



**Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 7th, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.
Bristol Town Office**

Committee Members Present: Alfred Ajami, Alex Beaudet, Rob Davidson, Paul DiMauro, Sandra Guibord, Charles Hanson, Kelly Harvell, Paul Leeman III, Harry “Terry” Lowd, Mary Piasecki and Patricia Porter.

Apologies for absence: Karl McLetchie

Also present: Select Board members Chad Hanna (Chair), Kristine Poland and Paul Yates; Christopher Hall (Town Administrator); John Riley (Treasurer); Scott Sutter (Fire Chief); Clint Gilbert (Transfer Station Manager); Richard Francis and Jessica Yates (Co-Chairs, Comprehensive Plan Committee); Paul Leeman Jr.; Charles Farrell.

Quorum present: 11 members out of 12.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Terry Lowd at 7:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Procedural matters:

Minutes: Piasecki noted that the Committee still had to approve Minutes from the December meeting. Hall promised to circulate these for approval, with the minutes of January 11 and of tonight, at tomorrow’s meeting.

Bristol – South Bristol Transfer Station:

Clint Gilbert, since January promoted to Manager of the Transfer Station, presented the budget which had been approved by the Transfer Station’s Board.

He noted that the Transfer Station budget had been essentially flat for six years, but now three factors are forcing the Station to request increased subsidy from the owning Towns: the growing volume of both Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) and bulk waste; the lack of a market for recyclable plastic; and increased costs of labor and fuel due to inflation. This indicated an increase in Bristol’s assessment for the year to \$295,894.87, an increase of \$55,204.87.

An additional \$4,410.00 was requested from the Town’s American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) grant money, for premium pay to staff to compensate for Covid risk during the prior year.

After brief discussion, it was moved by Davidson, seconded by Leeman, to recommend the total request of \$300,304.87 under Warrant Article 16. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Bristol Fire and Rescue:

Scott Sutter, who took over the position of Fire Chief on May 1st last year, presented his first Budget in his new position, which corresponded to Article 10 on the Town Warrant. He requested a total of \$478,375.40 from Town funds (including a carryforward of \$41,999.74), plus \$60,000 from the Town’s ARPA grant for two one-time items, a water system for Station Two in Round Pond and for new hand-

held digital radios. The core budget represented an increase of \$36,500 over the 2021 request, of which the biggest items were an increase of \$20,000 (to \$50,000) in the transfer to capital reserves for a new fire truck and \$21,000 in payroll, reflecting the need to increase hourly rates to maintain competitiveness especially with neighboring EMS services. The Chief reported that starting base call pay was increasing to \$17 an hour for entry-level members, increasing by \$1 an hour for each five years' additional service.

Sutter responded to questions about the dry hydrants line, noting with regret that the 2021 attempt to build a fire pond at Munro Brook was unsuccessful due to the soft ground; in 2022 he hoped to place dry hydrants at two other sites in the Round Pond area, plus one by the Harrington Road town line, where the costs could be shared with South Bristol.

Hanson and Piasecki questioned the costs and longevity of fire trucks. A new fire truck, fully equipped, costs in excess of \$1 million. New trucks have an expected life of around 25 years. Based on this the Town might expect to order new trucks in 2024 and a second later in the decade. An order in 2024 would be for contracted delivery in 2026, with the price held firm at the 2024 price. The cost could be defrayed by building up the fire truck capital reserve, by contributions from the Samoset Fire Company's trust fund, and from trade-in value on the old trucks; but it is to be expected that the town will need to borrow for these vehicles.

Piasecki and Ajami had questions regarding recruitment and pay, given that membership (as in all Maine volunteer fire companies) has declined over the past decade. Sutter believed Bristol's pay is comparable to that in other towns, but it is increasingly hard to get people to turn out for calls, especially at night. Hanson asked about training, and Sutter noted that new recruits have to undergo 80 hours of initial basic training. Former Chief Leeman noted that Covid had shut down much training for the better part of two years, but there is a Lincoln County emergency services recruitment and retention committee working to pool resources across the county and hopefully make it easier for people to join and be trained.

Ajami moved, seconded by Porter, to recommend the budget as presented. Motion passed, 10 votes to zero, with one abstention from a serving Fire Department member.

Town Budget:

Town Administrator Hall led the Committee through the several Town Warrant items. He began by noting that, while the Town continues to be served well by people in some positions who are at or above the retirement age, who are not seeking competitive salaries and do not take family health insurance. But that is not a sustainable basis of staffing, and recognition that the Town was very much at the low end of the scale compared to similar sized towns had led to a comprehensive external review of job descriptions and pay during 2021. Unfortunately the results of that review, though now incorporated in the proposed payroll Article 5, might be considered 'too little, too late' as we have lost some key younger people to jobs in the private sector where they could earn 25-35% more.

There were a number of comments to the effect that the Town must stay competitive, and it was noted that the Select Board intend to institute a 5% matching retirement benefit early in this year.

DiMauro moved, seconded by Davidson, to recommend Article 5 as presented. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Davidson suggested, and the Chair ruled in agreement, that Article 23 (Comprehensive Plan Committee) be taken out of order as a courtesy to Co-Chairs Francis and Yates. They presented the research that Francis had conducted into what other towns which did not have a professional in-house planning staff had spent on recent Comprehensive Plans. Based on this, they requested approval of \$10,000 in carryforward funds which are already committed to the current outreach effort, and \$50,000 from surplus to cover expected professional help in writing the plan. In response to Davidson, Select Board Chair Hanna noted that the Board had suggested requesting more than enough to complete the work, rather than having to come back to the Town for more money later.

Leeman moved, seconded by Piasecki, to recommend the requested \$60,000. A question was asked whether members of the Budget Committee who also serve on the Comprehensive Plan Committee would need to abstain; Select Board member Poland said that as there is no financial reward from service on the Committee, it is fine to vote. The motion then passed, 11 – 0.

Hall then resumed with the presentation of Article 6, covering transfers totaling \$76,000 to capital reserve accounts. These are the same as last year with the exception of resuming payment (of \$10,000) into the Dam Capital Reserve after two years in which that fund had been used to pay for work at the dam.

Harvell moved, seconded by Guibord, recommendation of the Article. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Hall asked Select Board Chair Hanna, in his capacity as Road Commissioner, to assist in explaining Article 7, the Roads and Bridges budget, totaling \$1,040,500. Hall noted that for the first time the Road and Bridge Maintenance line requested has reached \$500,000, up from \$475,000 in the last two years; this reflects the inflation in all types of contract work. He also noted that the amount expected to be allocated to fund this account from Excise Taxes is increased to \$750,000, which with the DOT block grant reduced the amount to be taken from Surplus to \$248,000.

The only item of discussion was the street lighting, with Hanson noting the great reduction in lighting costs since the Town purchased its own LED lights. Hall noted that a maintenance contract would need to be signed this year in order to maintain the town-owned lights once their warranty expires. This accounts for the bulk of the \$2,000 requested for street lights.

Ajami moved, seconded by Guibord, recommendation of Article 7. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Article 11, Ordinance Administration: Hall explained that as long as the pace of construction activity stays strong, he expects the costs of this department – including C.E.O. Joe Rose’s salary, and the Planning Board’s administrative and legal expenses – to largely be covered by Building Permit and Plumbing Inspection fees. The department is requesting \$10,000 from surplus as a safeguard in case permit activity does not maintain its recent pace.

Ajami moved, seconded by Porter, acceptance of the Article as presented. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Article 13, for the Bristol Mills Dam and Fish Ladder, triggered considerable discussion of the historic cost increases in the fish ladder. Hall pointed out that the work envisaged this year is largely funded from the carryforward of funding previously secured in grants and donations to complete the masonry work on the outside of the fish ladder, work now being undertaken by Peter Anderson’s firm, Natural Concepts. \$14,225 – the remaining balance in the Dam Capital Reserve before any new funds are appropriated under Article 6 – would be spent on planned concrete repair work, and just \$5,373.89 is requested of new money from surplus to complete the work foreseen on the fish ladder.

DiMauro proposed, seconded by Ajami, that the Article be recommended as presented. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Article 15, for Animal Control, included a \$500 increase reflecting the increased cost of a contract with the Midcoast Animal Shelter. With no discussion, it was moved by Ajami, seconded by DiMauro, to approve the Article in the amount of \$10,500 taken from surplus. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

Article 24 proposed the grant of \$100,000 of the Town’s ARPA funds as a match for private and state funding for the expansion of fiber-to-the-home in unserved parts of the Town. Hall explained the limited options open to the Town for spending the ARPA money, and this would hopefully allow the substantial completion of coverage on all public roads in Bristol before 2023.

Porter moved, seconded by Harvell, to recommend approval of the Article. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

The request for Article 25, Contingency, was increased from \$25,000 to \$40,000. Hall indicated his concern that uncertainties have grown considerably due to inflation and the current national trend to

staff turnover. The \$40,000 represented a reduction by the Select Board of his original request for \$50,000.

Beaudet moved, seconded by Ajami, that the Article be recommended. Motion passed, 11 – 0.

With that the Chair adjourned the meeting, to reconvene the following night at 7 pm to consider the School and Parks budgets.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Hall
Town Administrator