

# Town of Gouldsboro

## Joint Budget Committee & Select Board Meeting

Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, 19 May 2021 — PH Women's Club

### **Attendees**

- Dwight Rodgers
- Ray Jones
- Deb Bisson
- Jay Bricker
- Fred Cook
- Roger Dean (via Zoom)
- Becky Follette
- AJ Higgins
- Mary-Ann Higgins (Alternate)
- Eve Wilkinson
- Paul Stewart (Alternate)
- Dave Seward (Alternate)
- Andrea Sirois (Town Manager)
- Ernie West (BoS member)

### **Absent**

- Kim Shay (Town Office Manager, via Zoom)

### **General Discussions**

- Meeting called to order at 6:15 pm.
- Andrea distributed a revised custom budget report dated 19 May 2021.
- The two topics planed for tonight's meeting are an adjustment to the ambulance salary line and voting on the Town Manager salary "hiring buffer" of \$20K requested by the BoS.

### **Public Safety/Ambulance**

- The need for an adjustment in the ambulance budget comes about because one individual was originally budgeted for 10 hrs/wk, but should be 15 hrs/wk. This adjustment brings the total Public Safety to \$572,859.
- Motion made and carried with one abstention to approve the Public Safety budget of \$572,859.

### **Public Safety/Police Department**

- Following the vote on the Public Safety budget Ray made a motion recommending deleting Gouldsboro PD from budget and leaving it as "on call." This is the current situation since we have no police department and won't have until we hire a police chief. Ray estimated that this change could save ~\$275K. It was noted that the current is budget based on three full-time officers, however it was pointed out that the BoS request of Hancock Sheriff is for two full time officers. After discussions, Ray clarified his recommendation to leave the budget as is but recommend to the BoS that we eliminate the department. If the warrant is approved, then the town would adjust the budget accordingly. Relevant discussion notes include:
  - This would give the Town three choices: 1) keep Gouldsboro police department, 2) engage the Hancock Sheriff to provide police service, or 3) "emergency only/on call" option. His logic is that we should "try another option" after having had three police chiefs in the past several years.
  - One issue is how to work warrant article to make it clear to the voters what is proposed by the various warrant articles.
  - Comment that past discussions on this topic is that a majority of the town residents voted to retain local police service. But a later comment offered that this vote might have been at least in part motivated by concern over having the Hancock Sheriff provide policing in Gouldsboro as much as by inherent support for local policing.
  - Dwight stated there is a problem with eliminating all police funding as the town would need to have some money in the budget to cover any expenses that might arise, e.g., maintenance of the truck and two cruisers.

- Roger noted that while Ray's suggestion is worthwhile but questioned whether it is the purview of the Budget Committee to take such action unilaterally. He commented that the most the Budget Committee can do is recommend a position to the BoS; it is their job to make any decision. Andrea concurred that it is up to the BoS to decide how they want to proceed.
- If there is a decision to accept Ray's suggestion, a special town meeting likely would be required to sort it out later. Eve suggested that any warrant article to eliminate the police department should also include a provision to revisit the town budget.
- Deb commented that the Budget Committee's job is to ensure there is sufficient funds in the budget to cover any eventuality.
- Mary-Ann commented that the Budget Committee's responsibilities include remembering the town's ability to pay for it.
- The Committee consensus was to keep the Police Dept budget as is and recommend to the BoS that they consider including a warrant article to eliminate the Police Dept as an option. **Motion made and seconded.** While it is the BoS responsibility to decide on implementation of the recommendation, Dwight asked for the Committee's position on endorsing such a change. Consensus is that the Committee take no position on the proposed elimination of the police department; we are simply recommending the BoS provide a wider range of alternatives. It is up to the residents to choose. **Motion passed with one abstention.**

#### **Town Manager Salary \$20K "Buffer"**

- There was a discussion about whether the draft warrant article for the additional \$20K includes FICA & Medicare. Andrea commented that the current wording makes it clear that the \$20K is a ceiling and includes FICA & Medicare.
- Roger observes that he is in favor of including the warrant article but is adamantly against its approval given that the average town manager salary in Maine is ~\$77K and Eastport just hired a West Point graduate with an MBA for on the order of \$56K.
- Other discussions suggested that most of the Committee considered the proposed salary excessive given the reduction of historical town manager responsibilities concurrent with the hiring of additional staff to handle these shifted responsibilities. Further, in light of the town's size and ability to fund several members commented that not only do they consider a potential salary of \$100K to be excessive but that \$80K is also. One Committee member commented that there almost certainly must be qualified candidates who would do the job for \$80K or less.
- Ernie West noted that in the previous attempts to hire a new town manager at least one candidate asked for \$96K. He also noted that the \$20K was "just in case" we found a candidate who was well qualified but wanted somewhat more than the \$80K in the budget.
- In response to Committee questions, Andrea stated that the current budgeted amount of \$80K does not include FICA and Medicare. Eve again commented that if the \$20K buffer passes, it has to include FICA and Medicare; \$20K is a ceiling.
- Dwight requested a Committee position on whether or not to support the \$20K buffer. Motion made and seconded to **not recommend. Motion carried with one "nay."**

#### **Closing Comments**

- Eve expressed concern that while we have a budget of \$5M+, no one has any sense as to what the mil rate is likely to be. She further noted that the Committee has an obligation to recommend approaches to minimize any mil rate increase. Part of her comments had to do with how much of various surpluses (undesignated surplus and/or land purchase reserve) could be used to offset the budget... \$100K as currently proposed or raise to a ceiling of \$150K. Any change in how the budget could be adjusted to help defray increases to the mil rate would require two different warrant articles, existing one for the \$100K from undesignated surplus and a second article to take up to another \$50K from the land purchase reserve.

- Many Committee members expressed concern about the Assessor's reluctance to provide a reasonable estimate of the projected mil rate based on available data. The Committee generally agreed that it doesn't make sense to ask the town to approve a budget but not give them any idea of what it means to their taxes.
- Mary-Ann comments that the budget this year includes a lot of "just in case" money that budgets in the past hadn't completely included.
- The Committee discussed making a recommendation to the BoS for them to hold a special meeting to encourage the Assessor to provide an in-process estimate of potential mil rate earlier than previously agreed. Any special BoS meeting could also cover the likely use for the land purchase reserve. Committee members supported Dwight discussing this with the BoS but also having the Budget Committee participate.
- Dwight will notify the BoS of the Budget Committee's position on the police department and the town manager salary buffer at the special BoS meeting when scheduled or, if no special meeting at the next regularly scheduled BoS meeting.
- The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

