

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN BUDGET WORKSHOP**

**Minutes of 12-05-11**

**4:15 p.m.**

**Selectmen:**

*Colette Worsman, Chairman  
Peter F. Brothers, Vice Chairman  
Miller C. Lovett  
Nathan J. Torr  
Herbert R. Vadney*

**Town Manager:**

*Phillip L. Warren*

**Recording Clerk:**

*(Absent with Notice) Karin Landry*

Call to Order: Chair Worsman called the meeting to order 4:15 p.m. She introduced the Board and Town Manager and made announcements pertaining to emergency exits and the use of cell phones.

**W 11-34      2012 Budget**

At the request of the Board, Town Manager Philip Warren made recommendations for reductions in the proposed 2012 budget:

Legal Services

Reduce legal services by \$10,000. The reduction was proposed in the Board's budget questions; however, it was not included in the bottom line total. It is the position of the Town Manager's office that legal services can be reduced without concern due to substantial conclusion of ongoing legal issues and the utilization of LGC to handle general legal matters. Labor counsel and general counsel will continue to be retained for specialized legal matters.

Public Works

A reduction of \$15,000 is proposed in the public works budget based on past expenditures for salt and sand. The salt and sand sheds are at full capacity at this time, and will provide a cushion in the event of a major weather event. If necessary, an adjustment can be made throughout the year knowing that such an adjustment won't jeopardize core department activities or affect the road maintenance program.

Library

The library budget has seen growth in the past years, and should be returned to 2011 levels. The Town Manager is awaiting a breakdown of reductions from the library trustees. In order to meet the goals presented by the library at the November 21 workshop, there will be some reduction in service.

Parks & Recreation

The Town Manager reviewed proposed cuts in the department's budget with Director Vint Choiniere:

(1) The Town Manager does not support a proposal to charge the Interlakes School District for services provided by the department, including the use of the athletic fields. The existing usage agreement has been in place for at least 15 years, and reasonable time must be allowed to

make a fair assessment of cost sharing and how it might be more fairly apportioned and allocated. The Board will discuss options for establishing a foundation for the discussions, including identifying the cost of the use of Parks & Recreation facilities, at an upcoming workshop. A suggestion was offered by Chair Worsman to charge the Friends of Meredith Parks & Recreation or a committee established for such purpose with the task of identifying the cost of the use of the facilities. The Board acknowledged that the community center is operating at a deficit, and that opportunities for enhancing revenue should be explored.

(2) A proposal was made by Mr. Choiniere to perform mowing in house. The Town Manager does not support doing so because equipment breakdowns should be considered. A contractor will make arrangements for the repair of equipment, and in an emergency the Town can step in. In addition, the service is being provided at an extremely reasonable cost.

(3) The Town Manager recommends a proposal to close the community center at 8 p.m. as opposed to 9 p.m. Doing so will result in a budget reduction of \$29,627 in staffing time. There has been no adjustment for energy costs at this time. Persons with a key and access to the alarm code will be able to utilize the building later than the general public.

(4) Eliminate the fourth of July concert and street dance, and explore the endorsement of the events by a local business or organization through the Friends of Meredith Parks & Recreation. If this path is pursued, it should be made clear that the task is coming from the Board as a policy direction as opposed to a department head or the Town Manager.

A similar approach can be taken with the following events:

- Easter egg hunt
- Family fun night
- Fall family fun fest
- Holiday open house and tree lighting
- Family skating party
- Movies in the park (reduced in frequency)

Miscellaneous:

- The reductions will not affect the Camp Can Do and after school programs in a major way due to enrollment and the ability to combine groupings of children.
- A reduction in part-time maintenance will not considerably affect maintenance
- Reduction in uniforms

Proposals for increased revenue:

- The Hershey track program
- Annual spaghetti dinner and concert
- Touch a Truck
- Walk-a-Thon
- Halloween Dance
- Zoomba Class
- Event concessions

The 2012 budget with the proposed reductions is an increase of \$109,964 in the 2011 tax levy. Using the same amount from fund balance will result in 6 cents per thousand of valuation

increase in taxes. The Board acknowledged the difficult choices that they must make. They are comfortable that they considered all essentials and services the community supports and are making adjustments for current constraints.

Selectman Torr is concerned with the effect of cuts on essential programs such as Camp Can Do and the after school program. The Town Manager reiterated that the reduction in service levels will not affect those two programs.

Selectman Lovett summarized the options faced by the Board: raising taxes, using fund balance or making further cuts. He prefers not to raise taxes, but acknowledged that it is an option. Although the use of fund balance is appropriate, he does not support it because it provides what is needed now, but is an additional cut that will have to be made in the future. The use of fund balance is unsustainable, and it is too easy to allow the operating budget to grow through its use. The remaining option is further reductions in services. If taxes aren't raised and fund balance not increased, an additional \$109,000 in cuts would have to be made.

While Selectman Brothers finds it admirable not to raise taxes, he thinks that doing so combined with an increase in the use of fund balance is a good compromise. The proposals being made seem to be a reasonable accommodation, unless the Board receives additional information to the contrary.

Chair Worsman pointed out that the Board has stayed true to its commitment not to lay off employees, and only filled positions when people choose to leave or retire. It has made tough decisions but protected some of the critical things for the town.

Selectman Vadney is worried about over confidence in the use of fund balance and ending up in a bind three to four years in the future. At Selectman Vadney's request, the Town Manager will provide fund balance at year end for 2007 - 2011. Mr. Vadney is confident that there will be an interest in sponsoring some of the programs, and pointed out that it will be easier to add programs back in next year than make additional cuts.

There was a consensus among the Board that it supports the reductions suggested by the Town Manager. Selectman Torr agreed with the stipulation that there will be no cuts in the Camp Can Do and after school programs. The Town Manager will base the budget hearing on the information provided by the Board.

The Chair announced that the Board will move into a non-public hearing following the adjournment of the workshop.

*Selectman Vadney motioned to adjourn the Workshop at 5:15 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Torr. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Phillip L. Warren, Town Manager

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Colette Worsman, Chairman

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Peter F. Brothers, Vice Chairman

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Miller C. Lovett

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Nathan J. Torr

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Herbert R. Vadney