

From the Town Administrator

Dear residents,

There were a lot of comments/ statements made over the weekend on social media regarding the recommended 2020 Operating Budget. I have removed identification of the authors for privacy purpose.

I apologize for a rather lengthy note, but I want to make sure I am thorough and complete in my answers.

Here are the facts:

Post 1:

I want taxpayers to consider the addition of three new town employees and the reasoning. The full-time building inspector position is based on the fact that the administration thinks we cannot find anyone part time. I never saw a posting for the opening. The two full time employees in the Highway department. One to mow lawns and one to operate equipment. I have spoken to the Road Agent and he is fully staffed and asked for no additional employees. Last year we spent 6500 dollars mowing lawns. The full timer will cost three times that amount. Or greater! This change is based on you voting for a Department of public works director, no more Road agent. Do you truly believe that we need three more employees?

- Building Inspector: First, this is not an additional position/employee as the post implies. The Board of Selectmen is recommending to move to a full-time position with the main driver for this recommendation being to handle the volume of business. We are currently dealing with about 400 building permits/year and 360 building inspections. The position is also responsible for Code Enforcement which, unfortunately, due to a current 10-15/hr week position, has been sporadically exercised. I note that 10 years ago the Town had a full-time Building Inspector. At that time the Building Inspector reported 239 building permits. As stated in the post, we are also hoping to have a better chance to attract candidates to fill the position if the position carries benefits. This is based on our experience back in the Spring when we sought to replace the incumbent who subsequently retracted his resignation.
- Highway positions: the Board is recommending 2 new positions based on the request from the Highway Department (see below).

Highway dept. creating new position

It would be very beneficial to the dept if we could hire another guy to help on the dept. the time it would save to have another person here would be a huge impact on the town. To have another person in a truck or piece of equipment would make work a lot faster around town compared to one truck when ditching. In the winter time it's always nice to have that extra hand around the shop in a storm in case a truck breaks down or something is to happen. if a storm rolled threw it would be a lot safer having two guys per truck checking roads cutting up trees instead of one. In the winter time the person can also run the loader loading trucks keeping better count on the material that goes out in a storm. It would be more cost effective in the long run. There's a lot to discuss about this with time savings and just the safety aspect. To start out at \$17 an hour the yearly salary would be \$35360 and add on the average 400 hours of overtime on that the salary would be \$45560. Then adding insurance and everything on that were talking \$54740-\$71000 a year.

Parks and rec/ highway dept.

As a team here at the highway dept. we have discussed the pros and cons of combing the two departments. There wasn't many cons. We think it would be very helpful having another set of hands here. If it all worked out we figure the person would be about 20 hours a week between mowing and maintaining the parks and rec and town offices. The other 20 hours is hands on helping the highway dept. around the streets. Making two to man crews around town is a huge asset to the dept. a lot more could be done around the town. There is only one down fall we can see if that the town would have to purchase a new pick up and trailer and should invest in a zero turn mower to cut the time in half.

Some of the figures we have come up with if you pay this person \$16 an hour the yearly salary would be \$33280. With on the average 200 hours overtime a year would be \$38080. Then after insurance and other fees would be upwards of \$50000 a year single person and \$63000 with a family plan. This is something we would like to see to help the dept. and community grow and strengthen.

Thanks
Jim
+
Paul

With respect to the \$6,500 mentioned in the post, this refers to what was expended with the current Town Maintenance contractor who currently mows the lawns in the summer, shovels, sands and salts in the winter at most Town-owned buildings and also conduct facility maintenance odd jobs upon request. It is the intent that the new "Parks & Rec/Highway Dept" position will pick up these duties.

Post 2:

I was at the Highway garage before the public hearing, and the Road agent said he did not want the additional employees. What happens to the person that presently maintains crystal lake park? Gone like the three volunteers who were parks and rec

- See above re the statement that the Road Agent did not want the additional employees.
- With respect to the Crystal Lake Park person that has been maintaining the property, that position is still budgeted for. This is a seasonal position who handles much more than just mowing the lawn and raking the beach at the Park.

Post 3:

I Think that there may have been a change of mind when he found out about the warrant article getting rid of his elected position. The volunteers that ran parks and rec were duped! By the administration. Next year full time parks and rec director

- Highway: to the extent the Town votes "yes" on the Operating Budget, the Town will have the funding for the new "Parks & Rec/Highway Dept" position. As described above, the Road Agent will then be responsible for duties that will go beyond the definition of a Road Agent. That is why the Board is recommending the article that requests authority to have a Director of Public Works position instead of Road Agent. A Director of Public Works is an appointed position. I also note that should the Town vote "yes" on this article, the change will be effective at the end of the current Road Agent's term, in 2021.
- Parks & Rec. volunteers: it is unclear what the statement refers to. What I can state is that as part of the 2019 Town Warrant, the Board recommended that the Commission for the Park be dissolved. It had been operating in violation of statutes (inappropriate membership, no agenda nor meeting minutes). Through the spring and summer of 2019, the Board in many occasions asked for recommendations on how to best operate the Park in the absence of the Commission. This is a roughly \$24,000 budget, which deserves sound monitoring. I will also state that volunteers are welcome and have never been turned down. It just needs to be in an organized fashion so that Town's interests are protected.
- Full time parks and rec director: there is no such plan

Post 4:

It's because of the selectmen's office wanting more control (being the boss)! As an elected official Paul controls his dept. if we vote for a Public Works Director he will follow under the control of the Selectmen at a much higher pay scale. The selectmen or the TA know nothing on how to maintain roads! This happened with Parks and Rec and the volunteers involved. We now have no parks and rec volunteers because Heather felt there was no accountability to her dept. We now will be hiring because it puts to much-added work for the selectmen's office to operate the way they want it done! At the moment there is no one to book events at the park for next year. No swim instructor hired either! Are we making progress yet? Nope, going backwards instead of forward! Also FYI the full-time building inspector is not even for 40 hours at a salary pay scale with benefits!

- I have stated above the reason why the Board is recommending to move to a Director Public Works position, which will be an appointed position if voted through by the Town. Having said that, the Highway Department is the highest budget in town, with a combined \$1,239,437. The **Board of Selectmen** has a statutory duty to manage the **prudential affairs** of the **town (RSA 41:8)**. Toward this end there is a collective responsibility to monitor the activities of town departments and staff to ensure that operations are conducted in a manner consistent with applicable laws and policies.
- With respect to the pay of such a position, a recent job posting in the Lake Region does not support the statement that such a position will necessarily require a "much higher pay scale".
- Parks & Rec: This is a roughly \$24,000 budget, which deserves sound monitoring. That budget was run by volunteers, none of whom were Town employees, which creates a statutory concern when accepting contracts/invoices on behalf of the Town. I will also state that volunteers are welcome

and have never been turned down. It just needs to be in an organized fashion so that Town's interests are protected.

- Swim instructor: For last season, the Board had recommended that a "certified" instructor with insurance be hired. The instructor used by the Park, although surely well qualified did not want to seek her certification. We are therefore keeping our options open. We also need to address the geese issue before committing the Town for swim instructions.
- Building Inspector: The Board is recommending a Budget for a 35-hr/week position, which is the minimum for a full-time position. The intent is to have the position work 7 hours every day of the week. This is in answer to complaint of not having a Building Inspector available every day. 35 hours should suffice to handle the current workload. Why have taxpayers pay an extra 5 hours and additional benefits if not needed?

Post 5:

These are the facts. I have spoken with the Road agent directly . No one had spoken to the person maintaining crystal lake park. The original volunteers on park and recreation are not part of anything. They were duped! We spent 6500 on mowing last year ,that is from you at the public hearing. When someone from the public meeting asked if the Road agent would be the public works director ..silence from the board of selectmen. I think spending 133,000 on lawyers fees and budgeting 220,000 left plenty of money to do as you please . How about maintenance on the old town hall BOS wish to dispose of ? It will be really interesting to see your spin on this budget when you have Bishop signs on your lawn!

- Road Agent/Parks & Rec: see above.
- Legal: 2019 invoices are still being received by the Finance Department and we have encumbered the remaining balance to cover potential legal fees related to the 6 lawsuits that the Town is a defendant in. While the Town hopes it can to avoid this outcome, it is quite possible we may incur payments under these lawsuits and it is therefore prudent to ensure the Town can cover such charges should it come to that. Since it is public information, let me remind everybody that one lawsuit is asking for \$3 million in damages.
- Old Town Hall: the Board, last year, supported and recommended that a Condition Assessment be conducted to assess and update the cost of "fixing" the Old Town Hall. This year, the Board is recommending a warrant article to raise appropriate funds to have those "fixes" completed. Under its statutory duty to manage the prudential affairs of the town, the Board of Selectmen also needs to address the scenario where the taxpayers decide not to fund or insufficient funding is obtained.

Post 6:

Do the boards represent the town's folk or what they think is best for us ? At the public meeting seems no one wanted the old town hall disposal article and no one wants the lawn mower person ! My information came directly from the Road agent . Maybe he changed his opinion about supporting these additional employees after your meetings . I do not care about your smoking gun. I know a few people that have experience and could have applied for the building inspector position. Spending in this town is crazy . I am voting this budget down! Cannot help but think that not posting minutes is to deceive . How about that propaganda explaining the closure of the town offices two years ago. I do not deal with rumors and I go to the source ! I also listen to the residents !

- With all due respect, the Budget Committee Public Hearing was attended by a limited portion of the registered voters. All the voters will have a chance on March 10 to cast their vote whichever way they wish and the Board of Selectmen will act accordingly.
- With respect to the recommended Operating Budget for 2020, it represents a 4.5% increase to the Budget voted in 2019 once all funding for Outside agencies is removed since such funding this year is requested through separate warrant articles (3.61% increase otherwise). The Budget initially presented by the Board of Selectmen to the Budget Committee was \$16,559 more, a 0.38% difference and the Board ultimately decided to align with the Budget Committee numbers.
- Should all the articles pass as recommended the estimated tax rate for 2020 is estimated to be \$5.23, down from \$5.58. This is however only an estimate, based on today's information about revenues etc... The \$5.58 in 2019 is down from \$5.83 in 2018. The reasons property tax bills have gone up for some people in town is because their property has gained in value.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive letter 'B' with a horizontal line extending to the right and a vertical line crossing it.