



Town of Whitingham
OFFICE OF THE SELECTBOARD

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Questioned asked and answered about the budget and Town Report

Informational session to discuss proposed budget and Town Report on 2/21/24 (copied from Minutes of Selectboard Meeting)

Mike Eldred of the Deerfield Valley News questioned the amount of General Fund revenues on page 12, he thought it looked high. Interest rates went up substantially, current use tax reimbursement is up a little because of a rate change.

Ms. Adams is concerned with putting a limit on questions at Town Meeting because the cover of Town Report says, “detailed financial questions will not be answered at Town Meeting but can be answered before or after”. Lots of discussion ensued, of course folks can ask questions during Town Meeting, and general questions will be answered, but not detailed nitty gritty questions.

Ms. Adams questioned what happens with the cemetery funds on page 30? The intent of prior Cemetery Commission members was to just let the balance grow, so those funds can take care of the cemeteries without using money from the General Fund in the future. It should be a conversation between the Commission and the Selectboard in the near future.

Ms. Adams questioned Economic Development (ED) and putting money into the fund, and that there are 3 different agencies that do ED in the area requesting funding on the warrant. Mr. Weber answered that he recommended a few years ago that we keep putting funds into our ED fund in order to build a new website in the future.

Mr. Merrill questioned what happens to fees generated from police tickets. That money goes into the general fund.

Ms. Adams questioned if ED funding could just go to SeVEDS? Discussion ensued.

Ms. Adams questioned the status of the Town Garage. We recently learned that it can be built on the same property, and VTrans will allow us to keep the very large curb cut.

Mrs. Robohm questioned the amount of “equipment” in the municipal budget? It was explained that a new copier is planned for upstairs/town clerk’s office.

Mr. Robohm questioned what roll Ms. Aekus has during town meeting? She is the Election Official/Town Clerk running the elections and taking Minutes of Town Meeting. It was said a number of times tonight that if the Selectboard doesn’t know the answers to questions at Town

Meeting, the answer will be provided after the meeting, Ms. Aekus will not be looking them up during the meeting.

Mr. Robohm continued:

Page 12: why is bank interest projected to go from \$2,800 to \$20,000? The treasurer found better rates for the town funds.

Page 13: If all employees received a 3% COL increase why did the Selectboard Administrator's salary go up 13%? She was awarded a salary increase based on merit.

Page 14: Assistant town clerk got a 3% raise, but the Town Clerk's went up 12%? \$23,636 is the correct amount, it looks like a typo. It will be corrected for town meeting.

Page 15: Tax Collector what is the salary? That section of the budget should be called "Delinquent Tax Collector". That position is paid by the tax penalties. Ms. Aekus explained there were changes in the Vermont Statutes a few years back that the current taxes would be collected by the treasurer instead of the Tax Collector. There was a small salary in the budget for the collection of current taxes and the penalties are compensation for the delinquent tax collection. Mr. Brown noted that he would like to see the Delinquent Tax Collector and the Town Clerk paid by salary only versus salary and penalties or fees. These changes will likely be addressed when Ms. Aekus's terms are over.

Page 16: sewer usage fees went up substantially on the Municipal Center Budget. Mr. Weber answered how the allocation of usage was updated.

Page 17: ZBA Clerk fees why did they increase? The ZBA Clerk is paid \$75 per ZBA hearing; the budget simply projected more hearings.

Page 22: questioned librarian wages, were they on the wrong line? Yes, typo.

Page 25: questioned what is "sludge revenue"? Mr. Brown answered that it is revenues received from sludge haulers who may dump into our plants; the projected revenue went down significantly because we are in the midst of a large construction project and will not be receiving sludge.

Page 25: why are there assistant operator wages under "Labor" and on page 26 under "Sewer Plant Expenses" Simon Operations Contract Services? Simon Operations act as Chief Operator of the two sewer plants under their employee's license. But the plants need to be checked and testing conducted on weekends; our contract says we will cover weekends/holidays.

Page 25: who is the sewer treasurer, and why did that position get a 6% increase? Marylee Putnam. She was caught up on a wages increase that she did not get prior.

Page 26: what is the difference between outside testing and contracted services? One is strictly for testing the other is for other services provided.

Page 26: why did outside testing go up so much? Testing done by the prior Chief Operator may have been behind the 8-ball, and the state recently updated our discharge permits which require more frequent testing and more expensive tests.

Page 31: The various funds seem to be earning at different rates – why? Ms. Aekus explained that the funds are all in different types of accounts, she recently renegotiated the rates to be much higher. She noted that the town could consider an investment committee to help with investments.

Mrs. Robohm questioned the VT Childcare Payroll Tax throughout the budget, are the employees sharing the cost or are the taxpayers paying the whole thing. Ms. Aekus answered that the new tax came in so late she didn't have time to update the entire budget so for this year the taxpayers are paying it.

Donnie Boyd questioned how the garage fund balance on page 31 jumped so much? It was answered that the cell tower lease buyout of \$252,000 was deposited into that fund through Article 35 and also \$50,000 from Article 29 of the 2023 Warrant (fiscal year 2023 Town Meeting).

Town Report Budget Corrections:

Page 14, Town Clerk – Town Clerk Salary was listed as \$25,636.00. Correct amount is \$23,636.00, reducing FICA/Medi by \$153.00 and retirement by \$130.00 making the correct total for the Town Clerk budget \$104,660.00.

Page 19, Budget Summary – the FY 2023 Actual figure for the Transfer Station (bottom of column) was omitted. That figure is \$124,949.33, making the column total \$889,624.92.

Page 19, Budget Summary – the FY 2025 Budget for the Town Clerk's Office was listed as \$106,943.00, the correct amount is \$104,943.00, making the column total \$766,609.00.

Page 22, Library Expenses – in the FY 2024 Budget column the Assistants Wages and the Librarian Salary were reversed. Correct Assistants Wages is \$27,810.00, correct Librarian Salary is \$33,651.00. Column total does not change.

Page 25, Highway Budget Summary – the FY 2023 Actual figure was listed as \$152,431.50, the correct figure is \$133,091.60 making the column total \$1,328,565.60.

Page 25, Sewer Labor – the Treasury Salary for FY 2025 Budget was listed as \$3,527.00, the correct figure is \$3,424.00 making the column total \$17,167.00.

Correction to Article 1

Article 1 to be corrected during Town Meeting to:

Shall the voters authorize general fund expenditures for operating expenses for fiscal year July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025, of **\$766,326.00** of which **\$397,604.00** to be raised in taxes, the balance to be offset by **\$267,982.00** in anticipated revenues and **\$100,740.00** appropriated from prior year's fund balance?