

Special Town Meeting

April 27, 2023 6:00 PM at the Community Center

57 voters present

Called to order at 6:00

The moderator reviews the rules of order.

Article 1: To see if the Town shall vote to approve \$598,302.95, with \$478,895.95 to be raised by Taxes, to defray Town expenditures.

Denise Randall makes the motion to approve. Sandi Capponcelli seconds.

Eric Rosenbloom asks why the tax related revenues are so much higher than the previous year, while expenditures are lower. Denise and Hannah explain there are lower non-tax revenues this year. There is no surplus to carry over and no grant revenues expected. And the costs of most things are up this year.

Don Capponcelli says he crunched the numbers from the original town report and this year is the least amount of revenue apart from taxes that the town has had since 2019. He says with the cost of everything going up, it is a double whammy.

Sherry asks where and why the changes in budget were made – some things were increased and some decreased. Denise says that some things were increased because the bills came in with exact figures. Denise reviews the line items that were cut.

Sherry wants to know what the impact of the lowered budget, and will be and if trash will be impacted. Denise says that trash was not cut from the budget and there is likely to be some increase in cost in the new contract that the town will get in May.

Treah Pichette asks if the decrease of the salt and sand budget will impact the roads in the winter. Janet Perry responds that the salt budget was lowered, but the same amount was added to stone. Because in recent mud seasons the town has spent a lot on stone. She doesn't think the budget change will have any effect on the roads. Chloride was removed which might affect the dirt roads, but the foreman thinks there may be enough for this year. She says that the new chloride and fuel tank for the town garage have been put off for this year.

Eric Rosenbloom wants to know if the municipal taxes are going up, and if so, how much. Janet says she doesn't know exactly what the current grand list is but she thinks the rate will be around 1.33, which is an amount the town has paid before back in 2013, and before that the town had paid even more. She mentions inflation and the cost of fuel again. She says it's possible the school taxes will go down this year, but that won't be known until June.

Linda Linblatt asks about the fuel budgets going down and how that was figured. Janet says that it's hard to estimate, but when the selectboard made the first budget, they anticipated higher fuel costs than what they paid through the winter. They are hoping this year it will be about the same. The town always reviews available prebuy rates and tries to get locked into the best price. Last year the town paid \$4.74 for heating oil with a plan that allowed for a lower price if the supplier got a lower price. And diesel was

\$.25 above the rack price. The prices did go down at one point and the town did get the guaranteed lower prices.

Paper ballot requested for the vote. The moderator rereads the article.

Yes: 24; No: 33. The article was defeated.

Don Capponcelli moves to reconsider the article and come up with a budget figure tonight. Amanda Alsvig seconds.

The moderator says that we do need to pass a town budget and if people have a figure in mind, they can offer it.

Linda Taylor suggests that the budget be \$574,355.36, the actual revenue figure for 2022. James Neathawk seconds.

Krista Gay asks if the voters get to decide on how individual line items are adjusted. The moderator says they do not, the budget committee and the selectboard would work on it.

Kate Bova asks for the budget number to be written on the blackboard and for the moderator to explain how much less it is than the original figure. Harold Noyes says it is about \$24,000 lower than the original figure. The clerk writes the numbers on the board.

Sherry asks when people will know what the amount to be raised by taxes will be. David says she can simply subtract the ~\$24,000 from the previous tax revenue figure.

Treah Pichette asks if the budget committee will be able to work with a lower number. Amber says that the budget committee has already gone through the budget line by line with the selectboard. They already cut out as much as they thought they could. So more things will need to be cut that various town functions were hoping to purchase, like a computer for the office to replace the old one that is having problems.

Don Capponcelli asks if trash will be on the chopping block and if that would need a special vote. David says that it would not require a special vote, but the selectboard will need to look at it and at the contract. He can't say one way or the other tonight.

Linda Linblatt asks if the Taylor Hill project would have any impact on the budget. David says it would not. Linda says that the Taylor Hill project would be a financial burden to people in town and she wants to know if there will be additional costs to taxpayers. David says he can't discuss it at this time and doesn't have a good answer for it.

Ginger Maciejowski asks how much of the new figure would need to be raised by taxes. Denise says it will be approximately \$454,895.95. That is just taking the difference off of the previous tax revenue.

Hannah says that some of the things that won't be purchased this year still need to be purchased, so cutting the budget is really just kicking the can down the road. The town still needs a chloride tank, fuel tank and computer, and these things could get more expensive the longer the town waits. She says it's getting pretty hard for town employees to get along and provide basic town functions without the confidence of the taxpayers.

Treah Pichette thinks that the town officials, employees and volunteers are doing the best they can for the town and the voters should be supporting them. The town elects the people to work for them and she thinks the townspeople should be supporting them financially and otherwise. She points out that people have worked really hard on the budget and have had to revise it, and will need to revise it again. She thinks the town should support what the selectboard and budget committee comes up with.

James Neathawk, agrees with Treah and he also doesn't think that people should be putting themselves in poverty to support the town. He doesn't know the answer, it's hard.

Anna Warn says Athens has one of the lowest median incomes and highest tax rates in the county. She says a lot of people are on fixed incomes and can't handle a big tax increase.

Krista Gay says she feels odd about voting for a new budget that she doesn't know where the money will be spent. She wants to know what will happen if this figure is voted down and what the next steps will be. David says if the town doesn't approve a budget today, it would take over a month to try and present a new one and they'd be six months into the year. It would be much better to set a budget today and they will work through it. He says anyone who wants to come is welcome when the budget committee and selectboard meet to go over the new figure.

Sherry wants to know if there is any insight into revenues aside from taxes. She asks if it was unusual this year, and can the town expect other revenues in the future. Hannah answers that she doubts there will be a surplus from this year to apply to next year. It depends what grants are applied for and what those timelines are for reimbursements.

Kate Bova asks about Sheriff's fine money in the revenues. If we aren't getting a lot of fine income from them she wonders why the town keeps the service. David says it is a public safety issue more than a revenue issue. Bob Bova says he hasn't seen a sheriff on Brookline Rd. in months.

Tim Stevenson suggests some expenses could be covered by state and federal grants if the town had a town plan. He says that the tax situation is not going to get better in town. The economy is going to get harder, and people are going to balk at higher taxes. He says the town has to look into alternative ways to address the town's expenses. Denise says she agrees the town needs a town plan, but the plan was presented and voted down. Tim says if the selectboard got behind the idea of a town plan, maybe it would pass.

Jay Maciejowski said he can get behind voting for a lower budget but wants to be assured that the roads wouldn't be impacted to the point of becoming a liability. David says the selectboard will do the best it can for everyone in town with whatever figure is approved.

Dennis Mirante says he's looking at expenditures and thinks some are fixed and can't be changed, but some could be adjusted. He also thinks a town plan is needed.

A paper ballot is requested for the new budget figure of \$574,355.36.

Yes: 38; No: 19. The amended budget passes.

Sandi makes a motion to adjourn.

Adjourned at 6:57