

**Hopkinton Budget Committee
Public Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 25, 2023, at 5:30 pm
Town Hall, Hopkinton NH
APPROVED 2/8/2023**

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1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Zankel called the meeting of the Hopkinton Budget Committee to order at 5:31 p.m. on Wednesday, January 25, 2023, in the large meeting room in the Hopkinton Town Hall. Those gathered recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members Present: Jonathan Cohen, Rich Houston, Steve Reddy, Deborah Norris, Christa Scura, Ken Traum, Norm Goupil, Don Houston, and Christa Scura, Victoria Bram

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Thomas Lipoma, Select Board, Michael Flynn, HSD Superintendent, Michelle Clark, HSD Business Administrator, Dan Meserve, HSD Athletic Director, Patrice Brown, Principal, Harold Martin School, Mandie Hibbard, Director of Student Services, and Neal Cass, Town Administrator

Public Present:

Arnold Coda, Loren Clement, Sarah Persechino, Devon Chaffee, Kenneth Wasson, Sarah Matson Dustin, Ian Hart via electronic means, Amanda Gilman via electronic means, Rob Nadeau, as a citizen), Sabrina Dunlap (as a citizen), Matt Belanger, Mark Toto, Emily Gula, Emily Sides, Tricia Lambert

2. Approval of Public Meeting minutes of January 11, 2023, will be postponed. There is a draft available online.

3. Town Proposed 2023 Budget & Warrant Articles Update – Ken Traum

Mr. Traum explained the evolution of the board's requests after more work with the engineers the

- A decision was made to do the engineering for the Transfer Station septic lagoon cleanup in 2023 and the actual cleanup in 2024.

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- The \$1M Bond will be removed from the Warrant. \$150K will be added to the operating budget to cover the engineering costs.
- This addition to the budget can be offset by a higher-than-anticipated fund balance.
- Provided the project moves forward, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services will work with the town on the timeline.
- The bond can be proposed in 2024 for the actual cleanup when complete details are available.
- This also gives more time and potential to obtain additional grants to assist with the costs. Discussions are also currently taking place on the possibility of the sludge from the wastewater treatment facility being added to cleanup and sealing all on site at the Transfer Station which has the potential for significant cost savings to the town. Using the additional \$150K from the fund balance will still leave the town's overall tax 2023 estimated tax increase at six and a half percent.
- The estimate for the Lagoon cleanup is \$1,072,000— including the \$150K for engineering. These costs would be split 75%-25% with the Town of Webster.
- There is a Warrant Article to put \$10K into the previously established Payroll Liability Trust Fund, which is something we did last year. This fund was established to pay for payroll liabilities owed to employees, especially at the time they retire or leave employment with the Town. This amount will come from Fund Balance.
- Road Bond
 - The road maintenance spreadsheets were reviewed. They show a total required expenditure of about \$23M of which \$20M is for roads that need to be rebuilt. The schedule for on-going maintenance shows that at the current budget for paving/shimming, the continued 5% yearly increase to this line item, and about \$50,000 added to the gravel line, the on-going maintenance needs (\$3.0M) can be met over the next 5 years.
 - This leaves the \$20M of road rebuilding to be dealt with. Select Board Member Thomas Lipoma was called on to present information on this.
 - Currently, there is a backlog.
 - Two bonds in the past 5 years.
 - No bonds prior to 2011.
 - There is an extremely large backlog of Road rebuilding to do.
 - The last road bond was in 2020.
 - Gould Hill is missing from that list but otherwise is up to date.
 - The amount of money that we're budgeting on roads right now is about \$8,000 -10,000 per mile per year. We should probably be budgeting anywhere from \$50,000 to \$80,000.
 - With the projected backlog, \$2M is probably a pretty good estimate.

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- Makes sense to budget the maintenance but not budget the rebuilding because of the money that we lose.
- If a road is rebuilt, that road should, with a proper maintenance be lasting 30 to 50 years.

Mr. Reddy requested a list of priority roads for rebuilding.

Mr. Lipoma said:

- Briar Hill is currently close to the top of that list.
- The Warrant Article is going toward road maintenance, not toward a specific road.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Coda asked about retirement.

- What is the impact of not receiving contributions from the state?
- If the state reverts back to contributing 7% permanently
- Mr. Coda asked for the Select Board to calculate the total amount in the budget for the taxpayer's retirement contribution and what dollar amount the 7.5% would be.

Mr. Traum responded:

- The State would only pay a portion of retirement for police officers and fire fighters.
- Originally the State was covering 35% of retirement (police and fire) costs.
- The retirement number will be provided to Mr. Coda.

Mr. Meserve asked about the plan to upgrade George Park. He asked about the bathrooms, softball dugouts and field rebuilding. Mr. Traum said that the bathrooms were scheduled for 2023, but have been moved back to 2025 along with the field upgrades. This follows the recommendation of the CIP Committee.

Loren Clement asked about the George Park fence. This is a joint project between the Town and School District that was originally scheduled to be done this past fall, but was rescheduled to spring of 2023.

5. Hopkinton School District Proposed 2023 Budget Updates – Norm Goupil

Ms. Clark gave a quick overview of the **December Financial and Second Quarter Reports**.

Mr. Goupil provided the following information:

- The new School District CIP is on the School Board website. It is a detailed plan for the next 10 years.
- Mr. Goupil presented the **changes the School Board has made to their budget proposal since the last Budget Committee meeting**.
 - Reduce ESSR position at Maple Street School - \$44,243.55
 - Reduce ESSR position at Harold Martin School - \$106,848.70

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- Change Psychologist .40 to ESSR - \$26,540.80
- Reduce Maintenance Trust - \$75,000

Ms. Clark explained the ESSR funds (funds received during covid - Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund). This is year 3 of the grant (final) and the school district has until September 2024 to spend the funds.

The School Board voted for these changes, 4 in favor, and 1 opposed.

Mr. Flynn spoke about the operating budget changes:

- Maple Street School changed eliminates a fourth grade teacher.
- Harold Martin -Math specialist would be removed.
- ESSR to fund psychologist for another year.

Ms. Norris asked:

- Are 21% of our students recognized as needing special education?
- If we did not have this position, how would the school meet the needs of those students? Does the interventionist work with special ed or regular education?
- What would be the effect of not having an interventionist?

Mr. Flynn said that Hopkinton is at 18-19% with special needs.

Patrice Brown, Principal, of Harold Martin Elementary School.

- Wrap Around Team is bringing in all stakeholders.
- Children have different social skills now than before Covid due to children being home with their parents and not socializing.
- Intervention is the first defense.
- Interventionists service all grades.

Mandie Hibbard, Director of Student Services, Title IX Coordinator

- Tiered systems of support
- Without adequate personnel, prioritization must happen. If someone who provides support is lost, a student is not going to get support which means down the line they become part of the special ed. process.
- Wraparound process

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sarah Persechino

- Concerned about the School Board cut to a teacher and interventionist at Harold Martin.
- Concerned about the 4th-grade class sizes increasing.
- Saw effectiveness of early intervention

Devon Chaffe

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- Concerned about adding students to class sizes because for the past three years the kids have received personalized individualized attention.
- Has done research on the impact of class size on education and there is a positive impact on education with smaller class sizes.
- Likes the smaller class sizes in Hopkinton.
- Asked to think about a longer-term vision.
- Suggested a stronger budget in line with the town's values.

Kenneth Wasson

- Asked about the Harold Martin 4th grade class size.
- Questioned why stipends were not used for the athletic director and curriculum coordinator which would not incur a budgetary deficit.
- Wants the budget decreased.
- Sees residents concerned about food stability, on fixed incomes, and retired people in town who cannot afford any increase.

Mr. Flynn

- Increase in FTEs from .4 to 1 for the athletic director.
- There was no impact on the budget.
- A position was not added.

Arnold Coda

- There are people in town who he knows of who struggle to maintain a decent standard of living.
- The school budget increase from 2020 to 2023 is \$4.08, a 19.97% increase over 4 years.
- He would like to see a lower tax rate.

Sarah Matson Dustin

- She sees the major drivers of the budget consisting of three things.
 - The teachers' contract the community voted for last year
 - The second half of the bond
 - Inflation
- Two of the above have already been approved.
- Maintenance Trust - When we passed the bond, we learned that we cannot fall behind by deferring maintenance. Setting ourselves up for the same problem if we don't maintain our buildings.
- She noted that 1 in 3 living in poverty are children.

Loren Clement

- Sees a \$4.8 million dollar increase in three years in operating costs.
- If we're at a pace of increasing nearly \$5M over 3 years we are in trouble.
- Concerns about this year's and future year's budgets.
- We cannot continue at this pace.

Ian Hart- via electronic means

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- Request the budget committee return to the previous school budget in order to maintain the current level of teachers for next year's 4th-grade class.
- Supports maintaining the 4th-grade class sizes and teacher levels.
- Low student-teacher ratios are the first line of defense against the impacts of Covid on the students.

Amanda Gilman via electronic means

- Asked about class sizes for other towns for other rising 4th graders which have had the same pandemic impositions as our students.
- Supports a moderate class size for the rising 4th graders.
- What is a good class size for Hopkinton students?
- We should look at what other school districts are doing and benchmark.
- Supports the experts who said the elementary schools can live without these positions for the next year.
- The Maintenance Trust should have been budgeted. Asked to fund the Maintenance Trust fully and noted that the higher amount is still not what is needed.

Mr. Rob Nadeau (spoke as a citizen, not a board member)

- Spoke about stipends and the complexity of the role of the Athletic Director and teachers, not realistic for those two positions.
- Stipends have failed schools and are not what they once were.
- Stipends for coaches and department heads work.

Sabrina Dunlap (spoke as a citizen, not as a select board member)

- Does not see how the School Board arrived where they did.
- The rising fourth-grade class was uniquely burdened.
- Supports going back to the last budget.
- Nothing left to cut which does not have a material adverse impact.
- Class size matters and discussion should occur before a cut is made.

Mr. Matt Belanger

- Appreciates the need to reduce costs.
- Sees it as a reasonable request given a nearly 10-student decline in enrollment over the last few years.
- If staff decisions need to be made, he hopes that the School Board will present options that are a little bit more reasonable and reflect things that are more concrete such as enrollment and others.
- Reducing a teacher in a formative grade level with increasing enrollments is not in the best interest.
- What's presented here tonight will cost the district and cost our students in the long run.

Mark Toto

- Each year since moving to town in 2016 the school budget has increased.
- Urges decisions to be based on facts, not emotion.
- A \$250,000 cut is a 1% cut from the budget.
- Is now the time for an increase of this size?

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Emily Gula

- Against cuts to the interventionists and the fourth-grade teacher
- Has done some research which shows that third grade marks a pivot point in reading, if students are unable to read proficiently by the end of the third grade they face daunting hurdles in school and beyond, and struggling readers rarely catch up with their peers .
- She cited the Center for Public Education 2015, Report by the E. Casey Foundation 2010

Elizabeth Sides

- Urged the school board to go back to the original budget.
- No fluff to cut from the budget.
- Should listen to Principal Brown and Ms. Hibbard. The kids coming into Harold Martin are different now and that's a fact the teachers and specialists are aware of.
- Need more specialists, wrong to take one away.

Tricia Lambert

- Is there a standard class size? (Mr. Flynn said there is not a standard class size.)
- We do not have a standard class size policy.
- It is up to the school board and the superintendent to make that decision on the cuts while balancing the needs of the community.
- We need to be considering economic trends.

Ms. Scura

- Looked up NH code published on 1.5.2023 relative to class size.
 - K-2 - 25 students per classroom
 - 3-5 - 30 students or fewer provided that each school shall strive for a class size of 25 or fewer
 - Only provided for informational purposes, not related to her opinion.

6. Deliberation on Proposed 2023 Budgets for Public Hearing

I. 3:05 DELIBERATION - TOWN OPERATING BUDGET VOTE

Chair Zankel said that at the last meeting there was unanimous support for the Town's Operating Budget. He opened further discussion.

Ms. Scura

- Good for the community to see there is a schedule for road maintenance.

Ms. Norris

- We need the best plan for the cleanup of the Transfer Station Lagoons. Was not previously comfortable with the amount because she needed more information.

Ms. Bram

- Helpful for this committee and the community to see that there is a schedule in place for road maintenance as well as the overwhelming evidence that we have a lot of roads to be rebuilt.

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- Confirmed that Mr. Cass's memo about the design engineering cost, the construction engineering costs, and the estimated costs did not include anything to do with the Maple Street Wastewater plan, at this time.

Mr. D. Houston

- Hopes that the roads discussion is presented at the town meeting. It is better to get out to the public sooner rather than later.
- The roads are a monumental task and people must understand the order of magnitude of the numbers. People need to begin to understand what is being faced.

Chair Zankel

- In support of presenting the big picture related to the bond.

Mr. Reddy

- Maybe more room to look at revenue streams next year.
 - Tipping Fees - 10% over cost
 - Land Use Fees Published Schedule - are they tied to something?
 - Pay-by-ag Fees - how are those fees set?
 - Impact Fees - for new construction, new developments

Mr. Goupil

- Supports the Town's Operating budget.

VOTE: Mr. Reddy moved for the Hopkinton Budget Committee to recommend the Operating Budget (as modified by the presentation this evening), not including the Trust Fund. Mr. R. Houston seconded.

All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

II. CAPITAL RESERVE ACCOUNT AND TRUST FUNDS

Mr. Traum moved for the Hopkinton Budget Committee to recommend the Select Board's requests with regard to the Capital Reserve Funds. Mr. Goupil seconded the motions.

All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

Mr. Traum moved that the Budget Committee support the Select Board's request for a \$2M Road bond. Seconded by Mr. Goupil.

Mr. Cohen

- Concerned about the bonds ,and wishes we could budget for the rebuilds.
- Concerned about the road rebuild dollar amount given the burdens people in the community are facing.

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Ms. Bram will vote for the former budget.

- Concerned about the bond incurring \$550,000 of interest.

Vote 9-1 in favor of supporting the bond. Bram voted in the negative.

III. SCHOOL DISTRICT

Chair Zankel

- Supportive of the revised budget that was presented tonight.
- Discomfort about specifics to be cut.

Ms. Scura

- Reticence about the fourth-grade teaching position.
- Looking forward to a conversation about appropriate class sizes.

Chair Zankel

- The Budget Committee is not about micromanaging the school's budget.
- The Budget Committee is about determining the appropriate number and bringing it to the town.

Mr. D. Houston

- Recommending asking to reduce the \$75,000 for the Maintenance Trust and returning the other three numbers to their previous amount.
- We expect great schools, and we have to support that or we are going to change our environment.
- Propose all of the reductions be restored except for the \$75,000 removed from the Maintenance Trust appropriation.

Mr. R. Houston

- 2018/2019 192 FTEs 5.23
- 2022/2023 194.45 FTEs 4.77
- Suggests limiting any hiring of nonteachers.

Mr. Cohen

- Cites one of the drivers of the major increase in the budget driver is inflation.
- Voted to support the number the school board brought, including the \$275K for the Maintenance Trust.
- If we cut the proposed amount, it will hurt the kids who need it and they will need more help later, and the state may require it.
- Supports the prior number in its entirety.

Mr. Reddy moved that the Budget Committee to present at the public hearing for the School Board Operating Budget, the original number presented two weeks ago of \$24,892,924. Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

Chair Zankel

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- In support of the budget Mr. Goupil presented tonight.
- Cited the school board vote of 4-1.
- Difficulty and discomfort with the actual cuts proposed.
- Believes it will have an impact on students.
- Support of the revised School Budget, the 175K reduction

Ms. Scura

- Class sizes are smaller than average, but given the growth curve, some assessment could be done.

Mr. R. Houston

- Next year's teacher's contracts will hit the taxpayer hard.
- Inflation to continue.
- Safety and Security project prospect.
- Will vote with Chair Zankel.

Chair Zankel

- Does not think of administration as overhead.
- Should pay people in our school system a competitive salary and benefits.
- Can the school system be run with a smaller workforce, with the support of the town?
- We must have hard conversations about personnel.
- We have revenue challenges.
- In support of the revised operating budget, the \$175 reduction.

Mr. Bram

- A constraint we face is land we cannot use because it is under easement or unbuildable. We lack space to have people build businesses here.
- Do not want to force people to move out of this town.
- We have an obligation to make sure that elementary school children have reading and math skills that will provide success in the later grades.
- In favor of a higher budget.

Ms. Norris

- Supports the budget from two weeks ago.

Mr. Traum

- Thinking of affordability.
- If we cut the \$175K it is pennywise and pound foolish.
- Supports the budget from two weeks ago.

The motion to present the original operating budget amount passes 7-2-1

In Favor: Mr. Reddy, Mr. R. Houston, Mr. D. Houston, Ms. Braum, Ms. Norris, Ms. Scura, Mr. Cohen, Opposed Chair Zankel and Mr. R. Houston. Abstentions - Mr. Goupil.

IV. MAINTENANCE TRUST \$200,000

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Mr. Goupil moved that the Hopkinton Budget Committee support the \$200K for the Maintenance Trust Fund. Seconded by Ms. Scura.

Mr. Goupil

- This is of high importance.
- The District has a great CIP and must fund it appropriately.

Mr. Traum

- Supportive.

Mr. Cohen

- Not a sufficient amount.
- Do not want to be in the same position as 4 years ago.

The motion to support the \$200,000 for the Maintenance Trust Fund passed 9-1.

In Favor - Mr. Traum, Mr. Goupil, Chair Zankel, Mr. R. Houston, Mr. D. Houston, Ms. Norris, Ms. Bram

Opposed Mr. Cohen

Abstentions – None

V. PRECINCT BUDGET

Mr. D. Houston moved for the Hopkinton Budget Committee to recommend to Public Hearing the Contoocook Village Precinct operating budget of \$522,534. Seconded by Mr. Cohen.

Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Bram moved for the Hopkinton Budget Committee to recommend to Public Hearing the Hopkinton Village Precinct water system operating budget of \$116,838.

- Water Administration \$ 5,000
- Water Services \$92,200
- Interest \$41,149
- Principal loan payment \$15,489

The appropriation will be offset by \$72,250 in User Fees, \$40 of Interest and use of \$44,548 from the Unassigned Fund Balance. Seconded by Mr. Goupil.

Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Bram moved for the Hopkinton Budget Committee to recommend to Public Hearing the Hopkinton Village Precinct operating budget of \$29 237 for the General Expenses of the Precinct to be offset by \$6,913 from Unassigned Fund Balance with \$22,324 to come from Taxation. Seconded by Mr. Goupil.

Motion passed unanimously.

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- 7. Any other business to come before the board - None**
- 8. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:54 PM**