

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN Budget Reviews  
TOWN OF HAMPTON FALLS**

**OCTOBER 04, 2023 – 8:00 AM  
TOWN HALL**

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**PRESENT:** Ed B. Beattie, Chairman; Lou Gargiulo, Vice Chairman; Mark R. Lane, Selectman; Karen Anderson, Town Administrator; Rachel D. Webb, Assistant Administrator

**GUEST:** Jay Lord, Fire Chief; Ryan Veno, Police Chief; Stephanie Grant, Town Clerk; Linda Coe, Beth Forgione, and Bev Mutrie, Library Trustees; Jonathn Bohm, Cemetery Trustee

Chairman Beattie called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 8:00 AM.

**BUDGET REVIEWS:**

**Fire / Ambulance / Emergency Management – Fire Chief Jay Lord:**

Chief Lord presented his proposed 2024 budget. Bringing Deputy Chief Bobby Hudson on as a full-time Deputy as part of the succession plan has increased the budget by a considerable amount. Everything else is status quo.

M. Lane asked if B. Hudson's new position is proposed as a half-time position, and Chief Lord responded no, that the salary is divided equally between the Ambulance and the Fire department budgets, just as his (the Chief's) salary is also divided equally.

L. Gargiulo stated that it is a significant proposed increase, and asked if there is a way to temper the increase in some fashion on other lines? Chief Lord responded that most of the lines he either went down or increased only minimally. He said that what he is proposing is what it costs to run an ambulance service.

Chairman Beattie asked where B. Hudson's position is depicted in the budget, and Chief Lord responded under full-time, together with his salary, so the itemization in Ambulance (at 50% of salary) is \$48,714 for Fire Chief, and \$35,000 for Deputy Chief for a total of \$83,714. Chairman Beattie continued asking about the Part-time line item under Ambulance and said that in 2022 there was appropriated \$38,000 with \$0 spent, and proposed and increase of \$4,000 for 2024 to \$42,000 with \$0 spent in 2023, and he wants to understand that better. Chief Lord explained that when he submits his stipend at the end of the year that it is broken into the following two (2) lines 4215-120 for Ambulance, and 4220-120 Fire, and he was not aware that it was being put all into the Fire Department's line and not split in half with Ambulance. K. Anderson explained that the financial report shows expenditures through August, and those stipends are paid in December. In 2022 the total spent was \$66,484 for part-time.

M. Lane asked whether the part-time positions budget decreased because B. Hudson will go from part-time to full-time, and Chief Lord said a little bit, but said that he still has thirty-five (35) on-call firefighters and explained how they are paid. He said that when their pager goes off and until they're back in the station, their time is tracked and logged as part-time throughout the year. Hours are tracked for both Fire Dept calls and for Ambulance calls, separately. Additionally, if they attend trainings Tuesday nights, then those training hours are tracked as well. The first week in December annually they are paid their stipend as employees, based on the numbers of hours worked and their hourly rate. Chief Lord further explained that B. Hudson is currently working on Mondays all day, attends trainings Tuesday nights, and then works a few additional hours spread throughout the week. He stated that there currently are a couple of other positions that will be discontinued in 2024, that were paid out of the Fire Dept budget.

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M. Lane asked if there were several big events during a year, would the Fire Dept budget be overspent due to paying hourly instead of the former annual stipend? Chief Lord said that it would not, the events tend to balance out over the year, in his experience. He said that typically they see 6 or 7 events annually at which they attend for longer than a two-hour duration.

M. Lane asked Chief Lord how he came up with the salary amount for the Deputy Chief position at full-time? Chief Lord responded that it is the amount it is going to take to bring him on at full-time. He stated that B. Hudson is not going to take the insurance. K. Anderson stated that B. Hudson plans to take the insurance buy-out, and will be on NH Retirement.

M. Lane asked if the Selectmen needed to approve the Deputy Chief position, as they had only previously discussed the concept. L. Gargiulo stated that the Selectmen never had a conversation about the financial implications of the decision. K. Anderson said that B. Hudson has been in the position as Deputy Chief already, and Chief Lord added that he has been in the position for four (4) years. M. Lane said that the proposed budget is for a \$70,000 position for Deputy Chief, and Chief Lord said that it will be for a forty (40) hour week plus any weekend and evening calls, so 45-50 hours per week average. Chairman Beattie confirmed that this would be for a two (2) year cycle. L. Gargiulo suggested tabling discussion of this further until the Selectmen see the whole budget, because this is a significant increase, and they will need to see if they can find savings elsewhere. Chairman Beattie stated that the Selectmen have only previously discussed the concept of transitioning. L. Gargiulo said that the other option would have been to go out and recruit and hire a Fire Chief and then there would not have been a significant overlap. He continued saying that the Town may have had to pay more money for that new position, and they would not know who they were going to be hiring. L. Gargiulo said that this is a more prudent approach but it is going to have to be “sold” to the taxpayers that it makes sense. Chairman Beattie stated that what you spend to go out and hire and train a new person you spend in the transition period, so those comparisons will need to be made and balanced in terms of what the money is versus the transition value. L. Gargiulo stated that they’re too far into this to change their minds, and Chairman Beattie said that the Selectmen are looking at the budget, after the revaluation, and will have to look at the budget as a whole.

K. Anderson stated that the overall budget increase is 3.9% that is up \$129,000 over the 2023 budget. L. Gargiulo said that there will be the implication of what is going to happen with the new tax reassessments. L. Gargiulo said that some people are going to see significant hikes, and K. Anderson said that some neighborhoods will see significant hikes, and other neighborhoods will not see increases. She said that it was the smaller homes that were selling for high amounts this year. L. Gargiulo said that there are many homes whose values have doubled this year because of the revaluation. He suggested that the Selectmen table the conversation to look at the entire budget and then come back to it, and M. Lane agreed. M. Lane said that the Selectmen had discussed the concept of bringing B. Hudson in but had not discussed the financial implications. L. Gargiulo said that that was the part that was missed. M. Lane said that maybe there are other areas of the budget where the Selectmen can find the difference of \$70,000. M. Lane said that conceptually it makes sense. L. Gargiulo asked Chief Lord to see if there were places to cut in his budget, and the Selectmen are going to ask all the departments to see if they can cut their budgets even more. Chairman Beattie said that they would like to try to get as close to a zero-increase budget as possible. K. Anderson stated that the proposed budget does not include any

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Cost of Living (COLA) increases for any employees at this point. She clarified with Chief Lord that there would not be a COLA added to the \$70,000 Deputy Fire Chief position, and he stated that the salary starting position is the \$70,000.

K. Anderson stated that the Emergency Management budget is up but that is because it is a “drill year”, and Chief Lord confirmed that anything spent on the drill is 100% reimbursed. Chief Lord said that he has included a COOP plan (Continuity of Operations Plan) proposal for 2024 that is a 100% reimbursed grant through Homeland Security. K. Anderson said that it has to be “gross appropriated”. She continued that if it is like the Hazard Mitigation Plan that is currently in process that it is an 80/20 match with the local match being in-kind as town staff time on the committee as the offset. When the grant is received, it goes into a revenue account as “grants received from State”, and then when it comes to the tax rate, it is expenses minus revenues. K. Anderson explained that technically the Town does not spend revenues, they account for them and deposit them.

Chairman Beattie said that the only area he saw as unspent was uniforms and clothing with \$9,000 put in and nothing spent, unless it was an off-cycle year, and Chief Lord confirmed that it was an off-cycle year. K. Anderson said that \$10,525 was spent on uniforms and clothing, and Chief Lord said that he buys uniforms at the end of the year.

M. Lane asked about why dues and subscriptions increased. Chief Lord explained that the Dispatch Fee for Hampton Fire is a five-year contract, that is based on the CPI of Boston for the previous year in September. He said that last year that CPI was 8.3%, so that line item jumped almost \$4,000 for 2024. Typically, it is an increase of 2-3% annually. Chief Lord said that he would work on his budget some more.

**General Government-Executive – Town Administrator K. Anderson:** K. Anderson stated that there are increases that were established last year. She stated that the regular accounts are down \$1,400. The printing budget has been reduced by another \$1,500 (from \$3,000) for the Town Report, and the rest is level funded. She said that overall, the budget is a 3.9% increase, and the Health Insurance is a 15.6% increase. M. Lane asked what comprises the printing costs, and K. Anderson responded: Town Reports, and envelopes.

**Town Clerk / Tax – Stephanie Grant:** Town Clerk/Tax Collector Stephanie Grant presented her proposed 2024 budget, saying that there will be four (4) elections in 2024, with those election costs comprising most of the increase to her proposed 2024 budget. Part-Time positions increased a little due to a step increase, and the four elections. The Moderator and Assistant Moderator are shown in the Elections budget under elected officials for 2024, where they had previously been in the Executive section of the budget. Other Professional Services decreased in S. Grant’s budget because she moved Avitar tax support to the Communication Fund, since it gets paid from that fund annually. Printing costs increased due to a cost increase regarding the Election envelopes. And Dog Tags increased by \$150 which she said she was not expecting. K. Anderson said that the Dog Tags costs are offset with the revenues, and M. Lane asked if the Town should consider increasing the cost of the Dog Tags to cover the difference; K. Anderson responded that the State sets the price of the Dog Tags. S. Grant said that the Town could

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consider increasing the cost to register a dog from \$6.50 to \$7.50 as several other towns charge that price. L. Gargiulo asked how many dogs are in Hampton Falls, and the response was approximately 700. He said that he thought the dog registration fee should increase to \$7.50, that would increase revenues to the Town by \$700.

Chairman Beattie asked about the line-item Food and Meals for elections at \$300 per election he thought that did not seem like enough funding, and S. Grant confirmed that last year they overspent that line item. She described that they provide Breakfast and Dinner to Election workers, and she said that breakfast they can provide economically with bagels, but the dinner gets expensive.

S. Grant said that no hours were increased in her budget, and she tried to decrease costs where she could, but with four elections in 2024, that was the source of the increases in her budget. The Presidential Primary election will be in January or February, then there is the March Town election, September is the Governor primary, and November is the Presidential election.

K. Anderson reminded the Selectmen about the Warrant article they had discussed putting forward for the March 2024 election to change the polling hours from 8AM-8PM to 8AM-7PM, to end an hour earlier.

**Police Department / Animal Control - Police Chief Ryan Venio:** Police Chief Venio presented his proposed 2024 budget with a 1.4 % increase over the 2023 budget, that was mainly regarding Full-Time positions. There was an increase in the Prosecution contract that went from \$9,000 to \$10,600. There were a few small category line items that were deleted or consolidated into other accounts to streamline the budget. K. Anderson said that consolidation of some of the smaller accounts made sense to reduce the total number of accounts. Police Chief Venio said that Printing went into Office Supplies, and Books and Periodicals went into Dues and Subscriptions.

K. Anderson stated that last year when it was apparent that the fifth Police Officer position was not going to be filled, the Selectmen reduced the line item by two (2) months salary, so that for the 2024 budget that line item needs to go back to 100%. M. Lane asked about why the Part-Time positions line item decreased, and Police Chief Venio stated that he wanted to make the budget as close to what the Police Dept was going to use as possible. He said that that line item used to be as high as \$50,000 under Police Chief Dirsra, but that he was trying to make available Part-Time work to the Part-Time officers, so he reduced that line-item last year, and he was reducing it some more for 2024.

M. Lane asked how does Chief Venio budget for over-time (OT)? Chief Venio said that the new Lieutenant chooses to use his over-time as compensatory time off in lieu of payment. He stated that OT is just for hourly employees, not salaried, so most people take the payment instead of the time off. Additionally, he stated that with more staff there will be more vacations to cover. K. Anderson said that the Dept of Labor allows Comp Time in lieu of over-time for municipal governments.

M. Lane asked about the line-item for Vacations – Holidays – Education that appropriated \$27,000 for 2023 and has only spent \$7,600 so far, and Police Chief Venio said that those get

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paid out the first week in December. Police Chief Veno further explained that the reason that line item had the partial payment was because when Officer DiFrancesco left, the Town bought out his unused vacation time. M. Lane asked Police Chief Veno to see if he could please look at his budget to see if there were any other areas he could consider cutting, as they asked the Fire Chief to do the same thing and will ask all Department Heads.

Animal Control: Police Chief Veno stated that he moved around some line items within the Animal Control Department, but the bottom line stays the same, to more accurately reflect where the department is spending the money to make the ledger as accurate as possible.

L. Gargiulo asked about expenditures, and K. Anderson clarified that in 2022 there was only \$22 spent on Animal Control, whereas in 2023 there is \$2,000 spent. Chief Veno stated that at the start of the year he was not sure where the expenditures were going to be, as he had Patrol employees doing the job for first few months of the year; now, there are three (3) appointed and trained Animal Control Officers (ACO), so the \$2,000 spent was for five (5) months. M. Lane asked how the ACOs are paid, is it hourly when they respond to a call? Chief Veno responded that Animal Control calls are routed through the Police Dept. to a group text of the ACOs to see who is available to respond to the call. The ACOs bill their time and are paid hourly (at \$20.61/hr) in fifteen (15) minute increments, the same as Part-Time wage, plus mileage from their home to the call.

**Library Trustees- Linda Coe, Beth Forgionne, and Bev Mutrie, Trustees:** L. Coe presented the Library's proposed 2024 operating budget with small increases in the areas of Custodial, Lawn Mowing, and Office Supplies; and larger increases in Salaries. L. Coe and B. Forgione clarified that the Full-Time Salary line should read \$47,500, and the Part-Time positions are increasing to \$61,500. There is also an increase in benefits to \$45,611. L. Gaargiulo asked why the Part-Time line is going from last year at \$47,000 to this proposed \$61,500? L. Coe responded that "Substitutes" are positions who fill in for vacations, and the current hourly wage is \$10.00/hr for the one current employee. The Library has been trying to fill a second position for the past year, and no one is willing to take the position at that pay rate. B. Forgione said the current rate of pay for the current Library Staff is \$16.00/hr. and she said that the Library is going need to start paying a higher wage to compete with other jobs. L. Coe explained the Library's methodology in calculating the salaries, because they do not have Step raises, and they do not do COLA increases because they have a merit-based system of rewarding employees for exemplary work from that line. The Library compares itself with the State Library's annual salary survey and also with ten (10) other seacoast community libraries, with similar populations, to stay competitive with what other Libraries are paying, and the Hampton Falls Library is behind in remaining competitive. L. Coe stated that the average Library Director rate is \$27.38/hr and Hampton Falls is currently paying \$24.00/hr.

M. Lane asked if the hourly wage is being increased, then maybe there is no point to having the merit pay as well.

L. Gargiulo asked if the Library could do some outreach to try to get some volunteers to do the Part-Time work, and B. Forgione stated that State law says that you can not have a volunteer do work that is normally a paid position, and L. Gargiulo said that he would like to see that NH

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RSA, so K. Anderson said she would provide it. Bev Mutrie clarified that it had to do with privacy laws that volunteers cannot check-out books or use the Library computers because that would gain access to patron privacy issues.

M. Lane asked who gets Health Insurance at the Library, and L. Coe responded, just the Director being full-time, working 40 hrs/wk. M. Lane clarified that the cost for one staff person for a family health insurance plan costs the Town \$28,000. K. Anderson further elaborated that the employee pays 15% of the cost of the plan in addition to the \$28,000.

L. Gargiulo was not clear about what responsibility the Selectmen have about the Library Trustees' budget. K. Anderson agreed and said that the Library Trustees present their proposed budget to the Selectmen as advisory, because they are a separately elected board.

M. Lane stated that the Library Operations budget increase is up 8.1 % and asked if there was any room for reduction in that area? L. Coe stated that they could try. She continued that typically the Library turns back money to the Town, and that they apply donations to costs where-ever possible, but she stated that they felt as though they were putting forth a realistic budget given the costs this year. M. Lane asked about examining the hours open to see if there were any reduction of open hours possible during slower times, to save money on the Part-Time staff line, and B. Forgione said that they could look at that, to see how to reduce the budget. Another idea M. Lane floated was a seasonal variation approach to hours with more weekend hours in the Winter, and less in the Summer.

Chairman Beattie said that all departments are being asked the same thing in budget review, if there are additional ways/places they can cut their budgets. He stated that it is the Selectmen's job to get the proposed budget passed in March. Chairman Beattie noted that the Library has received donations from benefactors that they could apply to help offset some of these proposed increases. B. Forgione responded that she believed the Library is restricted in the use donations, and can't use them for payroll costs. B. Mutrie explained that the rules about donations are that the Library can spend donations within the year they are donated, but once a year had lapsed, then the Library must seek approval from the voters to spend those monies, so they would have to do a warrant article to authorize the spending from their donation account. L. Coe clarified that it could be a warrant article authorizing the Library to spend their donation monies, with no impact to the taxpayers. B. Forgione said that if a warrant article was proposed by the Library, then it has to be for a specific project, and cannot be for the Library's operational budget. Chairman Beattie stated that he was thinking of the recent Maureen Stard donation to the Library, and L. Coe said that the Library has been using that money to provide the Hoopla program to residents. L. Gargiulo suggested using donation money to fund programs such as Summer Reading, and L. Coe said that they do. He followed up asking if they could use donations to buy books, and L. Coe responded that sometimes they do. M. Lane said that maybe there is an offset potential, in addition to consideration of reducing hours open. B. Forgione stated that historically the Library receives approximately \$5,000 annually in donations, and if the donation is not designated for a specific use, then the Library can use the donation within the year, and they typically use those monies to offset operational expenses. B. Forgione stated that the challenge is really the salary and benefits and the cost of health insurance.

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Chairman Beattie asked for K. Anderson to clarify for the Selectmen exactly the role of the Selectmen in considering the Library's budget before the next Budget meeting. She said that the NH RSAs regarding Libraries are complicated in specifying what they can spend money on and what they cannot, and B. Forgione agreed, stating that the NH RSAs were convoluted.

M. Lane asked what happens at the Deliberative Session, can the voters decide to reduce a section of the budget by a certain amount? Could they do that to the Library? K. Anderson explained that a result of the Deliberative Session could be to reduce the bottom-line of the budget by \$5,000, and then the Selectmen would need to work with the Library to figure out how to reduce that \$5,000.

L. Coe said that they would look at the hours open and usage to see if there are potential savings to consider. K. Anderson said that the Library, the Recreation Commission, the Conservation Commission, and the Energy Commission are getting together to co-sponsor events.

**Cemetery Trustees:** J. Bohm, Cemetery Trustees presented the Cemetery Budget. He responded to Chairman Beattie's question about whether there were any complaints this past year, to which he said no, that the cemeteries received excellent mowing service this year and that they were ready for Memorial Day in May and will be ready for Veteran's Day in November. Chairman Beattie reminded the Selectmen that the mowing contract was improved to specify the mowing frequency to be ready for those two holidays, and K. Anderson said that the mowing vendor was very responsive.

M. Lane noted that the budget has a 9.7% increase, compared with the overall budget increase of 3.9%, and asked about the Supplies line. J. Bohn said that the expenditures this year are very low, but the Cemetery Trustees are about to spend \$4,000 for some tree removal, and he said that it is a recurring cost for the cemeteries and will be just as expensive to do next year.

Chairman Beattie said that the Cemetery Trustees are wanting to make sure that the Town's Revolutionary War cemetery is cleaned up in time for the historic Lafayette visit early next September 2024.

L. Gargiulo asked if there is a way to charge more for the Cemetery lots? J. Bohm explained that they have done that, to bring the prices more in line with what other public cemeteries charge, but those revenues go into the Cemetery Trust Fund, and not into the General Fund. K. Anderson reiterated that it would not be an offsetting revenue. She explained that the offsetting revenue is the interest from the Trust Funds. She said that each year the amount varies from \$9,000 to \$10,400. Chairman Beattie asked K. Anderson about the Cemetery's CRF (capital reserve fund). K. Anderson explained that there is a Cemetery CRF and Perpetual Care Funds. The perpetual care accounts cannot be spent. The CRF account is there for the Cemetery Trustees to utilize for big expenses, and that account has been sitting unused for a long time. She continued that generally, the interest is allowed to build as that money is used to protect the Town for future expansion of the cemeteries. L. Gargiulo asked J. Bohm if there is going to be a need to expand the cemeteries in the future, and he responded that Oak Lawn Cemetery has future expansion capability, but he would not anticipate that need for 100 years. He said that people are doing cremations more frequently now, and the Cemetery Trustees changed their bylaws to allow from

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4 to 6 cremains per lot. J. Bohm said that upon examination of the cemetery records, it was determined that there were lots available in Westview Cemetery, and when those were made available for purchase a few months ago 13 were sold in one day, and he thanked the staff at Town Hall for their handling of that surge of transactions. L. Gargiulo asked if there were maps of the cemeteries, and K. Anderson explained that the Town Clerk maintains the maps of the cemeteries, and updates the maps when lots are purchased.

K. Anderson said that the Cemetery Trustees could consider putting forth a warrant article that might hypothetically be worded such as: “To expend up to \$5,000 from the Cemetery Trustees escrow account for the purpose of tree removal (or some other specific purpose) in the cemeteries, with no impact to the taxpayers.” And that draft warrant article would need to be submitted by January 6, 2024, to be added to the warrant for the local March election. *It was later clarified that the principal Capital Reserve Account cannot be withdrawn, based on a warrant article approved by the voters.*

M. Lane suggested that the Cemetery Trustees consider doing the warrant article, as discussed, specifically at the Revolutionary War Cemetery, to clean-up that location ahead of the first Sunday in September 2024 Lafayette Tour event planned. L. Gargiulo stated that the Selectmen have no role in determining the Cemetery Trustee’s budget.

**Heritage Commission – Bev Mutrie, Chair:** The Selectmen reviewed the Heritage Commission’s proposed 2024 budget, and there were no questions.

B. Mutrie asked when the Selectmen would be reviewing the maintenance and repair of Town buildings, in the budget, and K. Anderson responded under the Executive section of the budget which may be discussed either later this morning or, if not, then October 18<sup>th</sup> at the next Selectmen’s meeting. B. Mutrie said that she had a list of issues/projects for consideration. She said that the Historical Society Museum building needs: clapboards replaced on the North side of the building, where there are some mold and mildew issues developing; the gutter needs some work over the back stairway; and Town Hall needs painting on the gutters. K. Anderson stated that some of the gutters on Town Hall need to be replaced and she has reached out to couple of vendors who do historic work, and they are fully booked through 2024. B. Mutrie said that she would provide the name of the restoration painter/carpenter who did the front of the Historical Society Museum. B. Mutrie said that there could be some significant monies spent on repairs to both the Museum and to Town Hall.

B. Mutrie asked if the dead tree on the Town Common was going to be removed near the church and graveyard, and K. Anderson responded that there were three (3) of four (4) trees removed from the Town Common earlier in the year at approximately \$1,000 per tree, so that last one will be in next year’s budget. B. Mutrie said that there is a woodcutter in town who is looking for wood to cut, and who may offer to take the tree down, so she will provide that contact to K. Anderson.

**General Government:** K. Anderson stated that the Financial Administration line decreased by almost \$22,000 because the revaluation was in the budget last year. She said that she would need to adjust the Avitar contract price to reflect the RFP price. M. Lane confirmed that the budget



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number proposed is for the new Auditor. K. Anderson stated that the software support (IT) contract RFP is currently out to bid with proposals due end of October. She said that the current contract with Stellar is for Town Hall, Police and Fire. She said that the Police Department was notified that Stellar's rate is planned to increase substantially, so the Town is seeking proposals on IT support. K. Anderson said that the Legal line has been level-funded at \$9,500. She said that that line may end up being overspent this year because that is where she put the cost of the Hydrogeologist consultant the Town hired to review the Large Groundwater Withdrawal Permit application by the Town of Seabrook. Employee benefits is the largest increase at \$82,000 that is based on the 15.6% health insurance premium increase. M. Lane asked if the health insurance was an estimated amount at the beginning of the budget year, that gets adjusted to the actual cost later in the year (like the School Dept), and K. Anderson responded no, because the Town is on a calendar year budget and the health insurance rates follow a calendar year, whereas conversely, the School is on a fiscal year, so that is why they estimate and then later adjust to actual. K. Anderson explained that the Town's fluctuations in employee benefits can be attributable to whether an employee changes plan types such as going from a Single-person plan to a Two-person plan, to a Family-plan. She further clarified that the proposed budget number includes the full-time Deputy Fire Chief position taking the buy-out option. She said that the buyout line increased from \$9,000 to \$36,000 for two reasons, because one person was budgeted in the health insurance line and then opted to take the buy-out. M. Lane asked how much the employee gets from the health insurance buy-out, and K. Anderson stated that the employee receives a 25% percent of the plan they would be on. M. Lane asked if the Health Trust is the only choice of health insurance that the Town can use? K. Anderson explained that Health Trust is not an insurance company, as they process through Anthem. The town's exposure rate is blended with other towns of *under 50 employees*, so that is the benefit. There is a similar option through NH Interlocal that utilizes CIGNA, instead of Anthem. M. Lane confirmed that six people are costing the Town \$300,000 in benefits. K. Anderson stated that the demographics of the Town employees have changed where there used to be more single and two-person plans, and now with some staff turn-over it has shifted to primarily family plans. L. Gargiulo stated that most companies do not offer the same percentage for a family plan. K. Anderson explained that health insurance in Hampton Falls is offered as a choice of three (3) tiers: 20%, 15%, or 10% employee contribution depending on the plan chosen. L. Gargiulo asked if all towns structure their health insurance that way, and K. Anderson said she had surveyed some towns, and there was a range from the towns paying 75%, to 25% by employee, to towns paying 100%. M. Lane said that if the health insurance continues to go up 10-15% per year, then the Selectmen may have to look at it, and he would hate to impact town employees because there are so few and the Board does not want to lose the ones they have, but it is a tough situation. Chairman Beattie pointed out that over the past five-years, three of those years had decreases in rates. K. Anderson said that when she received the phone call from Health Trust about the anticipated rate, it was described to her that during the COVID year many elective surgeries were not done, so that accounted for decreased costs, and then there was the increase of use following COVID as medical returned to full-service. The reason offered for the increased rate this year was that the Health Trust's reserves got depleted too low last year, and their actuary has recommended they need to reestablish their reserves for this year.

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K. Anderson stated that there is a small decrease in retirement rates, as the rates decreased effective July 1, 2023, so there was a 50% decrease for this year, and 2024 will be at the lower rate the entire year.

Chairman Beattie asked what is the cost of a family plan for health insurance, and K. Anderson responded that it costs approximately \$3,300/mo, and there are 5 Police, 2 Town Hall, and 2 Library employees utilizing the health insurance benefits.

**Planning Board budget**, K. Anderson stated is level funded for 2024. She added that Planning Board Chairman Todd Santora wants to discuss with the Selectmen some longer-term concerns regarding the Zoning Ordinance and will do so at a future date.

**Zoning Board budget**, K. Anderson stated is level funded for 2024.

**Government, Buildings:** K. Anderson included under the Repairs and Maintenance the older front porch of Town Hall scraping and painting of the columns. She said if she can get some estimates before March, it could be a warrant article to add to the Government Buildings CRF for that one-time purpose.

**Electricity rates** K. Anderson level-funded because the rate jumped last year, and the town locked in as part of the aggregation agreement with the RPC. She said that they are through August at \$10,000 and budgeted for \$16,500. She said she thinks the mini-splits have helped regulate the temperature in the meeting room, not having to turn up the system on meeting day.

**Insurance** numbers are not available yet from Primex, until October 17, so she budgeted the maximum increase allowed by the plan of 7%, so that final number when received could be less. She stated that there was an uninsured loss for an accident at the Fire Station where the Town paid the \$1,000 deductible, and Primex is subrogating through the person's insurance who caused the damage, so the Town may get that money back eventually.

**Building Inspection** budget is level funded. K. Anderson stated that the Building Inspector has budgeted (in the past few years) for a part-time person (3 hours/wk) to help scan the files in his office, but that person has been less available this past year. She said that there is going to be more of a concerted effort to get that work done to keep records maintained and organized.

**Solid Waste Collection** is a set contract so that remains unchanged.

**Solid Waste Disposal** is a decrease in the budget. K. Anderson said that the tonnage data show fairly consistent waste disposal tonnage. Having the monthly disposal days has worked out very well, with the amount received has not exceeded the amount collected at the former twice annual larger events, and there are no lines, no waiting and people are very pleased with it. She stated that the revenues have offset some of the costs, for example the Town has sold \$5,000 worth of Brush Dump stickers, which is great because the stickers limit the use of the Brush Dump to Hampton Falls residents. She said that residents are at approximately 75% compliance with people pre-paying for their loads at the Town Clerk's office, residents are getting familiar with the routine of the procedure. K. Anderson said that the Brush Dump will remain open through

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October. Chairman Beattie said that after that date, in November, the facility starts getting used in preparation for Winter Road Maintenance.

K. Anderson reported that the new fencing has been installed at the Brush Dump. She said that there was a fence mesh proposed by Jim Ziolkowski and R. Hilliard to attach to the chain link to visually screen the Brush Dump from passersby on Parsonage Road. She shared pictures of the fence mesh to the Selectmen, and they agreed to make the expenditure of approximately \$3.59/linear foot for the 90-feet of frontage on Parsonage Road.

**Health and Welfare:** Chairman Beattie said that one of the things that he noticed over the past year is that the Town has a Welfare Officer, who is hired to handle issues that arise during the year, and when COVID monies stopped in June that created a situation for Hampton Falls, that K. Anderson handled most of the work. He proposed the change to make those responsibilities held by the Town Administrator, and to eliminate the Part-Time Welfare Officer position. L. Gargiulo asked K. Anderson her opinion of the proposal. K. Anderson said that before this year, historically, the Town spent more on the Part-Time position wage than on direct assistance. She continued that this year was totally unusual with the situation at the hotel. K. Anderson said that the Welfare Officer was some help this year. She elaborated that the Town is ethically responsible if the “clients” present themselves to the Town in need. She explained that the process had been if someone needs to contact the Welfare Officer it is either by email or phone call, as the person works for other towns and the City of Portsmouth, but under “normal” circumstances it is very easy for the Town Administrator to handle the work, especially if a “client” needs to meet in person. She stated that typically the Town receives one to two calls per year, and the Town has been paying \$2,250 annually for that Part-Time assistance. K. Anderson reported that currently the Town has spent this year approximately \$11,000 on rental assistance for people evicted from the Hotel along with other costs. The Town received a \$12,000 grant offset from Rockingham County for emergency housing assistance which will cover the amount overspent in the welfare budget. She stated that there is one (1) family left, of the original 28 households needing assistance when the hotel assistance ended. She is still working with one family.

L. Gargiulo asked Chairman Beattie if the Planning Board looked at preventing hotels or motels from accepting/offering long-term rentals, as the hotel was temporarily turned into an apartment building. Chairman Beattie responded that the Planning Board is currently working on Short-Term Rentals due to impacts of noise, frequency of turn-over, and safety with some issues spilling over into the Welfare area depending on the clients served. K. Anderson said that the State legislature this Summer clearly defined residency to be thirty (30) days of self-sufficiency, otherwise the town or agency providing assistance has to be responsible, by law.

M. Lane asked how a community would handle illegal immigrants, and K. Anderson explained that the church or agency who funded the immigrants’ arrival would be responsible until thirty (30) days of self-sufficiency was demonstrated. She continued, if the immigrants presented themselves to the Town, (with no sponsoring church nor agency) as homeless, then the Town would have to help them get into a shelter. M. Lane asked the hypothetical question if the State sponsored immigrants in a Hampton Falls hotel, and then the State stopped sponsorship, (similar to what happened this past summer), where would the households go as they would not have a

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“sending community” who would be responsible to help them? K. Anderson said that would be a problem for Hampton falls. She pointed out that the State of Maine has towns providing assistance and then submitting expenses for reimbursement from the State, but she added that Hampton Falls does not have alternate housing to provide. Chairman Beattie said the State of Massachusetts has a sanctuary designation.

K. Anderson stated that the State can refer people to a shelter, but a Town cannot find a residential solution for someone who is homeless because otherwise the town would be liable. K. Anderson stated that the Town does not anticipate that the Hotel would accept another State funded program (as they did last Summer) because there were significant damages to the Hotel as a result.

L. Gargiulo stated that something to pay attention to is proposed legislation from Washington DC to eliminate planning and zoning to allow building apartment buildings on residential housing lots. And the NH State Housing Appeals Board, that basically can override local Planning and Zoning Board decisions can also be a problem. He mentioned that the recently denied proposal for housing development in Seabrook at The Brook is probably going to go to the NH State Housing Appeals Board. L. Gargiulo said that, as a person, he is all for development, but said that local people need to be making local decisions on the Planning and Zoning Boards, and he was not in favor of local control being taken away by the State.

Health Department budget: K. Anderson described the Health Department budget Test Pit line has been reduced by \$2,250 because it is an “in and out” account, where the Town collects the fee for RCCD (Rockingham County Conservation District) to inspect the Test Pits of potential septic system locations, and then RCCD bills the Town for their service, and the Town pays RCCD. The Town does not need to appropriate those funds. She said that the line is being reduced to \$250 for RCCD support.

Health Agencies: K. Anderson said that she has proposed to level fund the Health Agencies line at \$17,750 for 2024, and at this point in 2023 \$12,525 has been released. She said that she still has not heard from a couple of agencies. Chairman Beattie said that the agencies must make an annual request, and they must also make the request to release the funds.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Executive: Assessing Contract: K. Anderson stated that the Selectmen received the RFP results for the new Assessing contract at their previous meeting and asked her to negotiate the proposed contract with Avitar, which she did. She requested the Selectmen to authorize sending the updated Assessing contract to DRA for approval.

**MOTION: To authorize the Selectmen to send the updated Assessing contract to DRA for approval.**

**MOTION: L. GARGIULO**

**SECOND: M. LANE**

FINAL

UNANIMOUS

**Executive: Tiger Trot Race – Use of Town Common:** K. Anderson reported that the LAS PTO has requested the use of Town roads for the annual Tiger Trot road race on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 Noon.

**MOTION:** To approve the requested permit application from the LAS PTO for the Tiger Trot road race on November 18, 2023, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 Noon.

**MOTION:** L. GARGIULO

**SECOND:** M. LANE

UNANIMOUS

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES: September 27, 2023**

**MOTION:** To approve the minutes of September 27, 2023, as written.

**MOTION:** L. GARGIULO

**SECOND:** M. LANE

UNANIMOUS

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION:** To adjourn the meeting at 10:50 AM.

**MOTION:** L. GARGIULO

**SECOND:** M. LANE

UNANIMOUS

The next Selectmen's Meeting is: Wednesday, October 18, 2023, from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM- Regular meeting is limited to one hour due to the Seabrook Drill scheduled for 9:00 AM by the Hampton Falls Fire Chief at the EOC (Emergency Operations Center). K. Anderson stated that one (1) of the Selectmen must attend the drill.

These Minutes prepared by Rachel D. Webb, Assistant Administrator.