

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
DECEMBER 17, 2019

PRESENT: David Lage, Chairman, John Veaser, Bert Hamill
Town Administrator Scott Butcher
Finance Advisory Committee Members Jeff McCabe, Marc Fortier, Jack Low
Moderator Bob Romeril
Supervisors of the Checklist Chairwoman Barbara Graham

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Office

Selectmen's Office Budget Review: Chairman Lage began the meeting by reviewing the agenda. He asked that the agenda be rearranged so that the Selectmen's Office budget could be discussed first, rather than the Moderator's budget, and asked the Town Administrator to go through the line items. Chairman Lage stated that the requested increase in the Town Administrator's compensation to \$80,000 was too high. The Town Administrator countered that other area towns are compensating their Town Administrators even higher than the request, such as Ashburnham in the \$110,000-\$115,000 range, Jaffrey over \$100,000 and Wilton \$84,000-\$87,000 annually. The Town Administrator also pointed out that two of the employees that report to him are actually making significantly more. Selectman Veaser stated he felt an increase was in order but the jump to \$80,000 was a lot. Selectman Hamill stated he felt the Town Administrator was under paid and thinks \$75,000 this year is appropriate with another look at it next year. Selectman Veaser said the number he had in mind was in the \$72,000-\$73,000 range. Chairman Lage said he was thinking a \$5,000 increase plus a 3% merit increase. That would bring it to around \$72,000 and that he wanted the level of compensation to be fair. Selectman Hamill reiterated that he feels \$75,000 is the right number to ensure the Town Administrator doesn't leave. Selectman Veaser said he was willing to go to \$73,000. Chairman Lage wants more time to research it.

Chairman Lage had some questions about the requested increase in the Education line item from \$400 to \$800. The Town Administrator explained that the increase would allow attendance at the Primex annual conference which provides training on human resource, management, and risk mitigation areas. Chairman Lage went on to ask about why the Records Storage line item had been reduced from \$300 to \$1. The Town Administrator explained that none of this year's \$300 had been spent because the amount was too small to do anything effective with. He wants the \$1 as a place holder for FY2020 until a more comprehensive records management strategy can be developed. He went on to explain that the state of the files in the town office is unacceptable and will require a huge focused effort to begin to address the issue, and that by RSA, a Records Management Committee needs to be formed in the town to determine what records need to be retained or can be destroyed. He continued that more time is required on the part of employees to help start that process before hiring an outside contractor to do the rest. Selectman Hamill asked if a plan is in the works to do that. The Town Administrator said that he is asking for an

increase in hours for some of the Town Office staff in order to address a long list of general file maintenance and projects that need to be completed.

It was at this point the members of the Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) joined the meeting. Chairman Lage explained that it was the Selectmen's prerogative to rearrange the schedule and begin the Selectmen's Office budget early without the FAC being present.

Selectman Hamill asked about all the tasks that needed to be complete in the office and wanted to know what the financial impact would be to increase the hours for Lori Rautiola and Debbie Deaton to 40 hours per week each. The Town Administrator explained that he didn't have the costs associated with the benefits they would be entitled to at anything over 32 hours per week and was requesting their hours be increase from the current 28 hours per week to 31 hours to be under the 32 hour per week threshold to be benefits eligible. However, there is plenty of work to justify 40 hours per week for each of them. He went on to say that some responsibilities should be shifted around amongst the Town Office employees to make things run more efficiently and effectively. The Town Administrator also stated that many of the Town Office employees were being paid \$2-\$6 an hour less than what other area towns are paying people in those same positions and cautioned that the town is at risk of losing employees with nearby towns paying significantly more than New Ipswich is.

Selectman Hamill raised the concern about how much time the Town Administrator spends on documenting the meeting minutes and that his time could be better spent elsewhere. The Town Administrator indicated that an increase in hours for the office staff may allow that task to be offloaded.

Chairman Lage asked that backup documentation be provided by the Town Administrator to provide justification for the increase in wages and hours. He suggested that instead of expanding hours for the existing employees that hiring another part-time employee to focus on certain things. The Town Administrator explained that an additional part-time person would not be as effective as the existing people who are already trained and knowledgeable in the required areas. In addition, the state of current conditions means we are not in compliance with state law in some areas and files are not organized well. It will require additional manhours to get some of these things done while still trying to perform day-to-day duties service the public.

There was extensive discussion on what types of things residents, officials, contractors, and real estate people request from the Town Office staff. Chairman Lage referred to a recent request by the Town's Health Officer for information on a septic system that may have failed. The Town Administrator stressed that the Town Office needs to provide basic assistance to residents and be a local resource for information when requested. That requires the right tools and more manpower. Selectman Veaser doesn't believe that an adjustment in pay for some of the Town Office employees isn't warranted. The Town Administrator reviewed the various documents that support increases for the requested employees. Chairman Lage reiterated that he wants to

have time to review any supporting material. The Selectmen's Office budget will be reviewed again on January 7th.

Moderator's Budget Review: Moderator Bob Romeril did a run down of all line items and asked for a small increase in the stipends. Selectman Veaser said he didn't have a problem with the budget as presented. Selectman Hamill agreed.

Elections & Registrations Budget Review: Chairwoman Barbara Graham explained the increase in her budget requested is due to the additional primaries and elections that will take place during 2020. There was some discussion about the cost and number of ballots that will be required. The Selectmen agreed with the budget as presented.

Government Buildings Budget Review: The Town Administrator reviewed the requested pay increases for the facilities person and the custodial person moving them up to \$17.00 per hour from \$15.15, and to \$14.00 per hour from \$12.50. Selectman Hamill asked why the GGB Building line item has been reduced from \$10,000 to \$5,000. The Town Administrator explained that the line item had been barely utilized with less than \$1,100 having been spent. There was some discussion about the Groundskeeping and Lawn Care line items with the request being to level fund them. There was also discussion about the increase in the Maintenance line item from \$17,500 to \$19,500 to cover the pumping of five septic systems at town facilities. The Selectmen requested that a line item be added to the budget for temporary safety fencing for a specific town owned property in the amount of \$4,000. There was no decision on whether to approve the requested budget.

Legal Budget Review: There was discussion about the Legal budget exceeding \$50,000 for 2019 against the \$20,000 budgeted. The Town Administrator requested \$40,000 for FY2020 based on some ongoing litigation. After some discussion, the Selectmen wanted that increased to \$45,000.

Insurance Budget Review: The Selectmen reviewed the Insurance budget for Property & Liability, Workmen's Compensation, and Unemployment Insurance. The budget request was based on what Primex, the insurance carrier, had set the 2020 rates at in the amount of \$67,879 which is a reduction from the 2019 amount of \$72,066.

Outside Lighting Budget: The Outside Lighting budget was reviewed and the 2019 budgeted amount of \$24,500 will be exceeded before the year is over. The requested FY2020 budget is for \$26,500. The cost of electricity for lighting may get reduced if the town is able to install new LED fixtures during 2020. After some discussion the requested budget was approved.

Animal Control Officer Discussion and Budget Review: The Selectmen discussed whether the Animal Control Officer position was necessary. The budget line items were reviewed and there was discussion about how to fill the position and whether a town vehicle would be provided, possibly a retired police cruiser. The Selectmen decided to retain the budget for the position and

tell the Police Chief to interview candidates. The budget was level funded for FY2020 with a total budget of \$9,730.

2020 Road Improvement Discussion: The Selectmen discussed what roads should be a priority for resurfacing. After a lengthy discussion they developed a list of road improvements to be recommended to the DPW Director.

At 9:05 p.m. Selectman Veesser made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Selectman Hamill seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Scott Butcher, Town Administrator

Minutes approved by:
BOARD OF SELECTMEN

David S. Lage, Chairman



John Veesser



Bert Hamill