

Town Of Groton, Vermont – Selectboard Minutes, December 29th, 2015 (Approved)

The duly warned Groton Selectboard Budget Meeting of December 29th, 2015 was held at the Groton Community Building, 1476 Scott Highway, Groton, Vermont.

Attendance for the meeting included Lisa Hart, Carrie Peters, Brent Smith, and Dan Robinson.

The Following Selectboard Members were in attendance: Peter Lyon, Mary Grant, and Andrew Dorsett

The Meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM

Updates/Adjustments to the Agenda:

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

Review 2015 Year End Budget vs Actual:

Peter asked the Treasurer's office to walk the Select Board through the budget. Lisa explained the report that she had provided each board member. Peter asked for the record if the Highway and General fund spending were under the budget. Lisa answered yes. Peter said that now we could look at what funds could be reallocated to fund projects that had be put on hold.

Peter asked Lisa to update the board on the Town Clerk's office renovation project. Lisa said that it didn't look like that was going to happen because the contractor was unable to get in touch with an electrician to provide an estimate for the electrical portion of the project.

Peter asked what the total of unspent funds were. Lisa said \$31,000 General Fund and \$18,946 Highway.

After reviewing the budget and the requirements for each project, the Select Board identified the following projects to fund:

\$4,500.00 – Town Clerk's office efficiency remodel
\$6,497.00 – Community Building insulation deposit
\$1,500.00 – Community Building wifi/cellular service booster
\$5,500.00 – Fire/EMS Radio purchase
\$4,850.00 – Reserve for Insulation
\$22,847.00 – Total

The Treasurer's Office identified the lines in the budget to reallocate funds to cover the projects, Community Building Improvement Fund for all of the projects except the Fire/Ems Radios, which were reallocated to the Fire Department's Vehicle Fund.

Andrew moved to allocate year end funds to the projects listed for an amount totaling \$22,847.00. Mary seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve. Peter commented that the Team had a good closing, they were getting some well needed projects done and under budget for 2015.

Peter asked the Treasurer's Office to walk the Board through the Highway Year End. The Board told Brent that now was the time to identify items/projects that he wanted to fund. Peter asked Lisa what the year end total unspent was for Highway, Lisa reported \$18,946.00. Peter said this is where the electrical invoice for \$838.00 mentioned earlier will be paid. Peter asked Brent if there were any other spots he would like to reserve funds for. Brent stated that he would like to give any remaining monies back to the taxpayer. The Board raised the question of whether or not any Highway funds would be needed to match the sidewalk grant Groton had received. Peter said the \$15,000.00 was already appropriated at the last Town Meeting. Mary asked Lisa if she reserved that money, Lisa responded no. Andrew asked if the motion was to create a reserve fund or to appropriate the money? Carrie went to the Town Report to see how the Article was written or if she had a copy of the minutes from Town Meeting.

Carrie read the Article "Article 9 Shall the Town of Groton approve the establishment of a reserve fund to be called the sidewalk fund for the construction and maintenance of sidewalks in the amount of \$15,000". Andrew asked if that fund was created, Mary answered no. Andrew responded we have to create it. Mary asked how much needs to be in it, Peter said \$15,000. Andrew said that the funds are there, but because the Reserve fund was never created, that money/amount has not shown up anywhere. By creating the Sidewalk Reserve and placing the \$15,000.00 amount there, it can be tracked. Andrew said then the remaining \$18,000 from Highway would be carried as a Highway Unreserved Fund Balance to reduce the amount raised by taxes next year. This would in essence, give the money back to the taxpayer. Peter said that a question would be is because we are spending, \$7000 from the sidewalk reserve on the 1st section of sidewalk, do we want to replenish that to maintain the \$15,000 in the fund. Andrew and Mary indicated that would be a good Idea. Andrew made the motion to reallocate \$7000 from the Highway remaining budget to the Sidewalk Reserve Fund to replenish the fund. Mary seconded the motion. The board voted unanimously to approve the motion. Carrie asked Andrew to walk her through the Sidewalk Reserve Fund creation and moving the funds appropriately. Peter declared the 2015 budget complete.

Review and Work on Finalizing the 2016 Budget:

Peter asked Lisa to walk the Board through the Revenue report. Initial questions were raised about the BMU refund and how that is determined. Carrie indicated that it could fluctuate greatly and the Town could actually have to pay more instead of getting a rebate. Andrew said that it may be based on the number of anticipated students vs the number of actual students.

Peter asked why there was revenue for the Listers last year and none for 2016. Andrew asked what the Listers did that generated revenue. Brent said that the State gives so much per parcel that the Listers assess. Peter suggested that a note be put on that line to follow-up with Kitty to put an estimate in that line, Lisa said that she would talk with Kitty. Peter asked why there was such a drop in Community Building revenue. Typically there was in the area of \$2000 to \$3000 and now it was down to \$900. Mary said that she had talked to Linda and she said that the School had not paid her yet. Peter wanted to ask where the \$500 payment from Green Mountain Community Solar was being carried. He thought that a reserve fund was should be created. This would allow the Town to track the money received as income/revenue. The power credit would show on the electric bill and could be tracked there. The Board agreed that a revenue line be created for the Lease, and one for the tax payment from Green Mountain Community Solar. Energy credits will be tracked on the utility bill.

Andrew asked about the Town Clerk fee schedule. Lisa said that a lot of her fees are set by the State and that needed follow-up. Mary Said that Linda was also asking about the Community Building fees and resolving the insurance issue. There was also a question about approving the floor hockey request.

Peter asked about Highway Department revenue. Brent reviewed the revenue report.

Andrew asked about grant income having a line item, sidewalks as an example, which would go under Highway. Peter thought that was a good idea. Andrew said that we should show revenue of \$28,000.00 for sidewalks. Brent said that the Structures grant for the Boulder Beach project had been approved for \$80,000.00.

Mary said that the Planning grant of \$7629.00 should be shown as a revenue line under Planning. Carrie and Mary determined the line should be called the NVDA Planning Grant. Mary said that right now we have a lot of money going through the Community Building, and we have a reserve fund for the Community Building, but we don't show any revenue. Andrew said we have a line for Community Building use, but we don't have a line for grants. There is a General Community Building Revenue Fund that could be used. Carrie said that she believes that we do. She also suggested that the lines that are all zeroes should be made not to show in reports to reduce confusion.

Peter asked Brent when the Better Back Roads Grant was coming, Brent answered that it has already been received.

2016 Budget, expenses. Peter asked how everyone wanted to review the budget. Everyone agreed on top down, by line starting with the Select Board. Peter said that we still had the net goal of 1.75% maximum increase. Peter said that the Select Board was over and that they would have to find a way to balance it out during the review of other departments. Andrew added that there are also some other expenses that are going to drive departments outside of the 1.75% range as well. Mary said the reason the Select Board budget is higher is that they have a secretary that they are paying for. Peter said actually the Select Board Bookkeeper wages last year was \$6500 and that money was moved to another department so it isn't quite apples to apples. Peter added that he is creating a hold there until we go through the entire budget.

Town Clerk budget is lower for 2016 because in 2015 she had mandatory training. Linda is asking the town to cover the cost of her health insurance which is now Medicare because of her age and she is still working. Previously she was covered by the Town's health care plan which is significantly higher, so the Board felt this was an acceptable plan because of the cost savings. Carrie asked if the plan was to pay her or pay Medicare directly. Andrew said it would benefit her if the Town made the payments pre-tax. Andrew also brought up employee contribution to their health care plans and that the select board should be reviewing those options for next year. He went on to say that perhaps to get buy in from the employees would be to explain to them that they would be responsible for a 7.5% cost share, but this year the town would give them a 7.5% raise in pay, but the following year the cost share would increase to 10% with no raise in pay. Mary said this would have to be discussed further because insurance has been renewed for this year. Peter said that in the public and private sector an employee contribution has become the norm and he would support whatever the Board desires. Andrew asked Brent what his thoughts were. Brent said that he believes there should be a cost share, how much, he doesn't know, but there should be some. Andrew said that any contribution is made pre-tax which benefits the employee. He added that insurance is a pretty in depth conversation because of the options available. Andrew said he would be comfortable with a 5% employee contribution with an increase to 7.5% next year and 10% the following year with a pay increase of 5% the first year. Peter said that the pay offset would be another discussion and asked if that was a motion. Andrew said yes and Mary seconded. The Board Voted unanimously to approve. The Board asked Lisa and Carrie to do the math and get a premium figure. Lisa asked what this meant for Linda. Andrew said it would be the same, and she would be responsible for 5% of her cost.

Treasurer. Peter asked about training dollars. Peter asked if the \$1600 was sufficient. Lisa expressed concern that she was not comfortable with the training she has received on NEMRC. Andrew asked if the auditor was able to help as his rates were less than the NEMRC training team. Lisa said that the auditor's knowledge on NEMRC was limited. Lisa did have the name of a person that contracts as a trainer and she may be able to help at a reasonable rate. Lisa said that she still has a bill out there from NEMRC that she hasn't received. Lisa wanted to talk about the buy-out for her insurance. Peter asked what the amount was for the record, Lisa said 5%. Lisa said she had polled some of the surrounding towns and the general reply was \$3000-\$5000. Peter asked Andrew what Littleton does. Andrew said that Littleton does \$1500 single \$3000 couple/family. Andrew asked the Secretary to get more information from Larry Smith to get an average or recommendations. The discussion moved on to office expenses including phone/fax/internet service. Andrew asked the Secretary to get a tally of the number of phones in the town offices and get an estimate from Charter Communications to see if the cost of service can be reduced. Peter asked about a budget line for IT support for \$2000 and asked Lisa if it could be brought down to \$1000. Lisa said as long as they didn't have any major problems, it would be fine.

Collector of Current Taxes has no budget because Lisa does current taxes. Andrew suggested that she reduce her Treasurer wages (rough estimate) and put that money in wages for Collector of Current Taxes.

Collector of Delinquent Taxes was level funded.

Auditor's budget is down by \$66. Peter asked how we insert a notice of the Board's intent to modify how the Town Report is distributed into the Town Report. Mary indicated that the Auditors would make that comment in their report. Peter asked if the Secretary could send a note to the Auditors letting them know that the notice needed to be in the Town Report and work with them if they need assistance. Elections. With primaries and a Presidential elections year there were no questions for the Elections budget.

Listers. There was a question about some mapping expenses/revenue. The Treasurer's office will follow up with Kitty on what was being moved in or out of her budget from reserves.

Insurance. Some increase in insurance, but outside any control.

Professional Services. Attorney's fees stayed the same. Auditor's service is staying \$6000 for the upcoming year.

Dues. Up just a little, but has returns for the Town.

Interest. Peter questioned why we spent so much on interest. The only change is moving the collection of taxes back a month. The consensus was that may be the cause. Peter asked if there was a plan to move the tax collection date back to where it was. Lisa said no, that it is set based on the education tax payment. Discussion ensued of establishing a 2 payment tax system.

Caledonia County Tax. No Discussion.

Planning and Zoning. No discussion.

Transfers to Other Funds. Unused line. Treasurer will hide that line so it doesn't show in future reports.

Clock Repairs. Dropped \$100. Lisa asked about when she will see a bill for rental of the steeple. Peter said she should have a bill already, Peter dialed the Church Treasurer's number and gave Lisa the phone. They set up a time to receive an invoice. The Church Treasurer said she would come by in the morning.

Fields and Parks. No discussion.

Sidewalks. Brent indicated that he will move some labor and equipment time to sidewalks. Peter added that they are creating a Public Works Department. Carrie asked in solid waste, recycling building and Green Up Day are falling under Public Works, Peter said yes. Andrew added that streetlights and the Minard Hill blinker are moving under Public Works. He added that VLCT should be consulted on the best way to establish the Department of Public Works. The Treasurer's office will follow-up with VLCT.

Community Building. Peters asked if the Building Committee had reviewed the estimates from Power's Plumbing. The Secretary said he would track down the estimates and get them to the Treasurer.

Mary asked Lisa if she was able to establish a contract with the cleaning service. Carrie said the contract was for \$45 a week alternating between the Gym and the Office. Lisa said the Library does their own thing, although the town pays it. Mary said that the Library should pay for their own. Carrie said that the town pays \$1000 a year for a cleaner for the Library.

Tree Warden. Level funded, no discussion.

Building Committee. The Select Board, by consensus, renamed the Building Committee the Community and Economic Development Committee. Peter asked the Treasurer to rename the line. The budget of \$265 and \$0 in training and mileage. Mary suggested that we add money for training and mileage for the Committee chair or his appointee. The Board approved adding \$150 for training and \$50 for mileage.

Recreation Committee. Mary asked about the position proposed by Paul Berlejung. Andrew added that this position would be revenue neutral because it was to develop and promote activities in the town. The Recreation chair position is rarely filled and by providing a stipend there would be incentive to help organize activities. Paul's proposal was for \$2340, Andrew suggested \$2300 as a place holder. Paul also submitted a proposal of \$400 for Senior Meals. Floor Hockey, \$200.

Public Safety. Animal Control. Budget is up based on a 2016 dog survey coordinated between Linda and the animal control officer. Lisa will reconfirm with Linda to ensure that the Animal Control budget is revenue neutral.

Health Officer. Increased \$200 based on number of inspections required.

Emergency Services. Dispatch increase over last year. Amount was just an estimate during the initial workshop. Peter asked about the cost of fuel. The cost was carried forward when the actual cost of fuel has gone down. Peter said that Treasurer should talk to Dorothy about the fuel cost and reduce her budget. That would bring her budget down to level funding. Pager and radios are being funded with 2015 monies to further reduce the Emergency Services budget.

FAST. Level funded. Andrew asked about the amount for training and mileage. Brent said that there is a conference that most of the department attends. Discussion revolved around how lines are grouped together for budget and separated out for spending. It makes it hard for the voters to understand. Carrie also explained how mileage is broken out from training dollars. Peter suggested that the Treasurer's office work with Dorothy to align Budget vs Actuals.

Fire Department. Carrie said the lease payment had to be budgeted for. Peter brought up the fuel and propane cost. Mary asked about the dues increase. Peter said these should also be brought up to Dorothy when they meet. Brent indicated that they are anticipating driver training expenses for the new truck. Peter said that Repairs and Maintenance should also go down because of receipt of the new truck. The Treasurer's Office will follow up with Dorothy on the items discussed. Mary and Andrew identified that supplies should be taken down to \$1000 from \$3000.

Forest Fire. Level Funded, no issues or concerns.

Law Enforcement. Andrew asked if the radios Jim was looking for were part of the end of year purchase being made. Lisa said no, it was a different request. Peter asked why training went up \$1000. Carrie said that she thinks he get confused how dollars are broken down for training. Peter asked if the Treasurer's office could work with him to make sure he understands how to break it down. Brent said he believes that if Jim spends 8 hours in a class, then he has 8 hours less to patrol. Peter said that \$1000 is too much for training, so he needs to get a more realistic figure. Peter said that dispatch fees are a concern. He's not sure why we are spending \$2500 for a service Jim sees no benefit from. Andrew suggested trying to contract through Grafton County to see if there is any substantial cost savings. Carrie brought up the cost of cruiser fuel. Peter suggested that Jim be invited to the January 7th Select Board meeting to go over his budget.

Cemeteries. No questions or concerns from Select Board or Treasurer's office.

Library. Under 1.75%, no concerns or questions from Select Board or Treasurer's office.

Agency appropriations. Remove the agency appropriations from the budget and put in the Town Report and warn as a single budget item. Agency information sheets will be available for voters to review at town meeting.

Reserve Fund Appropriations. The sale of the old fire truck will go into the Emergency Services Vehicle Reserve fund. Everything else stays the same.

Highway.

Contracted work. No questions.

Infrastructure. Mary questioned salt. Brent said that the Select Board froze spending so he didn't finish making salt purchases. Peter told Brent that he is authorized to spend \$2500 on Salt. Andrew made the motion and Mary Seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously. Andrew said that there should be money set aside every year for crushing stone every year to help stabilize the highway budget. Peter said why don't we use whatever is left over from the highway budget toward the gravel to reduce the amount requested in Brent's Highway budget. Andrew made the motion to put \$16,000 of unused funds from the 2015 budget into the Infrastructure reserve fund. Mary seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve.

Peter asked about Boulder Beach plowing and does it match the Seyon Ranch work? If it matches we are good. Carrie said we actually make money on that one. Brent said we need to adjust for the 10 wheeler. Operating cost. No questions from the Board or Treasurer's Office.

Equipment. Level funded, no questions from the Board or Treasurer's Office.

Supplies. Expenses down a notch. No questions

Sidewalks. Level funded, Brent will get with Treasurer's office to move equipment & labor to sidewalks.

Paving reserves. No questions.

Peter identified that the only real major concern was working through the Constables budget.

Salaries.

Select Board – Stipend, Same

Fire – Chief, Increased to \$1050 Andrew made motion, Mary 2nd, Passed unanimously

Forest Fire Warden wages tied to Road Commissioner wages.

Forest Fire Fighters tied to Highway employee wages.

Andrew added that they were going to need further discussion on wages based on the 1.75% raise and the 5% insurance contribution. Peter concurred and asked the treasurer's office for worksheets with the math for the Board to review.

Mary made a motion to increase the Assistant Treasurer wage to \$16.00 effective December 1st 2015, Andrew 2nd the motion and the board voted unanimously to approve.

Lisa presented the board with a document folder for signatures.

Select Board Meeting was adjourned at 10:21 PM.

Minutes prepared by Dan Robinson, Select Board Secretary