

Budget Meeting January 16, 2018

Present: Brian Somero, Dan Heath, Alan Doyle

Undecided: Jay Hopkins

Brian called to order at 7pm.

Minutes from previous meetings were circulated for signatures.

Mr. Somero's opening remarks;

We're here to answer questions. We've appeared to take drastic action, notably with the police department. The committee found some things that we feel that the public was not treated fairly and we question some of the information being sent out. Also, some people feel that there should not be a Budget Committee. After his 10 plus years of experience with budget committees and previous finance committees, he feels that there is a need for a budget committee. Votes wanted a budget committee, and the people wanted one. They wanted a committee with more say-so on spending. You [the audience] can beat up on us tonight, but the people wanted a budget committee that looked into things and someone to keep things in line. Selectmen are too generous with people that they liked; I don't think that it should be about who you like, but representative of the needs of the town. The people voted for a Budget Committee and tried to keep some limit on overspending, specifically on the police department. There are a few other things, but I think that we should start off with questions.

The Chair pointed to an audience member who began to speak. David Lage stood up and interrupted and asked if we could explain our rationale for the police budget and whether there was any public input and where did we see that the people wanted cuts in the budget. The Chair said that there were no comments to this particular budget, but in the past, people have voted many times against another police officer, people have voted many times for a default budget, and people have voted in favor of cuts in the budget. I feel that the selectmen have not represented what the will of the people have been. Mr. Lage said that we're not in the past, but looking to the future and said that people recently have voted for the budget [while Budget Committee was in office] for the budget. The Chair said that in some case, the people have leaned towards a default. The Chair directed the question to Mr. Doyle. He said that we have not really cut any police staff in this budget. We have cut the non-existent officer, his retirement, his health insurance, and his new hire fees. If we actually had an office to pay, it would be a different issue. But we cut where we have been paying a position that doesn't exist for four years. So all we did was remove the non-existent people. Lage changes the issue to administrative hours cuts and if we were aware of the efforts to fill the non-existent police position. Mr. Doyle said that we had asked the police chief during the selectmen's meeting about the recruitment and noted that his support for his budget claimed at least \$750 ads and we noted that over the past four years, ads have not been placed. In addition, we point out that the Board of Selectman's office budget claim to be placing the ads for ALL departments. Therefore, we're budgeting for the ads twice; once thru the BOS and again through the police. Given that, we simply took the BOS's support and let them place the ads and dropped the police side. As far as it goes for recruiting someone, I don't know that we have. I know that in four years we haven't, but I know that we've been paying them for the past four years and we've been paying a 30% retirement for that non-existent person. Mr. Lage intrepid again and said "That's not true. Mr. Doyle corrected himself by clarifying that we were not 'paying' someone, but that the selectmen were

budgeting for someone and charging the taxpayers for an officer, his uniforms and everything involved for an officer that does not exist and hasn't existed for four years and we see no indication that there is anyone coming on-board soon. So instead of paying someone forever that doesn't exist; how about we look at it the other way around; let's find someone and then pay him. Mr. Doyle gave a breakdown of police salaries. The chief's salary remains untouched; the Lt's salary was reduced to a Sgt's level. We used Mr. Lage's guidelines, the LGC standards, which is for a Sgt, which is what it was and what you [Lage] recommended. Mr. Lage interrupted again and said that he never recommend that, and that they [assuming to mean the BOS] never recommended that. Mr. Doyle pointed out that it was him personally, and Mr. Lage denied it. Mr. Doyle said that the conversation that they had here, must not have happened. Regardless, we reduced the position based on the LGC job description. Mr. Doyle added that we gave raises to all three of the patrolman, again, that was based on your non-existent non-recommendation from the LGC, because we've heard over and over again how patrolman were leaving due to low wages. So what we did was take the money from the non-existent officer and bring those officers actually working up to par. The administrative position was reduced to 20 hours a week, which it was years ago since we could find nothing in the police justification to support a workload that is more than when the admin was eliminated. Mr. Lage pointed out that the position was eliminated 12 years ago... were we looking back that far? Mr. Doyle said yes. Lage asked if we had workload figures for that time and Mr. Doyle responded that we used what figures were provided by the chief.

The chair recognized a woman who asked if we were going back that far, she recalled a lot of beak-ins around town and the police being short-handed. Why are we going back when we should be looking forward? Mr. Doyle responded by saying that he didn't see how we were "going back." We're giving raises to the patrolman in the hopes that they stay. Another audience member asked about the Lt's reduction. Mr. Doyle responded by stating that the Budget Committee was told that his position was mostly an administrative position. Audience members claimed that this to be untrue. Mr. Doyle said that they could only go on what the Selectmen told them. The chief of police spoke up and gave a history of the police Lt's position going back to 2005 [when he was the Sgt that was promoted to a new Lt]. The chief then said that he didn't think that you [the Budget Committee] have the authority to change a position in a department. Mr. Doyle corrected him by pointing out that we [the Budget Committee] do not have the authority to change his position; but we [the Budget Committee] do have the authority to defund it. His position was funded based on the LGC job description. You may continue to call him a Lt, if you'd like, but based on the job description for a Sgt and a Lt., we funded as for a Sgt. The chief asked if we had reviewed his any of his policies and procedures or asked for them. Mr. Doyle reminded the chief that the last time the Board asked for him for information, they were required to submit a Freedom of Information Act request to get it. The chief said that we [the Budget Committee] will have to do the same for this and future information.

The chief went on to claim that he took over in 2012; since that time, 2013 – I returned \$48K; 2014 - \$10K; 2015- \$20k; 2016- \$69K; for a total of \$148K. He expected this year to over \$50K. The Chairman asked the chief to clarify and if this was money that was budgeted and returned to the general fund? The chief agreed.

Mr. Heath clarified that the numbers returned by the chief were basically the amount for the non-existent officer and he agreed. Mr. Heath asked the chief what his standard were for testing student. The chief responded by saying that they were the same state standards being used. Mr. Heath asked for

additional clarification and the chief gave a breakdown of number of push-up, sit-up, etc. (by age group) for qualifications and added that it was directly in line with state standards.

An audience member asked the chief if we were actively seeking another officer. He said that they had someone in mind, but that didn't happen. Mr. Doyle added that we have budgeted for an officer, with retirement and such, for four years and have not found anyone. The audience member asked if we were going to stop looking. Mr. Doyle said that would be up to the Chief and the Town Administrator who is paying for the ads. The chief spoke up and said that they [Town Administrator] don't advertise for me. Mr. Doyle said "According to them, they do."

The chief was asked if he felt that we needed the non-existent officer. He said that if he didn't feel the need, he wouldn't be asking for in.

Mr. Lage asked the chief what steps he's taken in the past year to recruit an officer. The chief said that he's advertised twice thru the newspaper and the internet. He added that he had done two testing sessions. In those cases, six people had applied and none made it thru the testing process.

The Chair addressed the want for officers. He said that he couldn't image a chief that didn't want more officers. He spoke of a finance committee meeting where he asked the previous chief if he got his sixth officer, would he then want a seventh, and then an eighth, the chief nodded yes all along. He thought that a police chief would want as many officers as they could. He added that the people that wanted 24-hour coverage... when an officer is added, they don't get that coverage. Currently we have two or three people on during the days so you still don't have night coverage.

An audience member [believed to be Jim Hicks] noted that we had reduced the amount budgeted for training. Mr. Doyle responded by telling him that the Committee had asked for support and their needs for 2018 from the chief and he had no answer. Mr. Heath said "There was no supporting documentation." Mr. Hicks said that they still needed training. Mr. Doyle agreed with Hicks, but added that one of the jobs of a department head was to request 2018 money for training and not just put arbitrary numbers in and charge the taxpayers. Mr. Hicks didn't see the issue with overcharging and pointed out that he [the chief] was putting money back into the town. Mr. Doyle pointed out that seems to be a poor way to budget. Mr. Doyle added that the Committee took the padded portions of the budget and chose to give it in the form of raises to the three patrol officers. Mr. Hicks continued to say that the new hire money should stay. Mr. Doyle said that the chief budgets \$750 for advertising and the committee couldn't see it being spent. Many members of the audience went to correct Mr. Doyle by saying its right here... pointing to the new handouts circulated by the selectmen before the meeting.

An audience member said that he didn't agree that a manager would demand more people [officers] than what was needed to do the job. Mr. Doyle reminded him that the Board's position was in favor of the officer and we should not be in a debate here about the need. We were in favor of the officer. All we were doing is to stop paying for this non-existent officer.

The Board's Chairman pointed out that the cost of the non-existent officer is much more than \$50,000 with Social Security, retirement and such. He asked the chief why then he was only returning \$20K. The chief said there are many over-run in other lines.

The chief pointed out that the overtime line had been reduced to \$1,300. The Chair took responsibility for adding to the part time officer line to send a message that we should be looking to use more part

time officers. It's only a token message. An audience member laughed that why a token and the Chairman said that the Selectmen would only move it anyway.

Mr. Veaser asked the Chairman what questions he asked when the police chief presented his budget to the selectmen? The Chair responded by saying that he asked about having two or three officers on during the day. Mr. Veaser interrupted and asked if that was before or after you got up and left the meeting. Vassar then went on to recite the paragraph that the police chief had presented to the Board of Selectman supporting training. He held the paper up. The paragraph appeared to be accurate in what the chief had given to the BOS, but did not identify specific 2018 needs requested by the Budget Committee. He said that it sounds like back up to me.

The Chair said that he did ask questions about two or three officers needed during the. With regards to leaving the Selectman's meeting, he said that he attempted to ask a question and a selectman yelled at him over and over, so he left. Jay Hopkins stood up and said that he was the one that was yelling at Mr. Somero during the selectman's meeting and then justified his action about the tax bill discussion. He then went on to address the audience telling them that he was on the budget committee but was sitting in the audience because he could not endorse what they [Budget Committee] was doing [in spite of not attending the Budget Committee meetings]. I'm sitting out here with David [Lage] and John [Veaser]. He pointed out what the Board of Selectmen expected in over budgeted amounts for 2017 and thought that they [BOS] gave a good bang for the buck. Mr. Somero pointed out that he only had to walk out once in 13 years and Mr. Hopkins has already walked out twice during this.

Mr. Veaser stood and said that we have no coverage between midnight and 7am...we rely on state police. He added that "By cutting the officer, you're putting the Town's people at risk with no police coverage." He pointed out that relying on a State officer to come from Manchester or Nashua take an hour to hour and a half. Mr. Doyle asked how eliminating a non-existent officer reduced coverage. Mr. Veaser continued about the time it took if an incident happened during the lapse in coverage... Mr. Doyle interrupted the discussion about the coverage and said that everyone is under the impression that we have 24/7 coverage. We have nowhere near it. Now all we're doing is not paying a non-existent officer and you seem to think that the coverage will be reduced. Mr. Veaser said that it should be extended. Mr. Doyle agreed and said that we should hire an officer and extend it, but all we're doing is trying to NOT pay a guy that doesn't exist. Another audience member asked if the budget proposed was based on that cut? Mr. Doyle said yes, and we increased patrolman salaries and gave a 2% COLA to the employees.

Another audience member began to speak, but Mr. Lage again interrupted and said that the budget was \$173K and change different.

Another audience member said that all departments [other towns] are having trouble hiring. He directed the discussion to the chief and said that he's returning the money budgeted for the officer. And if we don't hire, we're getting the money back to offset taxes. He asked how the town would get that money if the non-existent officer was cut and the chief tried to hire in the middle of the year. Mr. Heath said that we don't get a tax break...have you seen your taxes go down? It doesn't go towards taxes...where does it go? The audience member insisted that the money goes back to the town... Mr. Heath asked again...Where does it go? The audience member said "You tell me." Mr. Heath said, "That's what we'd [Budget Committee] would like to know."

He then asked how they would hire and pay a guy in the middle of the year. The Chair said that they probably couldn't. Mr. Doyle asked the audience member how long he would think we should continue pay that non-existent officer.

The Chairman asked if we should go to the selectman's budget and close this meeting. The audience seemed to agree.

Mr. Lage stood up to clarify his version of what happens to money returned to the town. He said that any department money left over goes into the General Fund. He used an analogy of a savings account and said that's what happens here. He then listed the ways that money can be spent from the General Fund. One was that the selectmen can use it to offset the tax rate; second was that the voters could use it as seen in various warrant articles that would say "the money to be taken from the unexpended fund balance". He then stated that his [police chief] money doesn't go to another department to be spent on our budget, it goes back into the General Fund. He went on to say that the Selectmen had decided to take \$300,000 out of Fund Balance this year to offset the tax rate. If they had not, you tax rate would be \$3 dollars higher. Mr. Lage the higher rate was due to the school budget. He then changed the subject and pointed out that the town had passed an article a few years ago that said that the town could not hire someone unless that person was budgeted for. So we really have our hands handcuffed.

The police secretary stood up and gave her history of why the previous police secretary was cut. She claimed that it was due to budget cuts and not due to a lack of work. She then said that we [Budget Committee] was not aware of what her job entailed. She said that we should have called her or asked her. [She was not aware that the Budget Committee was not allowed to talk with non-department head employees]

An audience member asked if it were true that the State determined our tax rate. Mr. Lage stood up and explained briefly how the rate was determined. The conversation between the audience member and Mr. Lage ended with the audience member understanding that leftover money was put into the General Fund and the selectmen then used it to reduce the taxes.

Mr. Heath reminded the audience that the \$300,000 that the selectmen spent from the General Fund will have an impact next year. That money will not be there.

The Chairman said that "It's not quite as magic as it's made to sound." He wanted to point out that taking from the fund will catch up with us. Greenville did what Mr. Lage claims the selectmen are doing and their tax rate went up \$7 per thousand. It comes back to bite you. The audience member wanted to dwell on not being able to hire mid-year without a budget. The Chairman agreed and said that it seems that we're not going to resolve the argument and wanted to move on.

An audience member said that there were four things important to a town. Then he went on to provide his life story. Since the discussion was comparing New Ipswich and Greenville... he said that Greenville is "A Shithole."

An audience member wanted to understand and asked that we expected the patrolman to make up the hours with overtime, but we cut the overtime budget. He then said that we wanted to cut the retirement? Mr. Doyle explained that we were not cutting retirement. The retirement amount is directly tied to the labor amounts and is set by the state; currently about 30%. The individual said that so if we don't hire anyone, that retirement amount goes back into the fund. Mr. Doyle said "Assuming that it

makes it back to the General Fund.” The individual said, based on history, it would go back into the general fund? Mr. Doyle said no. It is returned to the selectmen and only returned to the General Fund if they don’t use it elsewhere.

Mr. Lage interrupted again and said that was not true. Mr. Doyle asked Mr. Lage if the selectmen had paid off a lease this year [\$67,000]. Mr. Doyle pointed out that in this case, the selectmen took left over money, that the chief may have returned, and spent it elsewhere, in other departments. He asked that the selectmen do not give the impression that every dime unspent automatically goes into the General Fund. Every year, there’s a spending spree at year’s end.

The Chairman stepped in and said that Mr. Lage and the selectmen did a good job during their meetings and they brought up issues that he had not thought of. He asked Mr. Lage if it were true that leftover money does not go directly into the General Fund, and that they [the selectmen] had an opportunity to use it first. Mr. Lage agreed.

Another audience member said that he didn’t think that we should tie his hands and a cut would cause us to wait 45 minutes for a state police to arrive, you should encourage him to fill the position.

The Chairman pointed out that mathematically, you can get 24/7 coverage with the current staff.

Mr. Heath said that he’s all in favor of a fifth officer, but we’re spending money...like throwing \$50,000 out the door and hope you get a good return.

Mr. Hopkins asked if the committee would endorse the selectmen’s budget. Will you guys change your budget number to match our; \$2,350,360? Mr. Somero said that the room is definitely stacked for the police department. Mr. Hopkins again asked if we would endorse the selectmen’s budget. Mr. Somero asked if Mr. Hopkins agreed with anything on the Budget Committee’s budget. Mr. Hopkins wanted an answer to his question. Mr. Somero said that you’re asking me to fully agree to a budget that we haven’t seen? He asked if everything that the Budget Committee did was wrong and everything that the selectmen did was right. Mr. Lage stood and said that someone on the Budget Committee caught a miscalculation in the DPW FICA and retirement. That’s all. Then he said he’d tell us what we did wrong; we did not back the \$35,000 warrant article for the library because they have a \$700,000 fund that collecting interest.

Mr. Somero pointed out that the Budget Committee learned of the \$700,000 when Mr. Hopkins brought it up at a selectman’s meeting. Later, Mr. Hopkins told Mr. Somero that he knew of the amount, but he wanted the voter to know, so he asked the question on camera. Mr. Heath said that if we provide \$37,000 every year, when they would ever expect to use the \$700, 000...never. Mr. Lage then discussed how to manage the library. An audience member then seemed to offer veterans labor to paint the library.

Mr. Somero asked the police chief about overtime pay. The committee noticed a timecard where an individual took a full week’s vacation and then came in on the Saturday and worked a few hours. Is it practice to pay overtime after taking a week’s vacation? Mr. Somero had never hear of that. The chief did not respond. Various audience members had comments amongst themselves about their vacation/OT histories.

Someone in the audience made comments [unintelligible] about the budget in general. Mr. Somero said that he already knew what was going to happen if we held to our budget, you're going to go to the deliberative session; the budget would be changed. She asked if we'd consider the selectmen's budget. Mr. Somero asked the board members if they wanted to go with the selectmen's budget and go home. Mr. Doyle commented that he could not possibly vote for a budget that he had never seen. Following that comment, Mr. Somero asked the selectmen if there was a chance that we could get together and discuss different line items and come to a compromise. Mr. Lage said that we couldn't do it so late. Mr. Somero said that it could be done, but we'd have to have another budget hearing.

The Town moderator said that he's on the school budget committee. He recalls a few years back when cuts were made and it was good, but the cuts could not be sustained over the next few years. He's glad that for the first time, they have a school budget committee working closely with the school board.

Mr. Hopkins asked if Mr. Somero was going to make a motion to accept the selectman's budget. He mentioned that he had heard Mr. Doyle's response, but had not heard from Mr. Heath. Mr. Heath said that tonight was the first time that he's seen the selectmen's budget. He went on to say that over this budget year, everything has been stuffed down the Budget Committee's throat. He told Mr. Hopkins that if he had come to the Budget Committee meetings, he would have seen it. He commented on not knowing when or how the selectmen's budget was made up, comprised, or developed, but the executive secretary could have provided this at any time and we could have prepped. The Town Administrator disagreed.

Mr. Heath complained that we have to get information from RSA about the budget and place Freedom of Information Acts requests, and the systems seem to be broken. He said the he admired the chief of police, his work ethic, and he's a good man; but when we asked to review timecards... that would take an act of congress. There were 60 calls a day? 23,000 pages of calls? The police secretary tried to justify the 23,000 pages and the time needed to redact the information. Mr. Doyle pointed out that we asked for electronic data and only what had already been posted to the website. Mr. Heath said that he was all in favor of funding a police officer, but when we got to see numbers; I couldn't believe what was there. The police chief gets a good salary, but nobody notices that he gets a free car and gas to commute to and from to work. He said that his commute is 56 miles to and from.

Mr. Somero pointed out that with our chief living so far away, he's certainly no closer to respond that what has been discussed if the state has to respond which reduces his need for a private car.

Mr. Lage stood and asked if this was the first time that the committee had seen the selectmen's budget. Mr. Heath responded yes. Mr. Lage claimed that the committee received "this" [holding a spreadsheet with the department head requests] every week. He claimed that nothing had changed; neither the department head nor the selectmen.

The committee members said that they could not respond to whatever the selectmen had put on their hand out that night, and added that the Committee had not yet received the 2017 expenditures from the Town Administrator that were requested over a week earlier.

The crowd's discussion focused on whatever handout the selectmen had given and the committee was unable to comment. Mr. Somero did say, with regards to the fuel budget, that we had gone back four

years. And we felt that the police chief should at least pay for his commuting fuel to and from work (\$2,000).

An audience member asked about the court cost being cut. Mr. Doyle explained that it's more a matter of time scheduling. You know well in advance that you have a court date. If an officer is required to go to court, then the chief should simply change his hours over the next few days.

Mr. Hopkins said... as a member of the Budget Committee; make a motion to amend the Budget Committee's number from its current amount to \$2,350,650. Mr. Heath seconded. The vote was 3-1 in favor.

Mr. Somero left the meeting. Mr. Hopkins left the meeting.

We recognized the Recreation Department. They asked about the committee's vote to not recommend the warrant article for tennis court repairs.

At this point, Mr. Lage interrupted and approached Mr. Heath. Mr. Doyle told Mr. Lage that we were in the middle of a meeting and M. Lage made a threatening gesture towards Mr. Doyle and said "Don't you start with me!" He then told Mr. Heath that he [Heath] needed to educate himself and learn how we do things here in New Ipswich.

After Lage left, we continued the meeting with the Rec Dept.

We explained that we had no explanation about the specific cost breakdown; cost of repairs vs. new construction. We also pointed out that there was a line within the recreation budget for repairs. After listening the department's argument, we concluded that there were not enough members to make a decision. Mr. Doyle told the recreation department that, although he could not speak for the committee, he would personally support the warrant article at the deliberative session.

With no other public present, Mr. Doyle adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully,

Dan Heath

Chairman, Budget Committee

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Dan Heath', written in a cursive style.

Prepared by Alan Doyle 