic session as it could adversely affect the outcome.

**Selectmen's Announcements:** Bob announced the Rindge Chamber of Commerce Gala will be on January 21<sup>st</sup> at Hidden Hills and to contact the Rindge Chamber of Commerce if interested in attending.

**Consent Agenda:** Payroll & Accounts Payable 12.29.22 & 1.05.23

Minutes: 11.30.22, 12.07.22, 12.21.22, 12.29.22, 1.04.23

Karl made a motion to accept the consent agenda. Marybeth seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

**Old Business:** Bob stated the Board discussed encumbrances at the December 29<sup>th</sup> meeting. Bob noted a budget transfer of \$11,000 went from Highway & Streets to the Sanitation line. \$8,000 was encumbered for the Fire Fighter medical evaluations line. All grants were carried forward.

Final Budget Recommendations: The Board went through each department's budget. There was a brief discussion on the Town Clerk Deputy increase in hours. Bob questioned the \$4,250 increase in wages. It was noted this was to cover the extra 76 hours of vacation. It should be noted the Tax Collector reduced the deputy hours and those hours went to the Town Clerk's budget.

The Town Office wages line was discussed. Lori noted the wages included the Finance Director, Bookkeeper, and former Executive Secretary, now proposed as a Land Use Coordinator. Bob noted he would like to cut \$10,000 from the wages line. Karl noted it may be beneficial to reduce the Planning Secretary position wages. Marybeth was in agreement. The discussion continued on proposed Land Use Coordinator position. It was determined \$10,000 would be cut from the Town Office Wages line and \$10,000 cut from the Planning hourly wages line. Planning Wages will go from \$35,800 to \$25,800 and the Town Office Wages will go from \$138,809 to \$128,809. Social security and Medicare will be adjusted to match those salaries.

All were in agreement to cut \$5,000 from the IT hardware budget. Karl noted the Board just approved the purchase of four new computers using ARPA funds.

The Assessing Budget was discussed and considered cutting the \$15,000. It was noted to leave the budget at \$15,000. The Zoning Board of Adjustment was also discussed. It was noted to leave the budget as presented. Bob noted the advertising for Planning seemed high. Karl and Marybeth agreed. The advertising line was cut from \$2,200 to \$1,700.

There was a discussion on the Police Department and whether or not officers should receive the full step increase. Karl noted the only reason this came up is due to the increases in wages and the \$10,000 bonuses given to try and retain officers in 2022. Karl noted the officers have already accelerated three steps on the wage scale in 2022, and it should start to level off. Marybeth agreed, adding the Board gave the bonuses and two officers still left the Department, adding a 2.5% increase should suffice for 2023. Karl mentioned reducing the Officers step by one percent (from 3% to 2%). This would be a reduction of \$8,000. Bob suggested leaving it as is for the year. He noted Lori has already encouraged the Board to adjust the wage scale currently in place. Marybeth stated she would like to reduce the step increase from 3% to 2% for the Police Department. Karl was in agreement. This does not include the 2.5% COLA increase. It was determined the administrative assistant will receive the full step increase. Karl stated to change the hourly wages line to show a \$12,000 reduction to \$398,086. Marybeth said she wanted Laurie May to verify the numbers before a decision was made.

Bob noted he spoke with the Fire Chief and it was suggested to remove \$20,000 from the wages/training line and add it to the wages/call members line. This is due to hiring of three new call members. \$7,999 will be taken from the Fire medical evaluations line, but needs to be in the budget the following year as the trainings are mandated by the State.

Diesel costs, for the Highway Dept., were discussed and the Board was in agreement the diesel line should be increased from \$43,000 to \$48,000.

There was a discussion on the Social Services Agencies. Bob stated the agencies need to be thoroughly evaluated to determine the benefits the Town is receiving, however, time was an issue this year. It should be noted there has been prior discussions on placing the social agencies on the warrant. Last year \$5,000 was cut from this line. Bob proposed cutting it back by \$5,000. Marybeth agreed; Karl was reluctant. It was determined \$5,000 would be cut from the Social Service Agencies line.

The Recreation Budget was discussed. Nothing was cut from the Rec. budget.

Bob stated one of the long-term bonds has a \$10,000 increase over the past years due to it being the last year of the payments. The \$140,000 bond for Converse Meadow will be paid off in 2023.

The final budget number determined by the Board was \$4,948,770. Laurie May noted it would be a 5% increase over last year.

At 5:15 p.m. a brief recess was taken.

### **BUDGET HEARING**

The meeting reconvened at 6:00 p.m. Bob stated prior to the hearing the Board went through the entire budget and made some adjustments. He reiterated those amounts (as mentioned above). The final number the Board will bring forth to the voters is \$4,948,770.

Bob opened the public hearing to the public. Ashley Saari asked what the drivers were behind the increases. Bob explained the increases are mostly due to rising inflation and gas/diesel costs, as well as retaining our employees and keeping salaries competitive. Karl noted 1/3 of the increase was due to fixed costs such as health insurance/fuel costs and salt. Karl also noted the Board will be examining the step plan for town employee wages in 2023.

Dan Whitney, stated while following this process as a member of the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC), the first round of the budget came in just over 5 million, he continued adding, he had witnessed the care and effort that has gone into making this budget. Dan stated a budget that does not pass does not help the Town. Dan asked if the default budget had changed. Lori noted the figure is currently \$4,706,053 however there may be some final changes due to insurance packages.

Jim Qualey asked if the step increases for employees were included in the default. It was noted they are not included, nor was the COLA. Bob mentioned in the past, the Board had added contracts and certain items (fuel/diesel) but was recently informed by the Town Administrator that the Department of Revenue (DRA) recently changed what is allowed in a default budget.

Tom Coneys questioned the increases given to the Police Department mid-year were and the fact they could not be included in the default budget. Bob responded stating they are not included. The discussion continued on the default budget. Bob noted he had a hard time accepting the changes presented to him, however it is not his decision as it is required by the DRA.

There was a discussion on the wage increases for the Police Department and contemplation on reducing the step increases for the Officers. Chief Malynowski explained part of the agreement made during the summer of 2022 was to forgo the ninth officer in the 2023 to compensate for the wage increase made in 2022 to retain officers. Tom Coneys stated the Board was back tracking on some of the decisions to build the Department and it does not seem beneficial to the Town to forgo another officer to compensate for higher wages. Bob suggested to leave it for 2023 and keep the steps as is. Karl agreed, adding he liked Bob's suggestion on holding off on the reduction this year and to readdress the pay scale by next year.

Karl stated he does not want to change the bottom figure of \$4,948,770 but revoked his decision to reduce the Police officers step increase at this point and would like to get the wage scale under control for next year. He suggested finding \$12,000 elsewhere in the Police Budget to cut. Marybeth disagreed with Karl, adding the officers would still receive a 4% increase even if the step was cut by 1%. Phil Motta suggested not cutting \$12,000 from the wages and taking it from another area. Chief Malynowski offered to take the \$12,000 from another area of her budget but requested not to cut the salaries of the officers, adding this has been a battle trying to get the officers where they need to be, plus hiring and retaining officers.

Bob closed the public portion of the meeting. Bob stated the budget will go forth to the voters at \$4,948,770.

2023 Warrant Articles: A draft of the 2023 proposed warrant articles was distributed. Bob read the warrant articles as proposed. Bob made a motion to allow the proposed articles currently numbers 1-3 (Town Officials, Operating Budget and the Fire Rescue Truck) on the 2023 warrant. Marybeth seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

There was a discussion on the warrant articles for the fire capital reserve accounts. Bob noted he spoke with Fire Chief Donovan and it was decided to use ARPA funds to make those purchases for the SCBAs. Bob made a motion to remove the proposed articles currently numbered 4 and 5 (Fire Truck Capital Reserve two separate amounts-\$25,000 and \$80,000 each). Marybeth seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Karl made a motion to allow Article 6 as written (recreation capital reserve fund –for tennis court renovations) to be placed on the warrant. Bob seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

There was a discussion on the proposed article to allow \$30,000 for the Assessing Revaluation. Karl made a motion to allow the article as written to be placed on the warrant. Bob seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

The article for the Library was proposed for \$20,000 for the purchase of the new furnace. Karl made a motion to place it on the warrant as written. Bob seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Bob explained the two warrant articles for the re-adoption of the Veteran's Optional tax exemption and the All Veteran's tax exemption. If readopted and approved this would expand the eligibility requirements to include individuals who have not yet been discharged from service in the Armed Forces. If this article is not put on the warrant the exemption amount would revert back to the State minimum of \$50 per year. Bob made a motion to allow both of the Veteran's exemptions articles to be placed on the warrant as written. Karl seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Bob explained the purpose of the proposed cemetery article was to allow funds received from the purchase of cemetery plots to be added to the cemetery expendable trust fund which would allow the Selectmen to expend for the purpose of cemetery maintenance. Bob made a motion to place the article on the warrant as written. Karl seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Bob explained the Rec Department energy article, adding it would save the town on the cost of energy according to the proposal. The Energy Commission is recommending the article. Bob made a motion to allow the article to be placed on the warrant. Karl seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

The warrant article for the Wellington Bridge Capital Reserve account would be to resolve the account and the remaining funds and interest would be added to the General Fund Account. Bob made a motion to place the article on the ballot as written. Karl seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

The article is to establish a capital reserve account for bridge maintenance. Bob explained the Town has received a check for bridge maintenance from the State and the monies can only be used for that purpose. There would be no tax impact for this article. Marybeth made a motion to place the article as written on the warrant. Bob seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Bob stated the Planning Board has submitted three articles. Bob read the articles as proposed by the Planning Board. Bob made a motion to allow the articles to be placed on the warrant as written.

2023 Approved Holidays: The Board was in agreement with the holidays as posted per the Town Employee handbook.

### **Informational Items/Communications & Updates:**

Bob gave a brief explanation of the Wreaths Across America program, noting, it is a parade of first responders from all over the country. He added the parade travels across the country placing wreaths on the graves of our veterans around the holiday season. A Rindge resident, Larry Cleveland had volunteered to coordinate and assist with the duties should they decide to come through Rindge. Bob made a motion to allow the Wreaths Across America program to allow the volunteers to place the wreaths on the Veteran's graves within the Rindge Cemeteries. Marybeth seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Rautiola  
Town Administrator