

Town of Candia
Budget Committee Meeting
October 9, 2024
7:00 PM
Town Hall Meeting Room

Lynn Chivers called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:

Lynn Chivers, Chair
Katrina Niles
Susan Young (Selectmen's Rep)
Ryan Young (remote)
William Saffie
Susan Gill
Josh Reap
Stephanie Helmig (School Rep)

Others: Andria Hanson

The first order of business is to approve the minutes from the last meeting. A motion is made by Josh to approve the minutes, and Sue seconds the motion. The committee votes in favor of approving the minutes with Brenda abstaining.

The committee discusses the resignation of Joan, our administrative assistant, who has moved back to Massachusetts, leaving the committee without an administrative assistant. The group expresses concern over this situation and considers how to handle the minutes moving forward. A suggestion is made to take turns recording the minutes, with each member responsible for the minutes every ninth meeting. The committee agrees that this is a fair approach given the circumstances. Andria and Amy from the Land Use Office share that Amy records meetings and uses AI to transcribe the minutes. The committee discusses the potential of using similar technology to assist with their minutes, noting that while the AI may not recognize names, it can provide a good starting point for the minutes. The committee explores how to access the software and how the transcription process works. It is mentioned that the AI can produce a PDF that can be edited, allowing members to clean up the minutes after the initial transcription. The committee discusses the importance of stating their names before speaking to help the AI accurately attribute comments. Members agree that this practice will aid in the transcription process. One member volunteers to take the minutes for the current meeting, and the group decides to draw names to establish a schedule for who will take minutes in future meetings. The plan is to send the approved minutes to the Webmaster for posting.

The committee discusses the legal requirements for posting minutes, noting that unedited minutes can be posted within five working days, but they must be reviewed and corrected afterward. There is a discussion about the legality of using AI for minute-taking, with members agreeing that summarizing discussions is acceptable. The committee emphasizes the importance of reviewing the AI-generated

minutes before posting them. The committee considers advertising for a new administrative assistant, discussing various platforms such as the town website and Facebook to reach potential candidates. Andria shares insights on the expected length of the AI-generated minutes, indicating that they may vary based on the meeting's duration. The group expresses interest in testing the AI transcription process to see how effective it is. The committee begins to establish a schedule for minute-taking, deciding to organize it alphabetically by last name. Members discuss their availability for upcoming meetings and finalize the schedule.

October 9	Lynn Chivers
October 23	Brenda Coughlin
November 13	Susan Gill
November 18	Stephanie Helmig
November 25	Katrina Niles
December 3	Josh Reap
December 11	Bill Saffie
January 22	Ryan Young
February 1 and February 6	Sue Young

The committee confirms the dates for the deliberative sessions and assigns members to take minutes for those meetings. The group agrees to revisit the schedule after the budget season concludes. The meeting transitions to questions from the last meeting, with one member seeking clarification on a report that indicated a discrepancy in the budget. The committee discusses the encumbrance list and identifies errors in the previous report, ensuring that the correct figures are communicated.

The speaker mentions that they will send the minutes from AI to everyone for review, emphasizing that no action is expected from them. The focus shifts to the Town budget, with participants instructed to pull out their budget documents for discussion.

The group plans to formulate questions for the next meeting rather than reviewing all reports. A clarification is sought regarding the absence of a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in the budget, with Andria confirming that there is no COLA included.

The conversation turns to employee raises, with some employees receiving raises every other year or every year, and a 2% increase after five years being mentioned. The discussion highlights that some stipend employees received raises that are not reflected in the matrix.

The speaker clarifies that everyone is supposed to receive a COLA, but it was removed from the budget. The tax collector's salary is discussed, revealing that she received a raise and that her calculations were not subject to discussion. The group discusses the implications of raises and COLA for the tax collector and deputy tax collector, confirming that both will receive COLA if it is included in the future budget. The

conversation continues with a focus on the completeness of the budget, noting that it is not fully clear without the COLA included.

The group begins to formulate questions, starting with the need for clarity on raises and COLA. The speaker emphasizes that the budget should reflect the established system for raises, which includes a 2% increase for the first five years and every other year thereafter.

The discussion shifts to the ambulance budget, with a request for data on the number of runs and their timing.

Participants express confusion over the animal control budget, noting that it has already been overspent despite a lower request for funds this year. The speaker questions the rationale behind the lower budget request for animal control, given the overspending. The new police chief's plans for utilizing other avenues for animal control services are mentioned, but concerns remain about the adequacy of the budget.

The conversation continues with questions about the clothing allowance for building inspection and animal control, which appears to be unused. The speaker suggests that this may be a remnant from a previous era and agrees to inquire about its necessity.

The group discusses the budget for cemetery services, noting that funds allocated for tree cutting have not been fully utilized. Questions arise about the necessity of the budgeted amount for facility improvements, given the low spending. The conversation shifts to perpetual care for cemetery lots, with a discussion about the significant funds available in that account. The group expresses concern about the limited use of these funds and the potential for revising the fee structure for perpetual care. The speaker raises questions about the investment of the perpetual care fund and the revenue it generates. There is a discussion about the possibility of changing the terms of perpetual care to allow for more substantial withdrawals from the fund to support cemetery maintenance. The group concludes with a focus on the interest generated by the perpetual care fund and the need to ensure that sufficient funds are available to cover cemetery maintenance costs. The conversation emphasizes the importance of reviewing the budget and the potential for adjustments to better utilize available resources.

Discussion revolves around financial stipulations, particularly regarding the management of trust funds and the interest generated from them. There is a concern about the substantial interest that could be utilized to offset budgetary needs. The conversation touches on the specifics of certain trust funds, indicating that only the interest can be withdrawn, not the principal amount. A cemetery fund is mentioned, with a value of \$223,000, and there is confusion about the total amount available for withdrawal, which includes both principal and income. The beginning balance of the trust fund is noted as \$77,492, with interest accrued during the year amounting to \$92,105. The group discusses the spending of \$14,630, clarifying that this is income rather than an expenditure. The current value of the trust fund is reiterated as \$775,000, emphasizing that only the interest can be accessed for use. The limitations of the trust fund setup are highlighted, indicating that the principal cannot be touched, and only the interest can be utilized. There is a need to clarify how much interest has been taken out and the requirements associated with the perpetual fund.

The discussion transitions to the conservation commission, with a consensus on zero percent increases in their budget.

Direct assistance funding is debated, with concerns raised about the \$10,000 allocated annually, which often goes unspent. The rationale for maintaining the \$10,000 allocation is explained, emphasizing the need for available funds in case of emergencies or unexpected requests for assistance. Questions arise about the fate of unspent funds, with clarification that they revert to the general fund or can be reallocated. The importance of responsible budgeting is stressed, as overspending in one department could impact others. The conversation concludes with a discussion on the potential for creating a trust fund for direct assistance, noting the complexities involved in establishing such a fund and the necessity for careful planning and approval.

The next topic addresses election voter registration, with confusion about why the budget remains the same despite only having one election. Clarification is provided that the budget pertains to the active registration process, which can fluctuate based on new residents moving into the area. Discussion revolves around election voter registration, clarifying that the focus is not on election administration. The conversation highlights the importance of updating voter registration lists when new residents move into town.

A question arises about the purchase of a voting machine that was budgeted for the current year. It is confirmed that the machine will be bought after the election, using this year's budget. There is a discussion about the need for a backup machine, which is not currently reflected in the budget.

The conversation shifts to emergency management and fire and forestry budgets. Dean Young, the fire chief, is asked to explain the changes in wages for the fire department. He outlines a previous stipend system based on points for calls and training, which has now transitioned to a wage system due to legal requirements. Dean explains that the stipend system was replaced because it was found to be illegal to pay different rates for the same work done at different times. This change has resulted in increased costs, as the fire department now pays members based on their rank and training level. The budget for wages has increased significantly due to the transition from a stipend to a wage system. Dean notes that the previous system allowed for a fixed budget, but the new system requires more funds due to the number of calls and the legal requirements for payment. Dean discusses how he calculated the new wage line for the budget, using averages from previous months to estimate future costs. He mentions the impact of federal regulations on payment schedules, which now require bi-weekly payments instead of a single annual stipend.

The conversation touches on the dispatch account, with Dean explaining that they have not yet utilized the funds allocated for dispatch services. There is a discussion about the potential for collaboration with another town for dispatch services, but current issues in that town may delay any agreements. A question is raised about the matching grant money not being credited to the fire department's budget. Dean explains that while they apply for grants, the funds received go into the general revenue and do not directly increase the fire department's budget.

Ryan Young proposes the idea of donating a house to be burned for training purposes, suggesting that homeowners should have the option to cover the costs associated with burning their house down for

training. Dean acknowledges the idea but points out the legal and budgetary complexities involved in such donations.

The discussion shifts to the highway budget, with a question about whether the budget reflects reductions due to the revolving fund. There is concern that the town may be paying twice for the same services, indicating a need for clarity on how the revolving fund impacts the overall budget. The question is raised about the revolving fund established for the highway, specifically whether the budget reflects any reductions due to the \$125,000 allocated from the Moore highway fund or block grant. There is concern about potentially paying twice for the same budget lines, seeking clarification on why the budget does not account for this reduction.

Sue Young continues to inquire about the road agent's budget, mentioning an increase in employee compensation that she does not recall voting on. She references a previous town meeting where the road agent indicated a desire to increase the budget. Sue is confused about the timing and approval of raises for subcontractors and the overall budget implications. The discussion shifts to the payment structure for subcontractors, with questions about where the funds for these payments are accounted for in the budget. They seek clarity on whether these payments are included in winter payroll or other budget lines. The conversation reveals that all employees involved with the highway fund received raises, and Sue expresses uncertainty about the approval process for these increases.

The topic of stipends arises, with questions about the appropriateness of how certain officials, like the fire chief, are compensated. The conversation touches on the nature of stipends for various town officials, including the road agent, tax collector, and welfare director.

The discussion moves to insurance and legal expenses, with Lynn asking if there are any further questions regarding these budget items.

The focus then shifts to Parks and Recreation, where Sue mentions the need for repairs to the field house and the budget implications of recent expenses, including a broken pipe. Sue outlines the remaining balance in the Parks and Recreation budget, noting that while there is still a significant amount left, she anticipates needing funds for repairs and maintenance. There was confusion about the necessity of a \$28,000 budget when not all funds will be spent, suggesting that cuts could be made if necessary.

The Planning Board budget is discussed, with questions about the rationale behind a significant cut from \$8,500 to \$5,000 for master plan implementation. It is noted that there is a separate line for GIS expenses and there is skepticism about the need for master plan implementation funds, given that no spending has occurred in that area.

There is concern about the police budget, particularly regarding the increase attributed to hiring new personnel. There are inquiries about the current staffing levels and the anticipated hiring of six new officers, expressing support for the chief's plans despite the budget increase. The conversation highlights the challenges of police staffing and the need for training expenses.

There are questions about the budget allocation for training expenses, noting that it appears to be insufficient given the anticipated hiring of new officers. They seek clarification on the budget for

gasoline, pointing out discrepancies between budgeted and actual spending, and discuss the implications of using outside cruisers. The conversation shifts to retirement expenses, with questions regarding the significant increase in the budget from \$151,000 to \$177,000 despite a decrease in police staffing. They seek to understand the calculations behind this increase.

The property appraisal budget is briefly discussed, with inquiries about the status of the appraisal process and concern over the lack of communication regarding property assessments.

The conversation continues with a discussion about the solid waste budget, specifically questioning the rationale behind a \$4,000 equipment purchase when there is a fund available for such expenses. Discussion revolves around the trust fund and its usage, with one participant expressing frustration about its under-utilization. They mention that there is a specific equipment fund that cannot be accessed for other expenses. A question arises regarding a \$4,000 expenditure, with participants questioning what is being purchased and why it isn't coming from the fund. The conversation shifts to the special projects budget, which has a total of \$4,000, of which only \$400 has been spent. Participants express curiosity about the necessity of the remaining funds. The special project budget is referenced again, with a specific mention of improvements and the amount spent so far. There is a discussion about glass disposal charges, where it is noted that the budgeted amount is \$7,000, but only \$4,000 has been spent. Participants question whether the budget will be adjusted based on current spending trends. The conversation continues with a focus on landfill disposal and the budget for trash dumpsters. One participant notes that despite a significant budget increase, the actual spending is only at 36%. There is a consensus that the budget should reflect actual usage and spending patterns. The discussion touches on operations and maintenance (O&M) and whether those expenses can be covered by the available funds.

The tax collector's budget is brought up, with questions about a proposed raise and whether it will include a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). Participants discuss the implications of the raise and how it will be calculated based on the budget numbers. The tax collector's budget increase is noted to be around 6%, with discussions about whether this aligns with living wage standards. Participants express concern about the overall compensation structure and the need for transparency in how raises are determined. Questions arise regarding the tax collector's budget and how the percentage increase was calculated. Participants express a desire for clarity on the rationale behind the proposed budget changes.

The conversation shifts to town building expenses, specifically the sprinkler system maintenance budget, which has increased significantly. Participants question the reasons for this increase and whether it reflects actual maintenance needs. The need for building maintenance is discussed, particularly regarding a rotting front door that requires replacement. The cost of the door is noted to be high, leading to questions about whether funds from the building maintenance fund can be utilized for this expense. Participants discuss the importance of maintaining a building maintenance fund for future needs, including potential roof repairs. There is a debate about whether to draw from the capital improvement fund for immediate repairs or to use the building maintenance fund.

The discussion continues with a focus on the capital reserve money and its intended use for capital improvements. Participants question whether funds can be allocated for repairs like door replacements

and express a desire for clarity on the legalities surrounding these funds. The conversation highlights the need for a clear understanding of how capital reserve funds can be utilized for building maintenance and improvements. Participants express frustration over the lack of transparency in budget allocations and the decision-making process.

The Smyth Building's budget is discussed, with questions about the increase in expenses and whether a warrant article could be used to cover some of the costs. Participants note that there are existing funds available for maintenance and express a desire to minimize taxpayer burden.

The town clerk's expenses are briefly mentioned, with an emphasis on the expected increase in housing registrations due to new developments in the area. Participants acknowledge the impact of growth on the town's budget and the need for adequate funding to support increased administrative demands. The conversation shifts to town building expenses, with a focus on the town clerk's expenses. There is an expectation of increased housing registrations due to new buildings being constructed across town. The town clerk's workload is anticipated to increase as a result. Clarification is sought regarding the additional housing being discussed, with references to specific addresses and the number of houses involved. There is uncertainty about the approval status of these housing projects. The discussion continues with inquiries about the town clerk's expenses, and the group moves on to town officer expenses. There is a mention of a raise for an individual, with details about the percentage increase and the need for board approval. The raise is confirmed as a 2% increase, with discussions about whether this includes a cost-of-living adjustment. The need for further discussions with the board is emphasized.

Questions arise regarding the decrease in office expenses, with speculation that it may be due to over-budgeting in the previous year. The addition of a new finance person is mentioned as a factor in the budget changes.

The conversation shifts to the treasurer's stipend, with discussions about a requested increase that was not paid despite approval. The need for regular reports from the treasurer is highlighted as a condition for future stipend considerations.

The group discusses the overall budget, noting a 5.84% increase. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase of 2.5% is mentioned, with a reminder that the budget does not have to be based solely on this figure.

A proposal is made to skip the school report, which is met with agreement from the group. A question is raised about the town revenue report, specifically regarding a decrease in highway block grant funding and its allocation to a revolving fund.

The discussion turns to the appropriateness of recommending that departments pull from the revolving fund. The group considers the implications of such recommendations and the authority they have in making budget adjustments.

The calendar for upcoming meetings is reviewed, with a note that some dates are missing. The need for someone to manage Zoom meetings is discussed, especially in light of the absence of an administrative assistant. A recommendation is made to suspend Zoom access due to the lack of public participation and the challenges of managing the platform without dedicated support. Concerns are raised about

accessibility for members who may not be able to attend in person. The legality of having Zoom access for meetings without public availability is questioned. The importance of transparency and public participation is emphasized, with suggestions for alternative methods of remote participation.

A motion is proposed to continue or discontinue the use of Zoom for meetings. The discussion highlights the need for a decision on this matter, considering the challenges of managing Zoom alongside in-person meetings. A member expresses concern about the fairness of asking the public to engage with a system that may not be adequately maintained, suggesting that neglecting it would be a disservice. They emphasize the traditional value of in-person participation in public meetings and propose discontinuing the use of Zoom for the remainder of the budget season. Another member responds, highlighting the challenges faced by individuals, such as a mother with three children, who may want to participate in discussions about the school budget but cannot leave their home. They express concern that eliminating Zoom would limit access for those unable to attend in person. The discussion shifts to the cost of maintaining Zoom, with one member noting it is only about \$92 a year. They suggest hiring a teenager to manage the Zoom meetings, arguing that a younger person might handle it more effectively than the committee members. A member clarifies that their motion to eliminate Zoom is based on the current lack of administrative support. They acknowledge that if an administrative aide were available, the situation would be different. Another member proposes the idea of offering a stipend to someone to manage Zoom during meetings, suggesting that they could hire someone temporarily. The conversation continues with members discussing the feasibility of finding someone willing to take on this role.

Josh makes a motion to suspend Zoom until we have a person to monitor the system during our meetings. Katrina seconds the motion. The vote shows a majority in favor of suspending Zoom until a suitable solution is found. Members discuss the possibility of having someone cover the next meeting, with one member indicating they will check if their husband can assist. They also mention that if someone can manage the Zoom setup, it could alleviate concerns about participation. The motion to suspend Zoom is confirmed, and members agree to revisit the issue at the next meeting. They express the need to have someone available to manage the Zoom setup and discuss potential compensation for that role.

The conversation shifts to the next meeting's logistics, with members expressing uncertainty about whether it will be held on Zoom. They agree that if no one is available to manage it, the use of Zoom will be suspended. Members discuss the need for a job description and pay rate if they decide to hire someone to manage Zoom. They reflect on past practices and the importance of having clear guidelines for any new roles created. The group agrees to discuss compensation for managing Zoom at the next meeting, emphasizing the need for a structured approach rather than arbitrary decisions.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 23rd, which will include a joint meeting with the selectmen. Members confirm their responsibilities for the upcoming meeting and express a desire to keep the agenda focused.

Katrina makes a motion to adjourn and Bill seconds it with all members in favor. The meeting concludes with a sense of resolution regarding the use of Zoom and the next steps for future meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Chivers