

Approved Minutes
MAIDSTONE SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING

Monday, January 15, 2024

7:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting, both in person at Town Hall and by Zoom Video Conference

Members Present in Town Hall (in-person): Scott Lovell, Chair; Brad McVetty; Bruno McKenzie

Town Official Present in Town Hall (in-person): Treasurer, Delinquent Tax Collector, Lister, Zoning Board and Planning Commission member Bob Champagne-Willis

Town Officials and Staff Present via Zoom: Town Clerk and Lister Amy Pear; Zoning Administrator Mike Otis; Zoning Board and Planning Commission Chair Chris von Alt; Lister, Auditor, and Health Officer Sandra Gray; Selectboard Administrative Assistant Mary von Alt

Also Present via Zoom: Lin Mixer, Andy Champagne-Willis, Burt and Carol Kline, Laurie and Bob Snowman, Bonnie Lovell

Chairman Scott Lovell called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

The purpose of this meeting, described on the Agenda, was to discuss and set the proposed Maidstone Town Budget for 2024. The proposed budget will be printed in the Town Report that is distributed to all taxpayer households in February, and will be voted on at Town Meeting held on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, beginning at 7:00 pm at the Maidstone Town Hall.

The Treasurer prepared a Budget Worksheet for 2024 listing all line items in the 2023 Budget in the first column, the amount budgeted in 2023 in the second column, the actual amount spent in 2023 in the third column, and the amount proposed for the 2024 Budget in the fourth column. To set the budget, the Selectboard discussed each line item with the Treasurer to determine if the amount allocated in 2023 needed to be increased, be decreased, or remain the same for anticipated needs in 2024, seeking to trim the budget where possible because taxes are going up.

Treasurer Bob Champagne-Willis began the meeting by saying that it would not be possible to come up with a final budget number tonight, as the County tax assessment will not be known until after the County meeting later in the month.

At the December 4, 2023 Selectboard meeting, wages were decided upon and set for the Town Clerk, Cleaning, Town Treasurer, Assistant Town Clerk, Assistant Town Treasurer, Listers, Moderator, Selectboard Secretary, Ballot Clerk, and Town Auditors. The Town Auditors are responsible for setting wages for the Selectboard members. An Auditors' meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 18, 2024; Selectboard wages are on the meeting's Agenda.

The Selectboard then began discussion with the next budget item on the Budget Worksheet for 2024.

Zoning Wages:

Brad asked Bob about the Zoning Wages paid in 2023. Bob explained that 26 zoning permit applications were received by the Town in 2023; of the \$85 application fee collected by the Town for each permit, \$60 was paid to the Zoning Administrator as compensation, resulting in \$1560 of permit fees being paid to the Zoning Administrator in 2023, plus an additional \$1050 for work done at \$20/hour, for a total of \$2610. Brad said the Town should keep the line item at the \$3000 level. Bruno said that was fine with him. Scott said, "Myself, I think we should do something about that." Bruno said, "We will discuss that after," adding, "because there's going to be more permitting this year."

Mileage Reimbursement:

This is used mostly for training. Bob does not foresee any trainings out of the ordinary coming up; many are on Zoom. The decision was made to leave this at \$500.

Unemployment and Employment Taxes:

Bob said there was no need to worry about these taxes, as the numbers will be automatically calculated once the Selectboard wages are added.

Town Officers' Training Expense:

The amount for this was reduced to \$2500, with no increase in the amount of training anticipated.

Advertising:

The \$432 spent in 2023 was for the Snowmobile Ordinance. Advertising is needed for some bids, and is needed for newspaper advertising for one or two public meetings for the Town Plan this year. It is possible to use more of the Planning and Zoning Fund for advertising associated with updating the Town Plan. The Fund currently has a \$4400 balance, of which \$1000 is designated for the Town match for the Municipal Planning Grant. There is no money in the grant for advertising. The Fund may need to be replenished in the future. Bob suggested putting \$500 on this budget line.

Town Reports Expense:

The Town Report overage in 2023 was due to having more pages in the Report than anticipated. The School Budget Report length is unknown. The decision was made to stick with \$350.

Maps/Contract Update Expenses:

Bob says the cost this next year will be \$1100, so that budget amount must be increased.

Legal and Professional Expense:

Bob said most of these expenses in 2023 were for the tax sale. There may be one tax sale this year, and Bob thinks there will be challenges to new valuations in the Grand List that will require use of legal and professional funds. The decision was made to leave this at \$3000.

VLCT and NVDA dues (Vermont League of Cities and Towns; Northeastern Vermont Development Association):

VLCT dues will be \$1,417 for 2024, and NVDA dues will be \$565.

PACIF (Property and Casualty Intermunicipal Fund):

The higher charge for the Town's insurance was for 5 quarters this year, four 2023 quarters plus the first quarter of 2024. In 2024, the charges will be for four quarters, three in 2024 plus the first quarter for 2025. The decision was to budget \$5600 for PACIF in 2024.

Town Hall Office Supplies:

With Bob's recommendation, the decision was to budget this at \$2000.

Town Hall Animal License Fee:

The decision was to stick with the amount of \$400.

Town Hall Postage:

The postage for mailing the Town Survey was paid for out of the Planning and Zoning Fund. Postage is increasing from 66 cents to 68 cents next week. With Bob's recommendation, the decision was to set this budget amount at \$1200.

Town Hall Software:

As Bob explained at the January 8, 2024 Selectboard meeting, the maintenance fee that the Town pays New England Municipal Resource Center (NEMRC) for its maintenance of the Grand List has increased. Quickbooks fees have also increased for the accounting and payroll software. Part of the costs of the new website are monthly charges that will total \$1200. With Bob's recommendation, the decision was made to set the amount for Town Hall Software at \$8150, and add a new line for website maintenance at \$1200.

Town Hall Electricity:

Electricity costs did not increase as much as anticipated, but Bob recommended and the Selectboard decided upon \$1200 for this item.

Town Hall Fuel Oil:

This line item must now also include propane for the new generator; Bob suggested changing the name to "Fuel" to reflect that. Bruno suggested that he could speak to someone to get a better price for fuel. With Bob's recommendation, the decision was made to keep this at \$4000.

Town Hall Telephone:

The decision was to keep this line item amount at \$1300.

Town Hall Repair & Maintenance:

The need for a number of different repairs required was discussed: the back steps; areas of flashing on the roof; tiles that are in bad shape, requiring a new floor; problem spots on the ramp. Brad has all the tin left from when the roof was put on, which can be used for the flashing. The decision was made to keep this budget at \$2000 and pull any additional money needed from the ARPA funds (the American Rescue Plan Act).

Landfill Transport:

Vaughn Hodgdon Trucking's price projections last year did not happen. The Town now has a contract for 3 years. The Landfill Transport will cost \$11,625 in 2024.

Tip Fees:

These fees are based on weight, so are unknown. The decision was to leave the amount budgeted at \$8000.

Scale:

According to the contract, the Town is not supposed to be paying the scale slips, so this number will be 0.

Waste Pickup - Town:

This amount will be \$18,500 for 2024.

Recycling - Town:

This amount will be \$12,550 for 2024.

Additional Trips:

For additional trips that are required when all of the trash cannot fit in the truck, the charge is \$325/trip. This year there were no trips, as the truck was broken down over the Fourth of July holiday when additional trips usually occur. Bob suggested including charges for two additional trips. The amount set was \$650.

Trash Bags:

The Town bought a two year supply of trash bags last year, so will not need to buy any more this year. The possibility of changing to stickers was briefly discussed, but the focus was on planning ahead for next year's purchase of a 2 year supply of trash bags. Bob recommended doing an appropriation and creating a fund that will then sit and wait until needed. After discussing that recommendation, the decision was made to do an appropriation, set up a fund, and put in half of the cost this year, with the plan to add the other half of the cost next year. The amount of the appropriation will be \$4000.

Waste Management - NEKWMD:

This charge is based on tonnage. The decision was made to fund this item at \$2000.

Bulky Waste:

The decision was to set this amount at \$1600.

Groveton Ambulance Service:

The Ambulance Contract has been received; the amount charged is \$7,425.

Groveton Fire Department:

Groveton has verbally replied to Bob that they are staying at the same charge of \$3000.

N Stratford Fire Department:

Bob has not heard from North Stratford; Bill Sanborn has said that he thinks the charge will remain at \$3000. Bob recommended leaving this blank until he has more information.

Assessor Contract:

The Town is under reappraisal now; the contract for that with NEMRC covers us through the Board of Civil Authority hearings in 2024. This budget line item needs to cover the Fall visitation of properties that have had changes since the appraisal on April 1, 2024. At Bob's recommendation, the amount for this item was set at \$600.

Donations:

All of the next 12 budget line items are for donations that Maidstone makes each year to various entities: NEK Human Services, Guildhall Library, Northern VT VACD, Caledonian Home Health, VT Center for Independent Living, American Red Cross, Rural Community Transportation, Essex County Natural Resources Conservation District, the Area Agency on Aging, NEK Learning, Lancaster Food Pantry, Green Up Day, and Northwoods Stewardship Center. All of the amounts for these budget items will remain the same as in 2023.

County Tax Assessment:

This information will be available after the County holds its budgetary meeting later in January.

Cemetery Mowing:

The decision was made to leave this budget amount at \$2400.

Highway Expense:

This is the money that the Town puts in its budget, which, with the addition of the money that the State provides, covers the care of Class 2 and Class 3 roads. Maidstone Lake Road is Class 2; the Class 3 roads are Westside Lake Road, North Road, Hall Road, Tamarack Lane, and Wildwood Drive. This year the State awarded all of its budgeted highway monies in the summer, so that the towns affected by the floods had the money on hand. Brad says that usually the \$70,000 covers year round grading and any emergencies. The Fund currently has a \$68,000 balance. The decision was made to keep the amount budgeted for this line item at \$70,000.

Appropriation - Highway Rebuild:

Each year the Town puts \$20,000 into this fund that takes care of most of the Town Highway Rebuild. Rebuild is grant work, for which there is always 20% required from the Town. This year, with the box culvert project on Westside Lake Road, a higher need is expected as the grant will not cover a large portion of that. The Rebuild is a reimbursable grant, so the Town must first pay the cost, then wait to receive the reimbursement. At present, the fund balance is \$218,000. The decision was made to continue to put \$20,000 in that fund again this year. That will give the Town enough to cover the grant for the box culvert on Westside Lake Road.

Amy asked Brad if the Town is still slotted this year for the second part of the three parts of Maidstone Lake Road to be rebuilt. Brad said he hasn't figured out anything yet, but that the Town has many grants that are on a deadline that we have to get done. He has not yet contacted an engineer to do the work for the next section. We have a Better Roads Grant that is supposed to go on the upper end of the Lake Road from the Campground to the telephone building. Then we have a Class 2 gravel grant. Bob and Brad discussed the fact that the Town has a lot of grants in play: we have two grants-in-aid that are open; there is one Better Roads grant that is open; plus we have the Box Culvert grant.

Appropriation - Maidstone Lake Association:

The Maidstone Lake Association (MLA) paid out \$3400 of its own funds for the Greeter Program in 2023, plus an additional \$1000 that was the Town's contribution. If milfoil invades the lake, the cost will exceed MLA's treasury. Bruno expressed concern about what would happen if the State decided to increase its funding of this program. Chris von Alt, who manages the Greeter Program for MLA, said the State invests considerably

less than it could, historically dropping from contributing 50% to 40% then 30% of the cost. This year, the State has been told that its method of funding the Program is not legal; the State is now trying to come up with a new source of funding. It is highly doubtful, according to Chris, that the State will increase its funding, and much more likely that its funding will be decreased. The Greeter Program is the only active defense against aquatic invasive species at this time. Lake property owners pay about 68% of the taxes in the Town. Bob pointed out that the Town in the past donated much more to the MLA, about \$4000 per year. It has been \$1000 consistently for quite a while. After discussion, the decision was made to set this budget amount at \$2000.

Appropriation - Grand List Fund:

The Legislature is considering changes to Grand List reappraisals, putting all towns on a regular 6 year cycle for full reappraisal. Bob recommended that the Town continue to fund this at \$3000. The Town has \$46,000 in the Fund, of which \$10,000 is designated for payment of the current statistical reappraisal. This Fund exists so that the Town does not get hit with a large bill for reappraisal for which it has no funds in store. The need for another reappraisal, which must be a full reappraisal, which costs about twice as much as a statistical reappraisal, is not anticipated for a number of years, but that depends on the sales prices of properties in comparison with the Grand List valuations in the future. Bob's recommendation to keep the Fund budgeted amount at \$3000 was adopted by the Selectboard.

Appropriation - Direct Fire Support:

The Direct Fire Support Account balance stands at \$5000, which Fire Warden Bill Sanborn feels is a good number. The Town does not need to add to that this year.

Appropriation - Cemetery Fund:

This Fund balance stands at \$3800. The Town owes \$1300 for the work performed this past year. The decision was made to keep this appropriation at \$1000.

Chris von Alt spoke about the need to replenish the Planning and Zoning Fund over time to meet the needs of the 8 year cycle for updating/revising the Town Plan and then the Zoning Bylaw. That Fund is being used this year in the revision of the Town Plan and will most likely be needed in the revision of the Zoning Bylaw that will be required after the new Town Plan is adopted. Replenishment should be kept in mind and considered next year, if not this year.

The discussion of the 2024 Budget concluded.

The next meeting must now be scheduled, said Bob, at which the Town Warning must be approved by the Selectboard. After discussion, the meeting was set for Monday, January 29, 2024, beginning at 7:00 pm.

Scott brought up the issue of the flagpole at Town Hall, wanting to check on the availability of money to pay for that. Bob said that the flagpole could be paid for with ARPA funds. Scott will do more research into the flagpole issue.

Amy reminded the Selectboard that the Town does not have a Moderator for the Town Meeting. Amy will check to determine if the first item on the Town Warning must be to appoint the Moderator and to determine who opens Town Meeting in the absence of a Moderator.

The business of the meeting concluded, Brad made a motion to adjourn; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt