

Town of Canterbury, NH
Board of Selectmen
Date: 2023 December 4
Location: Meeting House

Selectmen:

Cheryl Gordon (Chair), Kent Ruesswick, Scott Doherty

Town Administrator:

Ken Folsom

Budget Committee:

Calvin Todd, Jan Stout, Kelly Short, Robert Scarponi, Robert Steenson

Others Present:

Rachel Baker (Library Director)

Linda Riendeau (Library Trustee), Ron Routhier (Library Trustee Alternate)

Michael Tursi (SAU 80 Superintendent), Debbie Thompson (SAU 80 Business Administrator)

Alice Todd (School Board)

John O'Connor (Highway Department)

Joe Halla (Zoning Board of Adjustment Chair)

Edgar Rivera (Libertad Press NE)

1. Call to Order

- a. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. Administration

- a. The Selectmen signed:

- i. Kent made a motion to sign the Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$1,294,262.51. Scott seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

1. This includes the monthly school bill and the annual Merrimack County tax bill.

- ii. Kent made a motion to sign the Payroll Manifest in the amount of \$45,389.81. Scott seconded. All in favor by roll call.

- iii. The Selectmen signed the deed for Tax Map 101 Lot 36.

1. See Selectmen's Minutes 11/20/23 Section 6.a. for previous discussion.

- iv. Religious Abatements

1. See Selectmen's Minutes 6/19/23 Section 4.iv. for previous discussion.

2. The Selectmen previously voted to allow Religious Abatements for Beulah Fellowship, Church of the Woods, and Canterbury United Community Church for 2023. These papers authorize the abatement for the second 2023 tax bill due at the end of December.

3. The Selectmen signed the abatement for Beulah Fellowship.

4. The Selectmen signed the abatement for Church of the Woods.

5. The Selectmen signed the abatement for Canterbury United Community Church.

- v. The Selectmen signed the Tax Collector's Property Tax Supplement Warrant for Tax Map 256 Lot 3.

- b. Previous Minutes Approval

- i. Phrasing changes were made in Section 4 to improve clarity.

- ii. Kent made a motion to approve the public minutes as amended for the Selectmen's meeting on November 20th, 2023. Scott seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

3. Budget Committee

- a. See Selectmen’s Minutes 11/20/23 Section 6.d. for previous discussion
- b. Kathleen distributed the 2024 Draft Budget, 2024 Budget Highlights, and the Capitol Reserve Accounts 11/30/23 Balances.
- c. Shaker Regional School District (SAU 80) Budget
 - i. Superintendent Mike Tursi and Business Administrator Debbie Thompson presented an update on the school budget for next year.
 - ii. The new budget has been proposed and a default budget has been presented. There will be a School Board meeting regarding it tomorrow 12/12/23, and a January public hearing should be announced at the 12/18/23 meeting.
 - iii. If the currently proposed budget is approved, it will lead to a school tax increase of 35% for Canterbury and 10% for Belmont. The default budget would lead to an increase of 32%.

	December 2023	Default Budget	Proposed Budget
Budget Increase	-	5.93%	7.36%
School District FY 2025 Budget Deficit	-	\$5 million	\$5.4 million
Canterbury is responsible for 24%	-	\$1.2 million	\$1.3 million
Divide by Canterbury’s assessed value of \$370,653,184 to get the percent that the school tax will increase	-	32%	35%
School Tax Rate per \$1000	\$10.91	\$14.40	\$14.73
Total Tax Rate per \$1000	\$21.00	\$24.49	\$24.82
Taxes owed on \$250K home	\$5,250	\$6,123	\$6,205

- iv. The deficit is due to a combination of a reduced surplus, loss of grant money, and reduced State Education money.
 - 1. There had been a significant surplus (about \$1.37 million) the last two years from not being fully staffed. Most of those positions have now been filled. That surplus had been used to offset other parts of the budget.
 - 2. Details on the reduced State Education money can be found [here](#). This calculation is affected by the Town’s equalization rate, which is currently 76.4%. The next reevaluation for the Town is in 2026.
 - 3. The State property taxes [for Canterbury](#) are increasing by \$63,675.
- v. This tax increase will be seen in the bill that comes out next November.
- vi. The default budget is mostly comprised of wages and insurance. Health insurance went up 9% this year.
- d. Fire Department Budget
 - i. In 2024 the Fire Department is likely going to change from “volunteer” to “on-call paid”. The Town has essentially already been treating the firefighters as part-time employees and the Town’s attorney advises formally switching. Chief Gamache doesn’t believe this will have any major payroll tax implication.
 - ii. The new firetruck has been ordered. It will take 26 months to complete, so the truck will likely be delivered in January 2026.
 - iii. Official word has not been received about the firetruck grant, but unofficial word is that the Town did not get it.
 - iv. The Town did win the grant for the new radios. This included mobile (vehicles), portable hand-held radios, and a new antennae tower at the Municipal Building.
 - v. The Committee and Selectmen discussed the ages of the various Fire Department vehicles.

- vi. Dispatch (item 4220.5) is up 9.2% in the 2024 Budget. This is a fee we pay to the [Capital Area Mutual Fire Aid Compact](#) for dispatching costs. Their operating costs went up this year, so they are charging more.
- e. Tax Collector / Town Clerk Budget
 - i. Town Clerk Office Equipment (item 4140.8) includes an additional \$5,000 for a folder/insert machine.
 - ii. There was discussion about if this type of expense should be a warrant article or not. It is unclear what the criteria should be. Since the new voting machine (item 4140.16) was for \$7000 and included in the budget, it would be consistent for this expense to be treated the same.
 - iii. Deputy Town Clerk Salary (item 4140.3) is up 63.6% in the 2024 Budget. The last two years the budget was abnormally low because the person in the position was only able to do a few hours a week. This Summer someone was hired to work the full 16 hours per week needed for the role.
- f. New Land Use Professional
 - i. A new item has been added to the 2024 budget for a Land Use Professional. This would be a part-time position to alleviate some of the workload related to Planning Board activities.
 - ii. The Committee asked questions about why this position was needed and if there were ways to reduce the workload with process improvement.
 - iii. Part of the need for this position is Lois Scribner stepping down as Planning Board Secretary. The new person has been able to take minutes, but is not interested in the other duties she performs.
 - iv. Another issue is that the Building Inspector / Code Enforcement Officer Joel French is only able to work for the Town two days a week.
 - v. No job description has been made yet. Not sure what the mix of work will be between secretarial and code enforcement. They would likely need to monitor compliance with site-plans and zoning. It might depend on what skill-set the hired person already has.
 - vi. The Committee requested a job description be created before the next discussion.
- g. ARPA Funds
 - i. In 2024 the remaining \$250K ARPA funds must be designated for specific projects. Those funds must be spent by 2026. It is proposed to use these funds to fix the dirt roads.
 - ii. Bob Steenson asked if these funds could be used to cover regular expenses rather than a big project.
 - 1. There are many restrictions for how this money can be used. It could be used to cover things like paving costs and heating bills.
 - 2. Each individual use requires reporting, so Ken was trying to find one large project rather than a dozen smaller expenses.
 - iii. To fix all of the 30 miles of dirt roads in town it would cost about \$3 million.
 - iv. Kelly asked if this could be used for more solar at the Municipal Complex.
 - 1. The Municipal Complex is billed as a commercial building, so it is subject to peak demand charges. It is hard to predict power usage in the building due to the wide variety of machinery being used and projects being worked on.
 - 2. Ken would need to calculate what the cost savings would be if enough Solar was added to cover peak energy usage.
- h. Transfer Station Budget
 - i. Solid Waste Collection Wages (item 4321.1) is up 42.3% in the 2024 Budget. This is due to increased hours from opening to the public on Tuesday afternoons.

- ii. There had been traffic issues with the previous schedule of Wednesday afternoons and Saturdays. Tuesday was the easiest day to add extra hours because staff would already be there to handle the bailing.
 - iii. Kelly asked if there is any data on how helpful the increased public hours have been.
 - iv. No specific data has been collected, but the Town has received a lot of positive feedback and no more traffic issues have been reported.
- i. Library Budget
 - i. Wages (item 4550.1) is up 8% in the 2024 Budget. This is mostly due to increased hours.
 - ii. One employee is receiving a \$1 raise (4.8%), the other 4 are receiving \$0.50 raises (avg 2.55%).
 - iii. The Committee discussed looking into switching the Town's health insurance plan to a high deductible plan with an HSA, where the Town funds the HSA. This could be more cost effective for the Town and the Employees. This calculation would take time, so it is something to look into next year.
 - iv. The Committee would like the Library to look at their run-rate when making next year's budget.
 - j. Police Department Budget
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 11/6/23 Section 4.g. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Due to the Department's inability to fill the vacant position and the expected surplus of about \$100K, Chief Labrecque proposes purchasing an additional cruiser so that the Department may offer take-home cruisers.
 - iii. The Committee discussed the pros and cons of a sign-on bonus versus a take-home cruiser.
 - 1. A sign-on bonus would be a one-time expense, but an extra cruiser would increase maintenance costs over time.
 - 2. A sign-on bonus would also require retention bonuses for the other officers so they aren't tempted to leave. Retention bonuses were done a few years ago. 4 of the 5 officers who received the bonus are still with the department. The fifth left for higher wages.
 - 3. Bonuses would let employees chose how to spend their money, but it would also have a tax implication.
 - 4. Take-home cruisers would likely result in better maintenance of the vehicles.
 - 5. Having 5 cars instead of 4 in rotation could extend the life of the cars.
 - iv. The Committee discussed if it was necessary to fill this vacancy. When the Town is understaffed, the State Police cover calls. The Sherrif and State Police are both very understaffed right now, so there is no guarantee that someone would be available to answer a call.
 - v. The Committee decided to leave it up to the Selectmen to choose which option to go with.
 - k. Warrant Articles
 - i. There are several warrant articles that are likely to be added including a backhoe and grader for the Highway Department, gutters for the Meeting House, and a Mini-split for the Historical Society room in the Library.
 - ii. The Cemetery Trustees are proposing a warrant article for preparing new lots at Maple Grove Cemetery. There are 15 lots remaining and plenty of room for cremains. This expansion would provide room for 400 new lots.
 - iii. The Historic District Commission (HDC) is proposing two warrant articles. One to change the description of the Historic Districts from metes and bounds to a map. One to allow for the HDC to make exceptions to the requirements for public hearings and application fees in certain cases. The Committee suggested changing the HDC exception from 2 person approval to 3 person approval to avoid ties.

- iv. The Planning Board is likely going to propose several warrant articles, but they have not brought them to the Selectmen yet. One will be for flood plain changes required by the Federal Government.
- l. Overall Budget
 - i. The total operating line is increasing by 3.1%.
 - ii. This is low partially because the Town Building Improvement Bond was paid off in 2023.
 - iii. The unreserved fund balance was at \$1.6 million on 11/22/23. The Town may need to use some of this next year to offset the school tax increase.
- m. Elected Official Salaries
 - i. Treasurer Salary (item 4150.93) has not been increased. It is still an open question.
 - ii. Some said that the salary should rise at the same rate as the rest of the Town employees. Some said that the salary should not rise because it is elected and the duties aren't performed efficiently.
 - iii. Selectmen Salaries (item 4130.1) has been increased once since 1979. The Committee suggested that the Selectmen's Salaries should be increased from \$3K per person to \$4K per person.
4. Conservation Commission
 - a. Meadowsend Property Conservation
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 8/7/23 Section 3.1. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Commission Vice-Chair Kelly Short distributed an informational sheet about Meadowsend property.
 - iii. The Commission is looking to conserve a piece of property that is adjacent to several other conserved parcels to create a 1965 acre continuous stretch of conserved land.
 - iv. They had applied to a program that would help them seek federal grant money, but this project was not accepted. The Commission intends to move forward with this project anyway.
 - v. The [NH Forest Society](#) will hold the easement. It is possible for the Town to have an Executory Interest, which would essentially be a backup easement. Kelly does not recommend doing this since the Town is not equipped to do the work of maintaining an easement.
 - vi. They estimate this property will cost in the range of \$400K to \$500K, but the land has not yet been appraised and a formal budget has not been established.
 - vii. They will seek multiple sources of funding including LCHIP, Moose Plate, and the Town. The Town money would be from the Land Use Change Tax Fund which currently contains \$299K.
 - viii. The timeline will likely be LCHIP funding in Summer 2024, Fundraising in Fall 2024, and closing in Winter 2025.
 - b. Deepwood Conservation Trust
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 5/1/23 for previous discussion.
 - ii. This sale will not be able to close this year. Likely closing in the first week of January.
 - iii. The trails have been created and are open to the public.
 - iv. Kelly was not sure if the new trails have been added to the trail maps yet. She will check.
 - c. Invasive Plants Management
 - i. The Commission is trying to be more aggressive about controlling the invasive plants growing in the Riverland Conservation Area. To do this they are mowing more frequently to prevent seed growth.
 - ii. An abutter had been doing this on a volunteer basis for a number of years. Now the Town is doing this work.
 - iii. To accommodate this, their budget for Land Management (item 4611.8) is going up \$300.

5. Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA)

- a. The Town's [Zoning Ordinance](#) Article 2 Section 2.6 states the amounts and types of signage allowed for businesses.
- b. ZBA Chair Joe Halla believes that the Canterbury Country Store is in violation of this ordinance.
- c. He has discussed this with the store owners and the Zoning Board of Adjustment.
- d. Since the Selectmen have the power to enforce the Town's Ordinances, he would like them to review the matter and make a decision.
- e. Ken read the ordinance to the Selectmen. He will send the Selectmen the text of the ordinance, they will look at the signs in question, and they will decide if action is needed.

6. New Business

- a. Merrimack County 2024 Budget Proposal
 - i. The County has sent out their [proposed budget for 2024](#). It is going up 9% from the 2023 budget.

7. Old Business

- a. Update on Deed Transfer of Tax Map 256 Lot 3
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 11/20/23 Section 5.b. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Ownership of a property on Whitney Hill Road is in question. The last known owner was Samuel Lovering in 1879. The Town believes they own it and Jose Cambrils believes he owns it.
 - iii. In Section 2.v. (above), the Selectmen authorized sending a tax bill for this property.
 - iv. The Town's attorney is in discussion with Mr. Cambrils' attorney to find a date that both sides can sit down and discuss the issue.
 - v. Historical Society Curator Sam Papps is investigating Samuel Lovering's family tree to try and determine who the rightful heirs are.
- b. Update on School District Withdrawal
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 11/20/23 Section 4. for previous discussion.
 - ii. As of the beginning of the meeting, Withdrawal Committee Chair Randi Johnson had not heard if this issue would make it on to the Board of Education's 12/14/23 meeting agenda. By the end of the meeting, attendee Alice Todd had received word that Randi had received confirmation that this topic is on the 12/14/23 agenda.
 - iii. Ken has sent the Town's attorney questions about the process to prepare for what may need doing if the Board of Education approves the withdrawal.
 - iv. A journalist from the Concord Monitor contacted Ken for an article they are releasing within the next week about the withdrawal. Ken provided them with the resources and background that is publicly available and directed them to Randi for more information.
- c. Northfield Inter-Municipal Agreement for Roads
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 11/13/23 Section 3.b. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Ken received the latest proposal for the new road agreement from Northfield.
 - iii. They are offering \$150 to cover the Summer maintenance for Ayers Road. They came to this figure by taking 20% of the \$750 they spent last year on maintenance. Northfield owns 20% of Ayers Road.
 - iv. This amount of money is insufficient to cover any maintenance work and the Selectmen do not want to accept the agreement.
 - v. Ken will talk with Road Agent John O'Connor to discuss the amount and come up with a counter proposal to bring to the Selectmen.
- d. Website Refresh Proposals
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 10/16/23 Section 4.e. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Kathleen received four proposals for redoing the Town's website.

- iii. It will likely cost \$10K for this project.
- iv. Ken and Kathleen will narrow down the proposals and present a draft warrant article to Selectmen.
- e. Town Center Solar Array
 - i. See Selectmen's Minutes 11/6/23 Section 3.d. and Energy Committee Minutes 11/6/23 Section 7. for previous discussion.
 - ii. The solar array has been repaired. It cost just about \$800.
 - iii. The electrician provided a proposal of future improvements for the Selectmen to consider.
- 8. Adjournment
 - a. Kent made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:08 p.m. Scott seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Next Meeting: 2023 December 18, 5:00 p.m. at the Meeting House

Minutes submitted by Kathleen McKay, Administrative Assistant