

Town of Epping  
Budget Committee Meeting  
January 13, 2021

Call to Order:

The budget committee meeting was called to order at 6:15pm in person and via zoom.

Attendance:

Budget Committee Members: Michael Charkowski-Chairman, Steve Ozols, Heather Clark-School Board Rep., Adam Munguia-Town Selectmen Rep., Marty Dyer, Mike Lecuyer, John Cody, Jen Chapman, Marc Nickerson, Greg Dodge, Lisa Fogg and Cynthia Hounam. Robert Hodgeman and Greg Tillman via zoom

School Board Members: Bonnie Sandstrom, Deb Brooks, Bill Furbush, Ben Leavitt and Dave Mylott.

Chief Wallace, Chief De'Angelis, Chief Lombardo, Joe Trombley, Jim Pouliot, Dave Reinhold, Tom Gauthier, Mike Yergeau, Sgt. Hero, Erika Robinson, Nicole Bizzaro.

Michael Charkowski read the public hearing notice (attached).

Opening Comments:

Tonight we will discuss and vote on the school and town warrant articles, with the school going first.

New Business:

School Warrant Articles

Article 1: Bond for Boilers and Ventilation Renovation to the Epping Middle/High: Read by Steve (attached).

- Bill said this is a long time coming, the boilers are over 35 years old and about \$25,000 a year in maintenance.
- In an emergency they could rent boilers which would be \$800 a day, plus fuel and a minimum of \$10,000 to set up.
- 8 residential boilers need to be replaced, 35 year old under-ground tank to be removed and update control systems.
- The last piece is the ventilation system. Right now, it is similar to radiators in a home, we can heat but no fresh air is brought in from the outside, they would replace the cabinets so it brings in fresh air.

Michael opens comments up to the board, closed for board comments, opens comments to the public.

- Public (no name provided) asked what the balance is, Bonnie said \$654,000, earmarked to replace the roof at the elementary school.

Michael asked for any other comment from the public, closed public comment. Motion to accept the article as written by Heather, seconded by John. All in favor, motion carries 10-0.

Article 2: Operating Budget: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment, closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Heather, seconded by Marc. All in favor-I, Opposed-nay. Motion carries 9-2.

Article 3: Paraprofessionals Association Collective Bargaining: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment, closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Heather, seconded by Marc. All in favor-I, motion carries 10-0.

Article 4: Add to Buildings and Grounds Capital Reserve Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment, closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- Steve Bettencourt, 19 Debbie Lane asked what will the sum be used for if it is not used for the boilers, it is for the roof only, if so should it be changed to reflect that. Ben said the purpose of the funds is to have funds available for a project or emergency. They are going forward with a warrant article for the boilers in its entirety and use the capital reserve fund next year for the roof.

closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Heather, seconded by Marc. All in favor-I, motion carries 11-0.

Article 5: Add to Special Education Capital Reserve Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- John asked for the balance, Deb said \$203,116.06

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Marc, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, motion carries 11-0.

Article 6: Steve did not read as it is a non-monetary warrant. Steve said that is all for the school warrants articles and we will move to the town warrant articles.

#### Town Warrant Articles:

Article 4: 2021 Operating Budget: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- John said he agrees with the operating budget but has concerns with the default and will not be voting for this.
- Michael wanted to let the public know the municipal budget committee does not have responsibility for the default budget.
- Adam said the only intent for the default budget was to pay for what the town needs, we do not have the option to not pay our bills

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, all the following questions were asked by Steve Bettencourt, 19 Debbie Lane.

- Steve asked why default items were not listed online. Greg presented him a detailed copy.
- Steve asked how long it took to come up with the budget, Adam is a 365 day 24/7 process. Steve said it was only posted online 2 days ago which does not give the public enough time to go through it.
- Steve wanted to make sure the default budget reflects \$35,000 for the removal of the police cruiser not \$110,000, Adam said it was removed.



- On the proposed budget he asked what the selectmen's salaries assignments of \$4750 was for, Adam explained every selectmen gets a stipend of \$3000 flat and it has not been increase since 1982, he did an assessment based on cola and assignments to all the other boards and that is where the assignment line comes in.
- Steve asked about the default for town report printing of \$5000, can that be minimized as it is all online. Adam agrees and would like to print fewer, but the town is bound by certain RSA to print these items.
- Steve asked, on page 3 the finance, they asked for 1% increase and the selectmen proposed 8%, Greg Dodge said the finance director was move from hourly to salary.
- Steve asked, on page 11 of the proposed, safety facility, what the (2) one time expenses totaling \$15,000 were, Adam said the well at the West Epping Fire and the generator at the main station.
- Steve asked how often the police cruisers are replaced, Adam said every 5 years we replace 2 cruisers and this year purchased one cruiser out of the expendable trust fund.
- Steve asked on page 15, fire salary, if the increase of \$100,000 from 2020-2021 was a new hire. Chief Lombardo said it was for 2 addition people. Steve asked if it was normal for the town to vote or is it required to be warrant article. Chief Lombardo said it is not required to be a warrant article and is something you can put in the budget.
- Steve asked the budget chair if the committee asked the town to decrease items as they did with the school budget. Michael said yes, we had a request for both to come in at a 2.5% increase from previous year. The town came back at 4.25 increase over previous budget and the school budget came back at 2.4%
- Steve asked based on the proposed and default budget if going forward 2022 if you feel this budget in the future has a chance of getting closer to 2.5% increase as the tax continue to rise. Adam said yes thy want to try and do that, the reason the recent events is there was 5 years of zero tax increase, that should not have happened.
- Joe Trombley just wanted to touch on a couple of Steve's questions:
  - The time frame for the budget it starts in September right up until now, there is a lot of work that goes into it.
  - Stipend for the selectmen, did not want to remove it from the budget at the selectmen level, but offered it as something that could be removed should the budget committee want it removed.
  - As far as printing the town report, he still has all of them from the past as it is good to look back at them.
  - While on the budget committee he was adamite on the replacement of the (2) cruisers every 5 years
  - For the fire salary, this has been talked about for many years and left it in the budget.
  - This budget committee has been the most active in helping the other boards.
- Cody Belanger had a statement regarding the stipend. He believes during these difficult times and more members of the town paying attention to the upcoming budget season it is prudent that these stipends remain the same. Now is not the time, we asked the town officials to cut their budgets and this continues to be an issue round and round again and should be not. This conversation for stipends should be over. Adam said he fully agrees and they have remained the same unless they proved their merit.
- Steve would like to know what John Cody disagrees with in the default budget, John said he has detailed that out for the town selectmen and should be available at the town hall.



- Adam thanked Steve for being here and digging into these budgets, they were giving a long email that reiterated the RSA which will tell us what we may and may not put in the default budget. There is grey area left up to the interpretation of the board and he boiled down to if they have to pay because they signed a contract then it is going in the default, if they don't have to pay it then it is not going in the default. Obligations is the other thing that went into the default. Michael asked if contractually obligated raises would be part of the default, Adam said yes.
- Steve asked if patriotic purposes is legitimate in running the town, Adam yes it is 100% legitimate per the RSA. The RSA states you start with last year budget that was approved and work from there. They lowered their budget by \$25,000.
- Tom Dwyer, 1 Hedding Ave, does not have paper in front of him but Adam said the selectmen salaries were not going up, but the vice chair was offered a \$250 stipend larger than last year than this year, is that correct. Adam yes he mis-spoke, they took \$250 out of the assignments line and add it to the vice chairs salary. Tom Dwyer is not in favor of the new selectmen stipend, it is the wrong time of the year.
- Joe Trombley said from the public perspective, himself and some others were happy to have that line item removed and specifically stated that the budget committee and it was motioned to be approved by the individual that was not going to vote for the budget this year because of the default.
- Steve Bettencourt asked about the merit pay of \$30,000 increase for personal administration on the default budget, are you contractual obligated or is that based on merit, Adam said that was part of the budget last year, the default budget starts with what you had last year plus and minus some things according to the RSA . Steve asked if that should be put in a potential one-time expense so it is not always carried over as recurring payment, Adam said it could be, but it was approved by the people in our budget last year. Adam does not like name of that line because it is a fund that used to pay out employees and that is where the merit pool started from.
- Selectman Jordan via zoom wanted to state that he did not ask for the increase that a board member made the recommendation.
- Heather wanted to clarify that when you have items in the budget that were approved those items rollover in the default budget the following year, what is removed is the one-time expense and will be removed in the next years default. You can only increase for what you have contractual obligations for. Both the town and school are bottom lines budget and they can decide not to use a line item for something else but it will still be in the default.

Michael asked for any more comments from the public on Article #1, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay. Michael asked for a roll call: Marty I, Mike-I, John-no, Michael-I, Jen-nay, Steve-I, Marc-nay, Heather-I, Adam-I, Greg-I, Robert-abstain. Motion carries 7-3-1.

- Tom Dwyer made a point of order that we are speaking about article 4 not article 1.

Article 20: By Petition: Community Children's Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Chris Soutter and Karen Drapaniotis are here to represent the fund. Chris said for 30 years they have helping children in the community. They are volunteers to help raise money and turn them into vouchers for clothing and also give money to schools to distribute how they see fit. Chris has provided information on the number of children they have helped (attached). She would like to thank the community on all the past help and hope for continued support.



- Adam said this is worthy cause for the community.  
closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,
- PJ said the children's fund actually supports the community in the reality of the dire need in these covid times.
- Mark Vallone said these kinds of articles have a really good return of investment  
closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Heather, seconded by Adam. All in favor-I, opposed-nah. Michael asked for a roll call vote: Marty-I, Mike-I, John-I, Michael-I, Jen-nay, Steve-I, Marc-nay, Adam-I, Greg-I, Heather-I, Robert-I. Motion carries 9-2.

Article 19: By Petition: Rockingham Community Action: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Patte Ardizzoni is here to represent Rockingham community Action. Patte said the mission is to draw the community together. They help with fuel assistance, weatherization, wic and head start. Patte went over the number from last year.
  - 12,129 households in Epping with a direct grant value of \$377,368
  - 153 households for fuel assistance with a service value of \$143,947
- Patte encourages people to call and see what services they offer, if they cannot provide something they have resources that can.
- Adam said that this is a worthy cause for the community, also the funds for the welfare line carry over because of the work they do.  
closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,
- PJ said it is worthy of our money to help those impacting in these trying times and pick up the slack where other programs fall short is so important.  
closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Steve, seconded by Adam. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 9-2.

Article 15: By Petition: New Overhead Door for the Epping Fire Department and Brickyard Museum: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Cliff said he has been working on this for a couple of years and he can get the door for \$5000.
- Heather asked when they started using it for a museum, Cliff said 2 years ago. Heather asked if you ever asked for any money from the town, Cliff said no that it has all been donations.
- Adam said that the town owns the building and we should pay for it  
closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,
- PJ, Harvey Lane, prefer not to have the burden put on the community  
closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 10-1.

Article 5: Police Union Contract: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said they re-negotiate this contract every 3 years and a lot of work and this year they restructured the way the officers are promoted, achieve rank and compensate tenor.
- Jen asked about the increase from \$31,260 in 2021 and \$58,370 in 2022, what makes it jump like that. Joe Trombley said they built in a vertical step year where one year during the contract cycle all officers are eligible for promotion based on the criteria that Chief Wallace and the police union pulled together. Jen asked if that was one time ever or once every 3 year contract cycle, Joe said in theory if it gets approved for this year there will only be potential for only 1 vertical for 3 years, the following contract cycle assuming it



gets approved there is still going to be built in the potential for 1 vertical on the contract year.

- Chief Wallace wants to thank the board of selectmen and the union. This was an arduous process and proud of the police union. They were able to award the officers for all their hard work and training. It going to show this community that if you want to work hard, do the training you will move up. You are going to have guys that want to work hard and train. The other thing to look at is some of the concessions the union made, an example was an overtime shift, one a week, which will save the town money and a few other concessions.
- Mike Lecuyer asked if this was going to help us retain the good officers in town and attract other officers from other towns, Chief Wallace said it will give him the flexibility to bring in another officer that may be certified, as well as the flexibility to bring in an officer that is at a level that will commensurate with their expense.
- Joe Trombley said that they brought up the entry level pay scale to be more competitive range, they were at the bottom of the range. They wanted to paint the path as to what they can achieve and move toward with the pay scale, it motivates them to want to excel.
- Chief Wallace it roughly caused \$40,000-\$60,000 for training.
- Mike Yergeau wants to thank Russ and the union as they went out on a limb for this, we threw this all out and started over, it took a lot of time.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- Steve Bettencourt asked what happens to your contract if this gets defeated, Chief Wallace said we don't know, as far as increases we don't know. Adam said we do the best we can with what we have and come back with a better solution. Chief Wallace said they do have the evergreen clause in there but that is up to interpretation.

closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Marc, seconded by Jen. All in favor, motion carries 10-0.

Article 6: Accrued Benefits Expendable Trust Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam this is used to payout employees.
- Mike Yergeau said they used the merit pool to pay out the high ranking officer.
- Steve asked if the police retire came out of the 2020 or 2021 budget, Lisa said 2020.
- Heather asked for the balance, Lisa said \$3600.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by John. All in favor-I, oppose-nay. Motion carries 7-2.

Article 17: Change Town Clerk/Tax Collector Assistant Position to Full Time: Read by Steve (attached).

- Erika said she would like to move the part time to full time as the town is growing, we are getting busier and we need the extra help.

Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said this was originally in the budget and they were asked to put it on a warrant article, the board of selectmen is behind this 100%
- Heather asked how many hours she works now, Erika said 24 and would like to make it 40. We always need to have to people in the office and she also covers for her when she is on vacation.



closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Marc to discuss. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, Michael asked for a roll call vote: Marty-nay, Mike Lecuyer-nay, John-nay, Michael-nay, Jen-nay, Steve-nay, Marc-nay, Heather-I, Adam-I, Greg Tillman-abstain. Motion does not carry 2-7-1. Erica asked why some voted nay:

- Marc is not disputing the change is needed, he feels it is not a good year to add a full time position. We should wait another year to make the decision.
- John said the statics he looked at do not support the position, Erika which statistic, John responded with the one's that were provided to us. John also said it was not consistent with other towns, Erika asked what towns he looked at, John said Goffstown and Bow.
- Michael does not think it is a good year with the retirement/medical increase, it should wait until we get a hold on that.

Article 9: Watson Academy Repairs Expendable Trust Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Steve said the balance is \$22,000
- Nicole Bizzaro said this year the roof was replaced with this fund. She is asking the tax payers to continue funding this account so we don't get hit with one bill. She asked for \$20,000 last year because of the roof, this year \$10,000 should put them in a good spot.
  - This fund is a necessity for the upkeep of the historical building.
  - Couple boilers need to be replaced in the future and we would like put money aside, there are elevators that continuous repair.
- Mike Yeregau said this fund will help go after the lchip grant again. This is the last year for the current lchip grant and they need to have matching funds to go after the grant.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- Eleana via zoom said it is not good to keep adding to the budget

closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay. Motion carries 8-3.

Article 10: Recreation Facilities Expendable Trust Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Steve asked Lisa if the balance was \$41,000, Lisa said yes.
- Nicole said this was established to be able make improvements to the community facilities. Looking to put in a pre-school playground that is open year round on the other side of the tennis courts which is on town land. She has worked with vendors to get a discount, if they fund the fund with \$10,000 it will be finished in 2021.
- Heather asked what the cost of the playground, Nicole said with the equipment discount it will be \$45,000 then town site work will be the additional funds of \$10,000.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Heather, seconded by Adam. All in favor-I, oppose-nay. Motion carries 6-5.

Article 8: Highway Equipment Capital Reserve Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Steve said the balance was \$133,000
- Dave Reinhold said they are planning to purchase an excavator with that money so it would make that account zero.



- Joe said there are two more pieces of equipment needed to purchase a grader/backhoe within 3-5 years and a loader within 7 years. The \$40,000 will give them the funds to purchase them within those set dates
- Mike Yergeau said it used to be funded for \$10,000 but the plan is to replace the equipment.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay. Michael called for a roll call: Marty-I, Mike-I, John-I, Michael-I, Jen-nay, Steve-nay, Marc-nay, Heather-I, Adam-I, Robert-nay. Motion carries 6-4.

Article 14: Highway Garage Addition: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said this the 2<sup>nd</sup> year coming forward with this addition.
- Dave Reinhold said it was a 3 bay 50x70 garage, nothing spectacular just insulation, sheetrock and concrete floors. It will be heated with what is there now. This is just a place to keep all our equipment in one spot and out of the elements.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- Joe Trombley, 6 Anthony Lane, said this is to protect the town assets, we keep kicking this down the road and we should not put this off.
- Steve Bettencourt, 19 Debbie Lane, asked if any of the items are being harmed now by not being garaged, Dave said yes there are 3 expensive pieces of equipment that are getting rusty from sitting outside, the sooner they get them in and fix the rust the longer they will last.
- PJ, 7 Harvey Lane, said as the budget committee you should be bending over backwards right now to cut the budget in any way possible not recommending more ways to spend our money, you vote yes and saying on behalf of the Epping residents they approve and want this and it will get voted down. This makes me believe you are out of touch with reality of our current tax burden Epping.
- Adam said he agrees that we should be keep out tax rate as low as possible but if we don't protect our equipment they will have to buy hundreds and thousands of dollars worth of equipment, we need to protect our equipment.
- Steve Bettencourt, Debbie Lane, asked how many pieces of equipment will fit, Dave there are 3 bays that will hold everything the town has and then some, they have the ability to add 2 more bays to the other side but that is later down the road.
- Joe Trombley says that he disagrees with the budget committee being out of touch, there are 3 or 4 articles that are planning on expenses in the future. He feels they are not getting support for items that will be needed later on down the road.

closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay. Motion not recommended 6-5.

Article 7: Town Hall Improvement Expendable Trust Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said this was funded at the lowest cost but does not feel it is enough. There are two projects pending, the meeting room expansion and the emergency escape stairs.
- Steve asked for the balance, Lisa said \$5500.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- Steve Bettencourt, 19 Debbie Lane, asked it if was necessary why not put it in the budget. Adam said it was in the budget as a one-time expense but they were asked to put it on a warrant article, so here it is.



closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 9-2.

Article 11: Landfill Closure Capital Reserve Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Lisa said the balance was \$123,000.
- Adam said this line has been fully underfunded, it is coming and it is going to cost millions. They are asking for \$100,000 to start the engineering to close the dump. We have been told for 5 years or so this was coming.
- Steve asked if there an idea when this going to have to happen, Mike Yergeau said they do not know, they are going over the plans now. They have a plan from years ago but it no longer applies.
- Steve asked if the issues exist on both sides, the stump dump and the transfer station. Mike said that is his understanding, but he has to read through the paperwork as he has been told one and then told both sides.
- Marc said this is a warrant article that he supports this year, it has always been unfunded. It is the most important warrant article this year.
- John asked if the highway garage is part of the landfill. Marc said it was built there because it was virgin ground.
- Michael asked if we had a more recent study would that help us to chase grant money, Mike said there is very little to know at this point, there are learning more everyday on how to mitigate and fund it.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- PJ asked why they feel a need to increase it with all the people out work due to covid and the tax situation. Adam said it has been planned but we did not plan was covid and the issue is still there with the landfill. This is not a good year, but we really don't have an option.
- Jeff Loembruno, 11 Molly Way, asked if this fund could be used for opening a new dump somewhere or will we have to fund that separately. Mike Yergeau once the engineering is done and it is determined we have to mitigate both side we would have to encompass the flip flop, taking the existing transfer station and bring it over to the other side once that is mitigated and leave that one active while we build a new transfer station on that site.

closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 11-0.

Article 12: Government Buildings Expendable Trust Fund: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said this works just like Watson and the Town Hall Fund, it is used for repairs.
- Steve asked for the balance, Lisa said \$11
- Steve asked if there are any projects or earmarked for any projects. Mike Yergeua can't recall for this year, but it is an aging building and we are looking forward for the aging structures to have the money in there.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment,

- Steve Bettencourt, 19 Debbie Lane, asked if the fund were used on the town hall and if so why two funds. Adam said the town hall can only be used for the town hall, the way the article is written it can be used for all the other government buildings. Steve asked if there was anything in the budget for the building, Adam said no.



closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Steve. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 7-4.3

Article 13: Epping Youth Athletic Association: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said this is the Epping Youth.
- Mike Lecuyer said he fully supports this article.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by John. All in favor, motion carries 11-0.

Article 16: By Petition: Rockingham Nutrition & Meals on Wheels Program: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said they do a lot for this town and the return of investment is phenomenal.
- John said this is the only nutritional meal some will receive, it also gives the ability for someone to check on them.
- Michael said this program is phenomenal and with everything that is happening this program is going to be crucial for the residents.

closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by Heather. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 10-1.

Article 21: By Petition: Richie McFarland Children's Center: Read by Steve (attached). Open to the board for comment,

- Adam said it is a small contribution for services they are already providing for the town.
- closed for board comment, open to the public for comment, closed public comment. Motion to recommend the article as written by Adam, seconded by John. All in favor-I, oppose-nay, motion carries 9-2.

Steve did not read the remaining articles as they are non-monetary the budget committee does not recommend on them. Steve would like to the wording on the articles to state 'Not Recommend' if they are not recommended.

Greg said that you need to close the public hearing, stay after to sign the MS-27 and the board of selectmen will have a little meeting.

Motion to adjourn by Heather, seconded by Marc. Meeting adjourned 10:30pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Cynthia Hounam