

**TOWN OF READFIELD
BUDGET COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of Meeting
January 17, 2019**

APPROVED

The Readfield Budget Committee held a regularly scheduled meeting on January 17, 2019 at Town Hall. Committee members in attendance included: Andrews Tolman, Chairman; Marty Hannish; and Ellen Schneider. Also present were Eric Dyer, Town Manager, and Teresa Shaw, Finance Director. Peter Davis and Rebecca Lambert were absent.

The meeting convened at 6:35 pm and began with a review of the minutes of the Committee's meeting of January 3rd. Hannish moved that the minutes, which included nonsubstantive corrections from the draft version, be accepted. The motion was seconded by Tolman and passed without objection.

The Committee then turned to the budget items scheduled for review at the meeting, beginning with Department 25-40, Library. Deb Peale and Sonya Clark attended the meeting and presented an overview of the Library's budget request. The Library Board's objectives for the coming year include expanding the librarian's hours from 20 to 30 hours each week, along with an expansion of the library's hours and enhanced programming. Peale and Clark indicated they would be providing historical data related to public use of the library. While the Board will be seeking grant dollars to assist with these initiatives, they are also seeking increased support from tax revenues. Dyer noted that the current balance in the library's reserve fund is \$6,700. The total proposed increase in the library budget is approximately \$9,200.

Dyer explained that the proposed budget reflects expenses associated with an increase in the librarian's hours to 28, below the level at which an employee would be considered full time and would be eligible for the benefits package that accompanies full time employment. The cost of this increase is 47,860.

The budget as currently proposed includes \$440 for electronic communications. Clark explained that the library receives a subsidy from ConnectME, which discounts access to electronic communications.

The Committee discussed the condition of the library building, which had come up in discussions during the prior fiscal year's budget meetings. Peale and Clark explained that due to the age of the building and the fact that the structure was designed and built as a residence, the second floor will not safely support the weight of stored books. This means that either the Friends of the Library will have to find an alternative site in which to store books donated for the fund raising sale, or they will have to stop holding the sale and refuse contributions of books.

The building is in need of substantial repair including roof repair/replacement, shingling, climate control upgrading, as well as repair and replacement of some equipment. The King Foundation has provided a \$25k grant that will be put toward the cost of these upgrades, but additional monies will be required. The Budget Committee will discuss the budget request for this purpose during its review of the capital budget, on a later date.

The next agenda item was Department 25-30, Age Friendly Community initiatives. Romaine Turyn was present at the meeting to present the budget, which does not reflect any increased expenditures for FY20. Turyn noted that while Readfield's age friendly activities were initially funded with a grant, the program now receives \$1,750 in appropriations. There is no longer a reserve fund for this purpose; all grant funds had to be spent down by last November.

Turyn explained that the age friendly activities rely to the greatest extent possible on volunteer support and contributions. For example, the Committee worked with the Red Cross to obtain new smoke detectors for older Readfield residents. The Red Cross purchased the equipment and local volunteers installed them in some 20 homes.

The Age Friendly initiative also delivers buckets of sand to residents for use on ice and runs a "handy helpers" program that provides volunteers to address small home projects for seniors. Turyn noted that in the coming year, the Committee plans to increase publicity for the services.

Next, the Budget Committee reviewed the proposed budget for Department 50-10, Cemetery. Ben Rodriguez, who oversees the Town's cemeteries, was present to explain the budget. Rodriguez noted that while there remains a good deal of unspent appropriations in this account in the current year, a good deal more work is planned between now and the end of the fiscal year. He expects that virtually all of the appropriated funds for FY19 will be spent down.

The cemetery budget for FY20 reflects the impact of inflation. Dyer noted that the budget numbers included in the Committee's review materials appear to be incorrect, as they do not include the supplies budget; there may be other corrections required, as well.

Rodriguez informed the Committee that there is a list of cemetery projects that they would like to undertake over the longer term. These include continued tree work and the purchase and implementation of software that will allow cemetery records to be digitized. A good deal of culvert work has been done alongside the stone wall of the cemetery at Readfield Corner, and it is hoped that will obviate the need to replace that wall. There is a reserve fund, however, that currently holds \$30k to offset the cost of wall repairs, should they become necessary.

Department 25-10, Animal Control, was reviewed next. The proposed budget includes \$575 to fund the increase in wages of the Animal Control Officer, required under terms of the contract negotiations, as well as the cost of contract services with KVHS.

Members then reviewed Departments 25-20, Kennebec Land Trust, 25-25, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments and 25-50, Public Access TV. The proposed budgets for these items reflect either no increase or small decreases, truing up budget for historical rates of spending.

Department 25-60, Street Lights, reflects a proposed increase in budget of approximately \$9,600. This increase is due to an expected 10-15% hike in CMP rates in the coming year. Dyer mentioned that he is currently exploring the feasibility of the Town taking ownership of the streetlights, and converting them to LED, which would save money over time.

The Committee next considered the proposed budget for Department 40-10, Protection. Dyer explained that the budget for ambulance services (40-20) might be low; the proposed figures represent a rough estimate. Because the Town of Winthrop is facing revenue constraints, Readfield may see an increase in costs for the rescue services purchased from Winthrop. Overall, the proposed figures for ambulance are \$1,350 higher than the current year's budget.

Dyer explained to Members that dispatch services are currently up in the air, and in flux. Lake Region Mutual Aid runs through the Town budget - this includes the costs associated with towers, transmitters, receivers and generators - and other towns subsequently pay Readfield for their share of the services. These payments are reflected in the revenue budget for our Town. Dyer went on to say that some 911 calls are routed through RCC to Augusta, due to the Sheriff's preference. That route results in higher costs for the Town, and the budget reflects an increase of about \$2,400 year over year for that service. The Town also incurs expense for some 911 service routed through Somerset County.

The Committee also discussed the budget proposed for the Fire Department. This proposal includes an increase of \$2k for training of personnel (Firefighters 1 & 2), which has to be carried out on a particular cycle. Funding for SCBA Testing is also proposed to increase by \$800 to square the budget with actual, historical levels of spending. The budget for EMS equipment has been zeroed out (\$500) to reflect the fact that the Fire Department, for liability reasons, no longer engages in any lifesaving activities.

The proposed budget moves \$8k that has, to this point, appeared in the operating budget as equipment replacement, to the capital budget, as these dollars are used for capital investments.

There was a brief discussion regarding the desire of the Fire Department to undertake a substantial capital improvement project: adding another bay to the firehouse, along with material improvements to that building. Dyer pointed out that by the close of FY19, the Town will have retired \$138k in debt associated with the 2008 road bond. Because we are actively following a strict investment plan in road maintenance, the Town should not have to float another bond for road activity, save unforeseen circumstances. The borrowing for the last fire truck will be retired in 2023. At that point in time, we will likely need to invest in a new truck.

Therefore, it seems that there is room in the debt portfolio of the Town to invest in upgrades to the firehouse.

As the meeting drew to a close, the group discussed how Dyer planned to show the public the breakout of the town budget and its associated mil rate from the impact the school budget and the county budget will have on Readfield taxpayers' mil rate. The Select Board is interested in presenting the information in this segregated fashion, as there is little influence the Town can exercise over the school and county budgets. As the proposed budget currently stands, there will be no impact on the mil rate *for those expenditures outside the school and county budgets*.

The meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at approximately 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen Schneiter