

**MINUTES SPECIAL SELECT BOARD MEETING
PRE-TOWN MEETING INFORMATIONAL MEETING
5:00 P.M. THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024
MEMORIAL BUILDING
20 CHURCH ST. 3RD FLOOR AND VIA ZOOM**

Select Board

Eric Remick, Chair
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Vice Chair
Shari Cornish
Elizabeth Dow - *absent*
Danny Hale

Others Present

David Upson, Town Manager
Casey Rowell, Business Manager
Tim Ricciardello
Mike Brochu
Lucy Upson

Others Present

Special Meeting

5:00 P.M. Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the Informational Meeting to order.

5:01 P.M. Set/adjust agenda - none

5:02 P.M. Item #1 Select Board to summarize the FY25 Town Budget and highlight any significant events and projects happening in Hardwick

Eric summarized the FY25 budget. The total budget being presented to voters for consideration is \$4,018,083 for an increase of 7.55%. Eric went over some of the areas that have significant increases including health care costs, and collective bargaining unit negotiations. In the office category, we are proposing that the zoning administrator/flood plain manager go from part-time position to full-time. This will also make her eligible for benefits. In line items, some of the capital funds set aside are increasing and bond payments for the library and gravel pit will go into repayment. Hardwick Rescue Squad also has an almost 24% increase.

Ceilidh mentioned that we worked diligently on the capital equipment schedule to reduce the amount that we set aside. Eric talked about trading dump trucks and that we are in a position where the lead time is such that we are likely not going to be able to trade the trucks. We will have to sell them privately after the new one arrives. In addition, repairs to trucks these days are extremely expensive. It is common to have a \$20,000 repair bill for one of the dump trucks. Mike Brochu said that he does not see the cost of repairs changing anytime soon. It has become the new reality. Tim Ricciardello asked if it was possible to buy used trucks. Due to the repairs we have had to do on the newer trucks, David said that it would be even worse for something used.

Eric said that the Police Department budget is modest. We do not have another town to share the cost with, which makes a big difference because the taxpayers have to bear the full cost of having a Police Department. Eric said that the police department is highly active, and he feels that people like to see their presence in the community. We are in a difficult environment for hiring officers. Danny said that the quick and easy way to fix it is with money, but that is not going to work. We cannot even find officers to fill the roles. If we want to attract and retain officers, we will have to compensate accordingly. Tim asked if we could contract with other towns. We do not have the workforce to offer our services to another town. Danny said that we need to address this police department sooner than later.

Ceilidh mentioned that there are a few new appropriations this year. Salvation Farms, Hardwick Downtown Partnership, Inc., and Center for an Agricultural Economy are new, and Casey said that NEKarts is also considered new this year because they did not have a request last year. These are voted separately outside of the budget.

Ceilidh thanked everyone for their work on the budget to get it down to the level it is at. In the beginning of the budget process, we were up around 13-14%, but after a lot of work, we have gotten it to a level that we feel continues to efficiently run the day-to-day operations of the Town.

David brought up that the Town has a lot of projects in the pipeline, such as the library and the pedestrian bridge. We also have a lot of permanent flood repairs to be made during the summer months.

5:31 P.M. Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, adjourned the meeting.

Minutes taken by: _____
Casey Rowell, Business Manager

Minutes approved by: _____
Eric Remick, Select Board Chair