

SELECTMEN'S WORKSHOP
Minutes of 12-21-09
4:15 p.m.

Selectmen:

Peter F. Brothers, Chairman
Miller C. Lovett, Vice Chairman
Robert C. Flanders
Charles G. Palm
Colette Worsman

Town Manager:

Phillip L. Warren

Recording Clerk:

Karin Landry

Call to Order: Chairman Peter Brothers called the meeting to order at 4:15 p.m. He introduced the Board, Town Manager, and the Recording Clerk.

The Town Manager responded to requests from the Board for additional information pertaining to the proposed 2010 budget:

- The decrease in the Conservation Commission line item reflects funds encumbered from 2009 for ongoing projects.
- The amounts for state and federal grants were accurate as reported, as of December.
- The water filtration grant was reserved for Water & Sewer.
- The state and federal law enforcement grant amounts are final.

Selectman Palm posed a question regarding the amount to be used from surplus to offset the tax rate. The Town Manager will provide him with additional information.

W 09-55 Discussion on Outside Agency Funding

The Town Manager's proposed 2010 budget includes level funding (\$160,000) for outside agencies that were previously funded. It does not include funding for three new agencies that have submitted requests totaling \$5,015.

Three concepts have been proposed for vetting outside agencies:

- Internally. Invite groups to present their budgets to the Board, and the Board decides on allocations.
- Including as warrant articles.
- Level funding agencies in the 2010 budget and allowing for a series of public hearings or workshops after Town Meeting. Funding can be adjusted once the agencies are reviewed.

There is a consensus among the Board that there is not adequate time to review the agencies prior to finalizing this year's budget. Priorities such as the hiring of a new Town Manager prevented the Board from exploring the vetting process earlier in the year.

Selectmen Lovett would like to establish criteria for funding outside agencies. Criteria should include, but not be limited to:

- Savings realized by the community through the work the agency performs
- Identifying the work of an agency that is helpful to those in the community in general
- Community costs that are being covered by outside agencies.

The Town must determine what an agency does for the community, and if the services it provides in Meredith are proportional to the services it provides in other communities in Belknap County. The work could be done through the Town, with an invitation for participation by other communities, or by an outside group that has experience in vetting, for example United Way. Selectman Lovett supports establishing a citizen's committee to identify criteria and conduct the vetting process. He does not support making the decision at Town Meeting, where there would be no criteria or vetting. In addition, a regional approach to providing services could be explored.

Selectman Flanders agrees that vetting or research must be done, and that the decision should not be made at Town Meeting. Although taxpayers are capable of making a good decision, they don't have the information necessary to do so in that venue. He is in favor of putting a vetting process in place immediately following Town Meeting, and is not comfortable with turning over the process to another agency. Meredith has had great success with citizen's committees and has made wiser decisions than other communities in the past.

Selectman Palm would like to begin with a review of the agencies to determine those that do things for the social good of the community that cannot be performed effectively and/or efficiently through Town offices. Although he believes they are fantastic agencies, he suggested supporting agencies such as the Chamber of Commerce and Lakes Region Association by becoming members. He suggested developing criteria through a series of Board workshops. He does not support funding the three requests from new agencies.

Selectman Worsman suggested developing different criteria for organizations that do not provide social services. There was a general consensus among the Board that both types of agencies need to be broken down into priorities, and the benefits they provide to the community identified.

The Chair believes there is value to civic organizations that promote general business and welfare that can translate into employment, which means less welfare. There are specific social services that the community cannot provide effectively, and there are well established businesses that have efficiencies and the proper staff and consultation to handle those matters. Criteria must be established for an allocation of dollars to organizations that do not provide community-based mental health services, but that are of benefit to the community. There are many small organizations that are worthy of consideration that don't have the resources to plead their case.

He prefers to break the agencies into various categories and criteria as opposed to funding them by moving them to different parts of the budget. There must be a base line of support for agencies such as the American Red Cross so they are on standby and ready to assist the Town in the event of an emergency.

Selectman Worsman recollects that the Board presented to taxpayers that they would bring outside agency funding before them in the form of warrant articles. The attendance at Town Meeting is historically much better than at public meetings. The Chair instructed the Town Manager to review the minutes of prior meetings to verify if there was a consensus that agency funding would be decided through warrant articles.

Selectman Lovett favors investigating the cost for the Town to become a member of the Chamber of Commerce.

Selectman Flanders does not think there is adequate time to develop and apply a process for effectively vetting agencies this budget season. The Board needs to address the matter immediately following Town Meeting 2010. He thinks the Board worked very diligently this year, and makes no apologies for not addressing the matter in 2009.

The Chair agrees that the hiring of a new Town Manager kept the Board from addressing the matter this year, and that it is a goal of the budget process going forward to establish a vetting process. He supports a review of the major organizations the Town supports, including a presentation by the agency, to allow for better decision making going forward. He recognizes that the sources of revenues for non-profits are being strained, and would like to provide them with interim assistance while due diligence is being performed. Funding agencies through warrant articles could be detrimental to the survival of some agencies.

Selectman Lovett supports commencing work on the vetting process immediately. Establishing a vetting process will present a good opportunity to look at funding on a regional basis. He suggested staging the funding of agencies to give the Board the opportunity to establish a vetting process.

The Town Manager explained that he recently attended a County Administrators meetings to see if there are areas where economies could be gained through regionalization, and that there was not much interest in exploring the funding of agencies at the county level. A thorough verification of the application process and verification with other communities can be handled in house at the staff level. All agencies must be encouraged to submit 100% of the information requested on the application. The Board has the ability to fund agencies partially and proceed with the vetting process. He shares the concern that the selectmen do not need another job, but does not favor relying on a citizen's committee because he would feel obliged to verify most of their work before it is presented to the Board. In addition, the relationship between communities is easier for staff to navigate than a committee. There was a consensus that the first priority must be the budget preparation.

Selectman Flanders pointed out that it will be very difficult to develop an intelligent budget without knowing the level of outside agency support. He does not support the new request for

funding from the Carroll County Transit Agency, and suggested that the Board carefully review all new agencies requests.

Selectman Worsman would like to know how the agencies are funded at the state and county level so there is a true picture of the level at which the taxpayers in New Hampshire are supporting agencies. Dialogue ensued regarding how the economic climate is impacting agencies and the changes they will have to make in order to survive.

The Town Manager will provide additional detail on the outside agency balance sheet. The Board instructed the Town Manager to proceed with exploring a more in depth vetting process without constraining work on the budget process. An action plan for the three new agencies will be developed during budget deliberations.

Selectman Palm motioned to adjourn the meeting at 5:30 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Flanders. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

DRAFT

Respectfully submitted,

Phillip L. Warren, Town Manager

Peter F. Brothers, Chairman

Karin Landry, Recording Clerk

Miller C. Lovett, Vice Chairman

Robert C. Flanders

Charles G. Palm

Colette Worsman

DRAFT