

APPROVED
TOWN OF PELHAM
BUDGET COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, November 9th, 2023

1 **CALL TO ORDER** – Ms. Meg Bressette opened the meeting at approximately 6:31 PM.

2
3
4 **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

5
6
7 Ms. Bressette called attendance:

8
9 **PRESENT:** Chair Meg Bressette
10 Vice Chair Greg Smith
11 Bob Sherman
12 Phil Haberlen
13 Ellen Cormier
14 Paul Grant – *not present at roll-call; arrived at 7:02 pm.*
15 David Silva
16 Garrett Abare – *not present at roll-call; arrived at 6:45 pm.*
17 School Board Representative David Wilkerson
18 Recording Secretary Heidi Zagorski

19
20 **ABSENT:** Secretary Deborah Ryan - *excused*
21 Selectmen Representative Jason Croteau - *excused*

22
23 **BUSINESS**

24
25
26 **REVIEW TOWN WARRANT ARTICLES**

27
28 Ms. Bressette announced that the Committee would review the town warrant articles first. Ms. Bressette welcomed Ms.
29 Tammy Penny, the Town Finance Director. Ms. Bressette stated that the town warrant articles were emailed to the
30 Committee members on November 2nd, 2023.

31
32 Ms. Bressette said the first article they would review is the Highway Block Grant Aid Special Warrant Article for 2024.
33 Ms. Tammy Penny stated they have a total of four financial articles to present this year. Ms. Penny said she will present
34 two this evening. Ms. Penny said another one is the Operating Budget. They will not have the final numbers until the
35 Budget Committee makes changes and votes next week. Ms. Penny said the other is the Collective Bargaining Agreement
36 that the Board of Selectmen will be voting on on Tuesday, November 14th, 2023.

37 Ms. Penny said the Board of Selectmen did vote on the two articles she will discuss. Ms. Penny said the first is the
38 Highway Block Grant which is a recurring article that has no tax impact. Ms. Penny said it is basically state-sharing
39 revenue. She explained the highway fund includes revenues from the road toll, and the gas tax, and a portion of it is turned
40 over to the town.

41
42 Mr. Greg Smith reiterated this grant has no tax impact. Mr. Smith said they have to have a warrant article to get the town's
43 share of the gas tax money from the state. Ms. Penny added if they estimate low and any monies come in over the
44 \$345,000, the little bit extra will offset the tax rate. Ms. Bressette stated she would read the warrant article at the following
45 meeting when they were voting on it.

46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93

Ms. Penny said the second article is the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Act “re-do”. Ms. Penny said there was an article in 2018 that passed the voters to address traffic congestion problems at Sherburne Road and Mammoth Road, and at Sherburne Road and Marsh Road. Ms. Penny said the NHDOT (New Hampshire Department of Transportation) grant was awarded to Pelham covering 60% of that project cost which was estimated at 1.2 million dollars and the remainder would come from extraction fees and unassigned fund balance. Ms. Penny said that the article expires at the end of 2023. She said they are asking the voters to reappropriate the same money again. Ms. Penny said due to construction delays, only phase one design costs amounting to \$103,000 have been incurred and the appropriation is going to lapse at the end of the year. Ms. Penny said while the cost of the project had increased and is anticipated close to \$3.5 million, the state now has agreed to fund the construction phases of the project at 80% and will continue to fund the design phases at 60%. Ms. Penny said they are asking the voters to reappropriate the cost of this project and there is no tax impact. She added the only financial impact would be if the article failed, the town would need to refund the state for the \$103,000 that they had received for the reimbursement so far.

Mr. Bob Sherman asked if this would be non-lapsing so it would not expire again. Ms. Penny said she did change the warrant language, so the funds won’t lapse.

Mr. Smith reiterated that no tax dollars are involved. Mr. Smith said the town has money set aside and will lose their permission to spend it when it expires, and they want to re-up that permission to fix the Mammoth Road, Sherburne Road, and Marsh Road congestion. Mr. Smith asked if it were possible to clarify the title of the warrant article, so all voters clearly understood the intent. Ms. Penny explained that when the ballots are printed, they have article numbers with an explanation underneath. Ms. Penny said they would explain exactly what this warrant article is in the voter’s guide.

Mr. David Silva asked if it was possible to include the anticipated project date. Ms. Penny said this would be included in the voters’ guide.

Ms. Bressette said if this should fail, then the State would need to be reimbursed \$103,000. Ms. Penny said they would need to get a legal judgment on whether or not the extraction fees that they’ve collected and spent would need to be returned as well should the article fail.

REVIEW ENTIRE SCHOOL BUDGET

Ms. Bressette welcomed Superintendent Mr. Chip McGee and the School District Finance Director Ms. Deb Mahoney.

Mr. Sherman asked for an overview of the 330 accounts which are Professional Services. Ms. Deb Mahoney said the Professional Services include Special Education Psychologists and Speech Pathologists. Mr. Chip McGee added that the increase is driven by Special Education.

Mr. Garrett Abare asked by law how many Speech Therapists, Physical Therapists, etc. are required. Mr. McGee said those services are required through the Special Education process. Mr. McGee said it is individualized per student by what is required in their IEP (Individualized Education Program). Mr. McGee explained these services are driven by the students’ needs, so there is not a by-law-specific requirement. Mr. Abare asked how you know how many you need. Mr. McGee said there is a unit calculation done of units of service required by the IEP, and they tally those up. Mr. McGee added that there are a fair number of annual evaluations required as well for students entering the IEP process and there is a three-year evaluation process for any student in the IEP process. He said they add these up to produce the staffing needs.

94 Mr. Abare asked if it was possible to see the fluctuations in the quantity of Speech Pathologists over the last five years.
95 Mr. McGee explained that there are staff and contracted staff to fill these positions. Mr. McGee said they could figure out
96 a way to combine these to see the numbers.

97
98 Ms. Ellen Cormier asked if it would make sense to have more contracted employees versus regular employees given the
99 benefits over time. Mr. McGee said they have found from a financial point of view that it is less expensive to hire their
100 employees versus contracted services.

101
102 Mr. David Wilkerson said historically they were able to successfully reduce the Special Education cost by hiring full-time
103 candidates. Mr. Wilkerson said the financial incentive was not how many people we hire, but how they can cost-
104 effectively meet those needs, adding that is where the hiring decisions were made. Mr. Wilkerson said year to year this
105 can change. Mr. Wilkerson said then they don't have an obligation two years out based on what they think they will need.
106 Mr. Cormier said if the specialists change year to year based on students' needs, you incur the cost of hiring an employee
107 and all the associated costs versus hiring a contracted service where somebody is not in a special niche. Mr. McGee said
108 yes this makes sense if they don't foresee a full-time need. Mr. McGee said it is hard to convince these related service
109 providers to take part-time work. Mr. McGee said they pursue hiring when they anticipate a full-time need for years. Mr.
110 McGee said they are a big enough district that there is a cumulative need across the district for the full-time positions that
111 they have proposed.

112
113 Ms. Bressette asked what would incur if they could not meet the needs of an IEP. Mr. McGee said to meet the
114 requirements of an IEP is a Federal law. Mr. McGee said first they would be required to provide compensatory services
115 like summer services or additional years of instruction possibly, to make up for what could not be provided. Mr. McGee
116 said that there could be potentially larger legal consequences for the district for being out of compliance with those
117 required services.

118
119 Mr. Silva asked if they currently have a full-time Speech Pathologist. Mr. McGee said they currently have two and the
120 demand is for five Speech Pathologists. Mr. McGee said they have hired two and use contracted services for the others
121 that are required.

122
123 Ms. Bressette referenced the instruction from Mr. McGee to the school district teams making the budget this year. Ms.
124 Bressette stated Mr. McGee said to strive towards a zero-increase operating budget by reducing any remaining areas of
125 historical over-budgeting and offsetting increases with reductions when possible. Ms. Bressette asked where they found
126 historical overbudgeting. Mr. McGee said there were several areas where they found overage in supplies. He also said
127 they identified places where they could pool resources. Ms. Mahoney said in the 2020 year, the expenses did not reflect
128 actual operations. Ms. Mahoney said in 2021 they were still modifying operations. Ms. Mahoney said they looked at 2022
129 and 2023 expenses and identified areas. Mr. McGee said the Chromebooks for students is a lease program and based on
130 population, they reduced the number they were going to purchase from 400 to 360.

131
132 Ms. Bressette said the Technology Budget was to replace the switches. Ms. Bressette asked if this was to replace them at
133 all the schools. Mr. McGee said yes. Ms. Bressette asked if they all had to be switched out at the same time for them to be
134 effective or if they could be spread out over two years. Mr. McGee said they did not have to be replaced all at once, but it
135 would back up their technology plan. Mr. McGee said these are on an eight-year replacement cycle. He said last year
136 they replaced wireless access points. He said next year they will have the High School teacher laptops. He said they have
137 a replacement plan for the projectors and in-classroom technology. Mr. McGee said they try to keep the technology
138 budget steady each year. Mr. McGee said they did delay the digital art lab for an additional year which is one of the
139 reasons why the tech plan is a little higher this year than it was last year. Mr. Smith said it could be split, but the IT
140 technician would need to manage two systems, two software bases, and two vulnerability threats.

141

142 Mr. Silva asked when unspent money is returned, how is it returned to the taxpayer, and where does it go. Ms. Mahoney
143 said they do state reporting that indicates the unreserved fund balance that gets reported to the Department of Revenue.
144 Ms. Mahoney said they use that number along with the town's report to calculate the tax rate for the upcoming year. Ms.
145 Mahoney explained it is returned to the tax rate calculation process. Mr. Silva asked if the taxpayer could see this
146 information. Ms. Mahoney said on the school district website under finances, you can see all of the reports of the
147 expenses and the town annual report which is the financial audit.
148

149 Mr. Paul Grant asked about the life scan fingerprinting machine. Mr. Grant said the machine was installed on September
150 29th and they used the machine 23 times. Mr. Grant stated they anticipated doing 250 fingerprints this year. Mr. McGee
151 clarified it is based on an academic year and the remaining will be done between now and July 1st, 2024.
152

153 Mr. Grant asked what the students were learning in elementary math referencing the new math coach. Mr. McGee
154 explained there is a fair amount of arithmetic, pre-algebraic thinking, breakdown of numbers, data statistics and
155 probability, and geometry. Mr. McGee explained they are learning number sets, graphing, and visual representations of
156 numbers which are the things you need as the foundation of statistics. Mr. Grant asked if the Math Coach position is
157 coaching students or teachers. Mr. McGee said the Math Coach is coaching the teachers. Mr. McGee said they have
158 found that math instruction to grades K-5 requires more skill and training than most teachers' training programs provide.
159 Mr. Abare asked what metrics are looked at when the results of the math program are spoken about. Mr. McGee said the
160 coach works with grades K-5. Mr. McGee said the metrics is a standardized state testing program for grades 3-8 and they
161 compare this data to their twelve peer districts. Mr. McGee said they have a goal to be in the top five; last year they were
162 6th. Mr. McGee explained they looked at Elementary, Middle, and High School. He said they found the gap was at the
163 Elementary level and they decided to put the resources where the gap existed.
164

165 Mr. Grant referenced the Mind Craft Club at the High School. Mr. McGee said this is a skill that all students would
166 benefit from learning, and it may include students who would not have tried out for a sports team. Mr. McGee said this is
167 a club, not a course. Mr. McGee this is to have ways for students to interact.
168

169 Mr. Wilkerson referenced the Math Coach conversation. Mr. Wilkerson said when he started, the math program was an
170 area of concern for him as a parent. Mr. Wilkerson said it became apparent to him that when you are in an undergraduate
171 or graduate program to gain your credentials as a teacher, you are taught a lot of how to teach children to read. Mr.
172 Wilkerson said the idea of a Math Coach is addressing perhaps deficiencies in how we both understand math as a society
173 and how we teach math. Mr. Wilkerson said a district like Pelham deserves the opportunity to be well-known for its high-
174 quality Mathematics program. Mr. Wilkerson said having coaches helps identify strategies. Mr. Wilkerson said this is how
175 we make progress.
176

177 Mr. Sherman asked if they offered HAS accounts for health insurance to personnel. Ms. Mahoney said the plans they offer
178 are not eligible for HAS. Ms. Mahoney said they offer FSA for those who elect it.
179

181 REVIEW SCHOOL WARRANT ARTICLES

182

183 Ms. Mahoney said they only have an operating budget at this time. Ms. Mahoney said the default number was calculated
184 and it was included in the warrant article provided. Ms. Bressette said the budget as of right now is \$41,768,453 and
185 should that article be defeated, the default budget would be \$41,503,442 which is the same as last year with certain
186 adjustments required by previous action of the Pelham School District or by law.
187

188 Ms. Bressette said the second article, which they do not have the numbers for yet, is the Pelham Education Association
189 (PEA) Collective Bargaining Agreement. Ms. Bressette said that the School District shall vote to approve the cost items

190 included in the Collective Bargaining Agreement for the teachers. Ms. Bressette said that between the School District and
191 the PEA that calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits over the amount paid in the prior fiscal year.

192
193
194 **NEW BUSINESS**

195
196 Ms. Bressette said at the next meeting they will be voting on the School Budget, the Town Budget, and the warrant articles
197 that they have.

198
199
200 **ADJOURNMENT**

201
202 **MOTION:** (Sherman/Cormier) To adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:56 PM.

203 **VOTE:** (9-0-0) The motion carried.

204
205
206 Respectively Submitted,

207 Heidi Zagorski

208 Recording Secretary