

**TOWN OF DEERFIELD, NH
MUNICIPAL BUDGET COMMITTEE**

George B. White Building
8 Raymond Rd. Deerfield, NH 03037

October 26, 2022

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Called to Order by Chair at 6:00 PM

Roll Call: Present - Bill Von Hassel, Bonnie Beaubein, Phil Bilodeau, Joshua Cresswell, William Huebner, Zach Langlois, Maureen Quinn, Terry Roy, Kevin Verville, Jennifer Lee

Excused Absence: Jocelyn Messier

Motion made by Mr. Roy to allow remote participation by Mr. Huebner who was joining the meeting via phone, seconded by Ms. Quinn. Yay - 9, Nay - 1. Motion passed.

Old Business:

Approval of minutes: Motion made by Mr. Roy to approve minutes of the 10/4/22 meeting, seconded by Ms. Beaubein. Mr. Verville pointed out an error in attendance. Mr. Roy was recorded as absent, when he did arrive late. Vote to approve minutes with correction made: Yay - 9, Nay - 0, Abstain - 1. Motion passed.

Status of A/V recording: Mr. Von Hassel has not had time to discuss with Tina. He would like to speak with John Harrington to make sure the MBC can afford to pay her.

New Business:

Town & School Budgets:

Mr. Von Hassel said that the town budget will not be ready until 10/31 and that he is very disappointed with this news.

Mr. Huebner said the town budget will be approved on 10/31, will need to be put together and printed and will be ready to be picked up by late 11/2 or early 11/3. The reason for the delay is that the selectboard got the Highway budget and without a road agent, they had to make changes.

Mr. Von Hassel stated that the MBC was proactive and asked in August if the lack of a road agent would affect the timing of the town's budget. He was told no. Mr. Von Hassel said this feels intentional since the selectboard met and hired a welfare person and gave someone a raise at their last meeting but didn't work on the highway budget.

Mr. Langlois said it doesn't seem intentional to him. The selectboard had a lengthy discussion on 10/17 and made changes. Yes, there is a delay but the selectboard is making changes and fulfilling its responsibility.

Mr. Verville said there is no legal requirement for the select or school boards to deliver a budget to the MBC. The MBC legally can create their own and put that on the ballot. He said he will vote no on any budget that he has not had proper time to review.

Ms. Quinn said she was at the selectboard meeting on 10/17. Their delay per Ms. Quinn was due to Fred McGarry's absence and the selectboard wanting his input on the highway budget.

Mr. Roy said regardless of the reason for the delay, the MBC needs to figure out what they are going to do. The MBC's obligation is to have a budget to the town by a certain date. He said they need an emergency plan to formulate their own budget.

Ms. Quinn asked what prevents the selectboard from providing the MBC with the parts of their budget that have been approved.

Mr. Von Hassel said nothing prevents that. They just don't.

Mr. Verville said Mr. Von Hassel was incorrect. There is precedent from prior years when both select and school boards provided unfinished budgets.

Mr. Von Hassel said he didn't remember a time when they did that.

Mr. Langlois said about 5 or 6 years ago, the school board used to bring a draft budget to the MBC and they had the unfortunate experience that the MBC didn't allow the school board to amend the draft budget and the MBC was upset that the draft didn't include the backup information with it and that's when the school board made the decision to only present the final budget with all back up material because MBC members were quite upset that they were given a spreadsheet with no contracts, etc. There were complaints on social media that the budget was only 26 pages long for a \$15,000,000 budget even though all of the backup information is available online. He explained that that is the reason that the school board budget is now presented in a 3" binder with all of the contracts and back up information because once they hand in a draft budget, even if it is still just a draft, it is the MBC's budget at that point.

Ms. Quinn asked if the MBC can have Mr. Huebner ask the selectboard to give them anything they can work on or if the MBC can add meetings to allow time to work. Mr. Von Hassel stated it is his intent to have as many meetings as necessary.

Mr. Verville said he went through his notes from when he chaired the MBC. He stated that they used to get the town budget in late November, week three or four. They had one Tuesday meeting and one all day Saturday work session.

Mr. Langlois said another thing to keep in mind is that the state has not released new insurance rates for next year so the town's budget could still be inaccurate because they're carrying assumptions for those lines.

Mr. Huebner stated that he wasn't aware that they're not in. Mr. Harrington had not informed him that there was a delay in getting them but he can check.

Ms. Lee asked if, to avoid this in the future, can the MBC impose deadlines on the school and selectboards. She said the towns of Weare, Raymond, and Windham do this.

Mr. Verville suggested that if a deadline were set and not met, the MBC could assume the previous year's budget was the intended budget for this year as a starting point and go from there. He said to remember they pass a bottom line budget, that the boards can move money from line to line as they see fit.

Ms. Beaubien said that is a discussion to have but that they need to take the boards' timelines and when they get information provided to them into consideration.

Ms. Lee said the MBC's charge is to come up with a budget they can present to the town. She finds it disrespectful that the boards give them budgets in December.

Mr. Roy said another point to remember is if the MBC decides to set a bottom line number if they don't get the budgets on time, the town & school can't add more than 10% over the bottom line they set. If the MBC sets the bottom line too low, the most the boards can add is 10% over the bottom line in a warrant article so it would behoove the boards to meet the deadlines.

Mr. Verille added that 10% is the max allowed at the deliberative session.

Ms. Beaubien asked if the MBC has ever missed their deadline for getting the budget to the town.

Mr. Von Hassel said, no they've never missed a deadline but they had four wasted meetings because of tabling things, and they still met their deadline. He also said that the meeting schedule that Mr. Harrington gave them is aggressive and going to lead to very long nights or breaking up into more meetings.

Mr. Langlois said the MBC has never had a problem meeting deadlines. He stated again that insurance rates don't come out until the beginning of November and that it is the same insurance as the school.

Mr. Roy asked how Raymond meets their MBC's deadlines..

Mr. Langlois said he hasn't spoken with other towns but if the tone this committee wants to take is to ignore the boards and set its own budget, that is setting a pretty strong precedence and he doesn't agree with it. Mr. Langlois added that what he is hearing is that the MBC is upset because the board of selectmen is doing their due diligence and now some of the MBC members are looking as a committee to say they don't care what the board of selectmen has done, they're going to give a deadline, and the selectboard is going to meet it or they're going to pick some random number and run with it.

Mr. Von Hassel said he takes issue with the due diligence comment. He didn't think anyone was questioning that.

Mr. Langlois stated that they started this conversation with a question about whether or not the selectboard was dragging this process out.

Mr. Von Hassel said that is very different from due diligence.

Mr. Langlois said the due diligence is the fact that the board of selectmen spent hours discussing lines in a budget. They're cutting money from a budget and doing exactly what they're supposed to do.

Mr Von Hassel pointed out that the board of selectmen agreed to the MBC's schedule and that the MBC has even made adjustments to their schedule to accommodate them.

Mr. Langlois said this is the very reason he will never commit to a date with this committee.

Mr. Von Hassel replied that is why the school board may get a bottom line budget.

There was inaudible arguing between Mr. Roy and Mr. Langlois.

Ms. Lee said it is unacceptable that they could get budgets at the end of November and have to cram when the other boards won't do the same. She suggested that the boards can give them preliminary budgets and fill in things like insurance when they become available. She said if other towns can do this, Deerfield can too.

Mr. Von Hassel agreed and said at this point the MBC has to deal with the situation as it is and perhaps look at correcting the problem.

Mr. Roy made a motion to authorize Mr. Von Hassel to speak with Mr. Huebner to come up with the possibility of getting pieces of the budget that have been approved by the next MBC meeting to start working on those things. Motion seconded by Ms. Quinn.

Mr. Verville said the budget is a public document being worked on in public. The MBC can make a Right To Know request to get a copy of the budget where the selectboard left off and as the selectboard makes changes, Mr. Huebner can make motions to make the two documents align.

Ms. Quinn said that she thinks taking that approach is unnecessary and that they could work with the board of selectmen more collaboratively.

Mr. Von Hassel said he would love to work collaboratively but it seems to be one-sided at this point.

Ms. Beaubien asked if Mr. Von Hassel could speak with Mr. Huebner and ask him to have the selectboard provide them with the approved parts of the budget for tomorrow or the day after.

Ms. Lee asked if the MBC could impose deadlines for this session.

Mr. Huebner said he sympathizes with the spirit of the motion but he has been advised by Mr. Harrington that doing that in the past has led to difficulties and math errors. Because it is only a week away, Mr. Huebner suggested that they don't do that. He said he hears the MBC's complaint and thinks it is a valid complaint.

Mr. Verville suggested a gentleman's agreement that the MBC would not make changes until the final budget was available.

Ms. Beaubien asked if the selectboard would be able to respond to Mr. Von Hassel's request before their next meeting. Mr. Huebner said the request would go to Mr. Harrington, who would then contact Mr. McGarry, and they would discuss whether to have an emergency meeting or not. Mr. Langlois said that it is a negligible difference in time. Mr. Von Hassel agreed it doesn't matter much at this point. Ms. Quinn agreed and said there are three weeks in November without meetings and that the MBC can't complain about feeling pressure with three weeks with no meetings, and that she doesn't think they should make a Right to Know request.

Mr. Roy amended his motion to say If no budget is available by 11/3, as expected, the MBC will then the MBC will request items that are approved by the board of selectmen at that point. Seconded by Mr. Cresswell.

Ms. Quinn suggested amending the motion to 10/31 since the board of selectmen will know by then if the budget will be approved. Mr. Roy amended his motion, seconded by Mr. Cresswell.

Mr. Langlois stated that the MBC cannot compel the selectboard to deliver those items, they can only request them. Mr. Verville said they can compel via a Right to Know request. Mr. Von Hassel said he's not sure that they want to create that kind of animosity at this point.

Mr. Cresswell moved the question. Yay - 7, Nay - 3, Abstain - 0. Motion passed.

Mr. Huebner made a motion to cancel the 11/1 meeting, seconded by Mr. Langlois.

Mr. Roy said canceling the 11/1 meeting would defeat the purpose of the motion that was just passed. Mr. Von Hassel said that they probably wouldn't have the approved parts until 11/3 anyway; that he doesn't know what the turnaround time would be if the board of selectmen agreed to hand over parts that were finished. Mr. Bilodeau moved the question. Yay - 9, Nay -1, Abstain - 0. Motion passed.

Mr. Verville made a motion to amend Mr. Roy's motion that passed earlier to say the MBC will make a request of the board of selectmen tomorrow (10/27) for the parts of the budget that are finished. Seconded for discussion by Mr. Cresswell.

Ms Beaubein said she feels that Mr. Huebner has heard the MBC and understands what they are feeling and what they want from the selectboard.

Mr. Langlois said he has all the faith in the world that the board of selectmen will have the budget to them after their next meeting, that he had read the minutes and the town budget is done. He asked if anyone else at that meeting had read the minutes from the last selectboard meeting. He stated that some of the committee has read the minutes so they know where the selectboard stands on the budget, that the budget is done. They just need to make the adjustments for the bottom line and move the bottom line at the next meeting.

Mr. Verville moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Bilodeau. Yay - 8, Nay - 2, Abstain - 0. Motion to adjourn passed.

Meeting adjourned by Chair at 7:10 PM.

These minutes were transcribed and respectfully submitted by Tina St. Peter,
Recording Secretary