

Minutes of Hudson Budget Committee Meeting, December 8, 2021

The Hudson Municipal Budget Committee met on Wednesday, December 08, 2021, in the Town Hall BOS Room.

A. Call to Order

Chairman Weissgarber opened the meeting at 6:59 pm

B. Pledge of allegiance.

Chairman Weissgarber led the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. Attendance

Chairman Weissgarber, Vice-Chairman William Cole, Norman Martin, Ted Trost, Kathy Leary, Shawn Murray, Grace Hopkins, Robert Clegg Selectman Liaison Brett Gagnon, School Board Liaison Diana LaMothe, and Alejandro Urrutia Clerk.

D. Public Input

None

E. Acceptance of Minutes (November 16 and November 17, 2021)

Chairman Weissgarber asked for a motion to accept the minutes of November 16 and 17 with minor corrections, mainly grammatical made by Ms. LaMothe; Mr. Martin made the motion. Mr. Murray indicated that because there were changes since the minutes of November 16 have been seen, he should have time to review the changes before voting.

Chairman Weissgarber asked for someone to second the motion made by Mr. Martin, and Selectman Gagnon seconded it. The motion to approve the minutes of November 16 and 17 failed 4 yes, 5 nay, 1 abstention.

Chairman Weissgarber asked for a motion to accept the minutes from November 17. Mr. Trost made the motion, Mr. Weissgarber seconded it the motion passed: 10 yes, 0 nay, and 1 abstention (Mr. Clegg abstained)

F. Reports from liaisons

a. Select Board

Mr. Gagnon reported that he submitted to Chairman Weissgarber the answers from Town Administrator Mr. Malizia on the outstanding questions raised in the previous meeting of the Budget Committee. In addition, Selectman Gagnon announced that he is a member of a cost-savings committee with Selectmen Roy working with the Town, the Library, and the school.

b. School Board

Ms. LaMothe followed up on a question from the last meeting when the job listing report was being reviewed. Someone asked why there were only two assistant principals on the Alvirne list when there are three. Ms. LaMothe clarified that there are actually three assistant principals on the list, just in different categories. Ms. LaMothe wanted to follow up on some emails with many detailed questions over the last week. She believes it would be beneficial for all if the SAU staff, those responsible for building the budget, could be present in a meeting to address those questions. She believes it also be beneficial to the public, and it would become a public record. Ms. LaMothe asked the Chairman if we could add an agenda item for school budget follow-up on December 16 following the town wrap-up. She has confirmed that the Business Administrator would be able to attend, and that could be a good discussion about the questions that were raised.

Mr. Clegg asked for a list of emails. Ms. LaMothe clarified that there was a lengthy email forwarded to the committee on December 6 with 14 attachments. Mr. Weissgarber stated the email was from a resident. Mr. Murray stated it would be a courtesy to invite the resident who sent the email. Chairman Weissgarber concurred.

Mr. Clegg questioned if the Budget Committee will have special sessions every time somebody from the public asks questions and then start the budget process over again by bringing the SAU or the Town in to discuss. Mr. Clegg said everybody has a right in this Town to speak; not everybody has a right to reconvene.

Ms. LaMothe said that when there is an email with many questions sent to the committee, it would be courteous and transparent if those questions were brought up in a committee meeting. Mr. Weissgarber asked if it was questions or recommendations. Ms. LaMothe clarified that it was a combination. Ms. LaMothe also pointed out that the school wrap up meeting was cancelled, so there has not been a school wrap up meeting. This could be on the 16th following the town wrap up.

Mr. Clegg added that if we're going to do it for one person from the public, then we need to do the same every time somebody sends this committee an email, and we can be here every night of the week. Mr. Clegg doesn't think we should start questioning what people give us for information or questions to turn it into a town meeting or school meeting.

Mr. Urrutia believes that having public hearings and deliberative sessions allows the residents to present ideas, concerns, and questions.

Chairman Weissgarber said that the resident who wrote the email has the intention to be at the Deliberative Session. Ms. LaMothe asked if an email to the entire Budget Committee is not considered a quorum. Mr. Weissgarber stated no, that is why emails are sent BCC. Ms. LaMothe was suggesting a meeting discussion to have the complete picture for the public, and have this be public record.

Mr. Clegg suggested that emails to the board should be public. Ms. LaMothe agrees with Mr. Clegg if the school's responses could be included. Some comments were inaccurate.

Selectman Gagnon sees both sides. He suggested adding the emails to the agenda packet available to the public; that's step one. Regarding communication, the Chairman can send information to the committee to digest, and then the school response could be dispersed, but this would start a two-way communication that isn't potentially public. The emails could be part of the agenda and the school liaison can be prepared with a response to the agenda with a person or two needed.

Mr. Murray made the following motion:

To have the email sent by that individual posted or added to our budget committee package either for this meeting or there should be room on the town website to post that. The motion was second by Mr. Martin. Ms. Hopkins asked if email is also considered public input and would it be put under that agenda item. Mr. Trost added that emails are discoverable with a right to know request. Making them public is more transparent. Mr. Clegg agreed that emails should be listed as public input.

The motion was to post the most recent email with attachments as public input. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. LaMothe asked if her request for an agenda item for the school budget follow-up after the town wrap-up on December 16 will be an agenda item, noting that the SAU wrap up meeting on November 22 was cancelled. Chairman Weissgarber said he would not keep her from putting

something on the agenda. SAU81 wrap up is scheduled on January 5th. The request for a December 16 agenda item was dropped.

G. Town Presentations

a. Public Works and Solid Waste: Public Works Director Mr. Jess Forrence provided an overview of Public Works Facilities code 5515, Public Works Administration code 5551, Streets code 5552, Maintenance Dept. 5553, Drainage 5554, Parks Division code 5556, and Solid Waste 5970. Ms. Lisa Nute, Former IT Director, joined Mr. Forrence to explain that code 5777 is the DPW portion of the IT budget.

b. Mr. Elvis Dihma, the Town Engineer, was joined by Mr. Steve Malizia, the Town Administrator; they went through codes 5561, 5562, and 5564 for the Sewer Fund and codes 5591 to 5594 for the Water Fund.

Mr. Dhima said that Hudson has owned the water utility company since 1998. The Town of Hudson owns three wells that are in Litchfield. Today, the Town of Hudson is challenged with the waters due to high PFAS concentration in one of the town wells that are now closed and working on remediation to bring it back online. As a result, we will see an increase and how much water Hudson buys from Pennichuck.

Mr. Clegg asked if Hudson was getting any money from the people responsible for contaminating wells. Mr. Malizia stated the Town is discussing that right now, so he can't say too much, but the answer is yes.

c. Engineering code 5585 was presented by the Town Engineer, Mr. Elvis Dhima. Engineering's proposed operating budget increase is about \$964, 1.5% increase, which consists of training, phones, tires, and brakes.

Mr. Martin asked Mr. Dhima if the interns were needed anymore in his department. Mr. Dhima said no because the department has a Civil Engineer.

Mr. Martin made a motion to remove \$6,717 for the temporary part-time interns from the Engineering budget; selectman Gagnon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Lisa Nute, former IT Director, joined Mr. Dhima to talk about the IT component; she indicated it is level-funded.

d. Conservation Commission code 5586 was presented by Town Engineer Mr. Dhima in the absence of Mr. Bill Collins. The budget consists of an increase of 1.5% related to small equipment, such as updating kiosks, trails, signs, and things of that sort.

e. IT Department, former IT Director, Ms. Lisa Nut, presented an overview of the IT Department budget with the codes 5330 and 5X77's. With her was IT specialist Mr. John Beike. Mr. Martin praised Mr. Beike's service he does from his office at the police station. Ms. Nute clarified that he is not working specifically for the police department.

The Budget Committee went into recess from 9:10 to 9:16.

f. Library.

In the absence of Ms. Donna Boucher, Ms. Linda Pilla, the Library Director, presented the Rogers Memorial Library budget code 5060. There is a 1.5% increase on the operational side of the budget. Electricity costs decreased around \$7,000, which was reallocated to software maintenance.

Mr. Murray asked if the library had a fund balance leftover at the end of last year. Ms. Pilla said that without having the actual numbers before her, the library returned around \$13,000 plus something from payroll.

g. Planning and Planning Board codes 5571-5572. In the absence of Town Planner Mr. Brian Groth, who had a schedule conflict with the Planning Board meeting, Town Administrator Mr. Malizia seated to present.

Mr. Clegg made a motion to move the Planning, Planning Board, and Zoning to Thursday, December 16 to have the opportunity for Mr. Groth and Mr. Buttrick to present and answer questions from the committee; Mr. Trost seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

H. Other Business/Comments

Mr. Murray wanted to bring to the attention of the Budget Committee about his observation from the School Board on Monday, December 6. He learned that there are 20 counselor positions that will be funded by the ESSER grants. Mr. Murray thinks that will impact the budget and the taxpayers in the long run. Mr. Murray is concerned that the School Board does not have oversight over how ESSER funds are used.

Ms. LaMothe answered by saying that the positions added that will be funded by the ESSER grant are geared towards helping students come back to school after remote learning due to the pandemic. There is a need to help the students adjust to getting back to school, so these positions are grant-funded. The applicants to those positions understood that their employment is contingent on grant funds being available. People who have accepted these positions don't think they will be employed after the grant runs out. There are continual assessments to see the effectiveness of positions and programs added to help students during this transitional time. The hope is these will not be needed after the grant period ends. We can't say that at this time. In terms of School Board oversight of grants, there have been no questions related to other grants. Ms. LaMothe understands this is a large grant. A request from the NHSBA for an understanding of the purview of the School Board over grants is in process.

Mr. Trost would like to know how grants work in the budgeting process, for town and school, and he believes it is within the purview of the Budget Committee.

Ms. LaMothe indicated that she had a conversation with the Chairman after explaining that it would be great to have an agenda item for a budget review for transparency. She also suggested, if there would be an interest, having an additional discussion about how the grants are working and how their needs are being met under the grants. Ms. LaMothe was happy to coordinate that. Chairman Weissgarber said it should also be done with the Town.

Mr. Clegg stated that grants for firefighters and police officers had a stipulation in them that at the end of the grant, you had to give that person a full-time job. Mr. Clegg is assuming that the grants are online for people to read to see what they say and require.

I. Adjourn. Mr. Martin made the motion to adjourn, second by Mr. Clegg. The motion passed unanimously.