

Town of Candia
Budget Committee Meeting
Unapproved Minutes
December 17, 2024
6:00 PM
Town Hall Meeting Room

Lynn Chivers called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Attendees:

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

Chair Lynn Chivers opened the meeting with the pledge of allegiance. She requested for speakers to state their names for the meeting transcription clarity and explained that the planned Zoom meeting was inadvertently canceled and wouldn't be happening, noting that it had been set up correctly but was canceled mysteriously. Lynn Chivers stated the meeting had a 45-minute time limit and would adjourn promptly and began with questions from Josh, which had been sent in advance. Lynn Chivers also acknowledged receiving the minutes but deferred their review to the next meeting.

Lynn Chivers transitioned to addressing questions submitted by Josh. The first question concerned the new town inventory evaluation, confirming they had the figure and had sent it to the committee members.

The meeting begins with a discussion of the town's inventory evaluation, noting a figure of just under a billion dollars, specifically \$933,314,973. This represents the total town inventory's current value. The new town inventory evaluation is questioned, with clarification that it encompasses everyone who receives a tax bill. Susan Young raises a concern, stating that the assessor hasn't finished the assessment process, as communicated by Andrea. This concern is acknowledged, but Lynn Chivers steers the conversation back to the main topic, emphasizing the narrow window of discussion based on recently mailed tax bills. The focus shifts to revenue projections for the town and school based on these tax bills. It's suggested to calculate this by multiplying the total inventory value by the tax rate. Susan Young inquires about revenue from taxes, and Lynn Chivers confirms that the current discussion pertains solely to tax revenue, excluding other income sources. The tax rate of \$12.86 is mentioned. Further questions from Josh, based on the recently mailed tax bills, how much will be generated for the town/school?

Lynn Chivers calculated a figure of \$12,860,000 and states that is insufficient with the need to pay county and state property taxes, and the exclusion of state and federal funds from the budget. Bill Saffie highlights the need for budget cuts. Susan Young explained that while block grants are sometimes received, this revenue is factored into the tax bill and contributes to lowering the overall tax burden. Additional question from Josh, is the full-time officer's line in the town default budget be based on the actual number of officers employed or number budgeted for last year. Lynn Chivers states it was based on what was budgeted for last year. Josh also asked if there is state guidance on this subject. Lynn Chivers states she is unaware. Susan Young shared clarification that the default budget cannot include any anticipated raises for the upcoming year. Susan Young raised concerns that these raises may not have been removed from the default budget. Lynn Chivers states the default goes to the Department of Revenue Administration for accuracy. Josh lastly raised a question about the funding required for six full-time officers, and it was agreed to forward this question to the police department.

Brenda Coughlin raised concerns about the police department's budget increase of 16.44% (\$137,000) from the previous year. The current staff consists of three full-time, five part-time, and one administrative staff member, and no Animal Control Officer (ACO). Reviewing the past five years, it was noted only one year had seven full-time and one to two part-time officers. The current police chief's request for seven full-time and five part-time officers (12 total) was questioned, especially considering his explanation "to match state, national, and peer department sizes like Candia Police Department we should have 9 total officers". This question will be submitted to the Chief for further explanation. She further sought clarification on the definition of a part-time employee in the budget, and questions whether retirement benefits are paid to part-time officers. This question is submitted to the Chief for further clarification. The conversation also touched upon budgeting for part-time hours, with a request to determine the number of part-time hours being budgeted. The discussion concluded with a question about the police line item in the budget. Brenda Coughlin requested clarification for the \$17,500 budget for prosecution services. Lynn Chivers clarified that the funds are for prosecuting crimes and that while the town doesn't have a dedicated prosecutor, the budget accounts for this service.

Brenda Coughlin asked how the calculation for the \$18,500 gasoline budget is determined, and what price per gallon was used in the calculation. Next, questioning the need for frangible ammunition of \$4,000 as this is 50% more expensive compared to training ammunition type, the question was raised about the training locations (indoor or outdoor) of the officers. With the elimination of the ACO (Animal Control Officer) position and the Chief's plan to refer calls to the SPCA, questions remain for the need of \$2,653. Clarifications requested for budget allocations for animal control, including \$150 for uniform software, \$300 for rabies prevention, \$300 for seminars and training, \$200 for maintenance and repair, and \$150 for gasoline suggesting potential reductions in this line item.

The conversation shifts to the Welfare Director's stipend, which increased from \$5887 to \$7622, representing a 2.13% increase. Further explanation for why this line was overspent. The meeting leader suggests contacting Russ, the liaison for the Welfare Director, for clarification.

The discussion moves to the Highway Department, with a question regarding the status and usage of the "beaver deceiver" equipment. Questions raised as to where the equipment is and what is in use. What is the \$10,000 allocation for wildlife management.

The committee discussed the cemetery's encumbrance of \$18,000 for tree removal, in addition to the budgeted \$16,000 for the same purpose. Concerns were raised about the scope of work, particularly regarding two large trees requiring crane removal and the potential impact on the requested budget of \$16,000, expressing intentions to recommend a budget decrease.

The committee members discussed the default budget, seeking clarification on its details beyond just the dollar amount. A committee member points out the previous \$5,000 discrepancy and requests an explanation of how the default budget is calculated. They discuss different forms, including the "MS 1" and "MS DT," trying to identify the correct document containing the detailed breakdown. The committee identifies the default budget amount as \$4,039,354 on page 5 of a document, but they continue to seek a detailed breakdown of the increases and reductions contributing to this figure. They examine the "reductions or increases" column, totaling \$71,000, and discuss how these changes relate to the previous year's budget. Continued discussion of discrepancies in the 2024 budget, specifically regarding police budget increases. Susan Young questions a \$29,000 increase for police, citing a rule against including pay increases in the default budget unless mandated by contract. The discussion centers on the New Hampshire retirement contribution (line 4210), which increased due to the state's increased percentage contribution to retirement. Katrina Niles clarifies the \$29,000 increase reflects the difference between last year's retirement budget \$151,000 and this year's \$180,000. Susan Young closes discussion requesting confirmation that the default budget does not include any raises for 2025.

Ryan Young questions the town administrator's salary expenses noting an increase from \$83,932 in 2024 to \$93,000 and asking how a salary position can be overspent? This is a significant salary increase of \$10,000 (11.2%) for this year's budget. The committee seeks clarification on the Town Administrator's pay scale, matrix inclusion, and the structure for salary increases, including the frequency of reviews.

Katrina Niles shifts questions to the school budget. She questions how the school determines competitive wages. As an example of concern, the school administrative assistant's proposed salary of \$73,000, which they deemed competitive, is contrasted with the town office administrative assistants' salaries, ranging from \$44,500 to \$50,000, a difference of \$23,000. Katrina questions the basis for determining "competitive" salaries and whether the administrative assistant is threatening to leave without a raise? She requests to see the comparable salaries they base this decision on for the school administrative assistant position.

Brenda Coughlin asked who the designated employee is responsible for monitoring and applying for grant money for the town. Lynn Chivers stated that different people apply for different grants. Katrina Niles & Susan Young shared the responsibility of grants and was noted to be the Town Administrator's umbrella responsibility. This was included in the proposal for the need of a Town Administrator. The conversation concluded with a question about the number of grants received in 2024 for the town.

Lynn Chivers totals the cumulative questions, 13 will go to Andria Hansen and 1 will go to the school. The meeting was adjourned at 6:41pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Coughlin