

**TOWN OF BEDFORD
TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES
November 1, 2023
BEDFORD MEETING ROOM
10 MEETINGHOUSE ROAD**

ROLL CALL: A budget workshop of the Bedford Town Council was held on Wednesday, November 1, 2023 at the Bedford Meeting Room, 10 Meetinghouse Rd. Present were Bill Carter (Chairman), Lori Radke (Vice Chair), and Councilors Phil Greazzo, Sue Thomas, Dave Gilbert, Kathleen Bemiss, and Michael Strand. Also present was Town Manager Rick Sawyer and Finance Director Matt Mannino.

Chairman Carter opened the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Library – Miriam Johnson, Library Director and Caitlin Loving, Assistant Library Director

Professional Services – added \$3,400 for an Acoustician to assess their space upstairs.

Internet Service – increase – every three years for maintenance and security

Library Periodicals – small increase

Online Data Bases – small increase

Programs – added \$500

Furniture & Fixtures – added \$500

Ms. Johnson stated that the tent was an additional cost. They have someone set it up, take it down and store it for them over the winter. This year, they were going to get it cleaned as well as part of the maintenance.

Chairman Carter wanted to know if the Library was fully staffed at this time. Ms. Johnson responded yes, but at the end of November they won't be.

Chairman Carter mentioned a dramatic increase in longevity. Mr. Sawyer stated that was his proposed change. The Department request line was the longevity without the increase and the Manager's Budget was the proposed change. It includes regularly scheduled part-time employees receiving longevity for the first time. Almost half of the Library staff was regularly scheduled part-time employees.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to know how merit adjustments were determined and if there was a specific percentage. Mr. Sawyer stated that the Manager's proposal was 5.5% lump sum for each department and then the Department Head gets to allot that based on performance evaluations. The Library and Library Trustees didn't ask for anything additional. They did some adjustments a year ago for a few positions in the Library that they didn't believe were categorized appropriately.

Assessing – Doug Irvine, Chief Assessor

Capital Improvement Project line – added \$7,500 for revaluation of the utility properties.

Mr. Irvine stated that every year he has to evaluate utility values; information is given to him by the utility companies. He takes that and some formulas from HB700, which governs how he makes those adjustments. It covers one element of utility valuation: distribution. Then there is transmission; they don't capture the growth and value each year without an occasional revaluation. It's been many years since they've looked at their utility values. They could bring in an expert to help them and set him up with a template for the future, so somebody wasn't coming back every time they wanted to do a full look at their valuation. He thought they would capture the revenue of what the cost would be, which he was estimating at \$15K for a consultant fee of revaluation of utility values. He decided 2025 for that; they would collect \$7,500 this year and \$7,500 next year. The gain in revenue should make the cost look inconsequential.

Chairman Carter wanted to know if the value of that goes up, the revenues coming in from that would lower the taxes. Mr. Irvine thought it would more than offset, but he didn't want to predict, but it would be significant.

Mr. Irvine stated that they were in open litigation with PSNH. When they request discovery items, they were bound to see that it was likely they were undervaluing their utilities. An independent expert consultant to help them capture much more than they had, and that litigation, would work to their advantage. It would be \$15K over two years. He thought it was money well spent and a necessary exercise.

Mr. Irvine thought as they do the 2-year cyclical revaluations, if the conditions of the market didn't change much (low inventory and high prices), prices weren't pushing as they had been historically and they started to see indications of flat-lining, they could discuss whether or not it was wise to do the next reval in 2 years or 3, 4, or 5. That was another component when they think about budgets that increase. There were many moving targets that could impact things that they weren't yet ready to determine, but based on what he's seeing weren't unrealistic possibilities.

Councilor Strand wanted to know what happens if they didn't bring in an expert or independent consultant. Mr. Irvine stated that they would be leaving money on the table. Councilor Strand wanted to know if Mr. Irvine had the ability to make that evaluation himself. Mr. Irvine stated that he made changes annually, but he wasn't a deep expert in utility valuation. Councilor Strand wanted to know if there was a legal risk if he used the information he had available to make that valuation himself without paying for outsourced consulting. Mr. Irvine stated that he would refer to uniform standards and appraisal practices. When you're valuing property, you have to demonstrate your knowledge. When it came to picking up new money or value off of utility transmissions, that wasn't his area of expertise. A lot of it they could handle, but certainly not all of it. He wouldn't be comfortable just trying to chase it down himself. That's why they get an expert. It sets them up with a template for the future and helps him to better understand what they have and identify further growth and value it correctly. Councilor Strand was thankful for his honesty. He's always been skeptical of what could sometimes seem as erroneous consulting fees or consulting experts when they value his expertise in terms of making some of those calls. Mr. Irvine stated that when he says expertise, he's talking about somebody who might be one of three people in the State with that level of knowledge. Mr. Sawyer stated that they weren't unique in that situation; it's not just Bedford. Councilor Radke stated that a lot of towns do that. They have their own

assessor or they'll contract assessing companies and they'll have somebody that does utilities. Chairman Carter pointed out that they had a lot of utilities in Town. Mr. Irvine stated that those assets had grown. He had access to people who do this and helping to change policy and legislation to try and make this a more equitable exercise.

Councilor Radke wanted to know if he would feel confident that hiring an outside consultant to do utilities would keep them out of litigation. Mr. Irvine thought they would be on strong ground if they made some changes and then had to defend them.

Councilor Gilbert mentioned his comment of a normal valuation cycle, and he didn't think there was anything normal about valuation cycles anymore. He wanted to know what he considered a normal valuation cycle. Mr. Irvine stated that a normal revaluation cycle would refer to the statutory requirement of no less than every 5 years for revaluing. Councilor Gilbert liked the idea of reassessing the assessment meaning if things level off, then they wait a year; it would be up to him to tell the Council what they should do. It's good that he's thinking about if it changes they could reassess.

Mr. Sawyer stated that the CIP line was equal funded, \$26K. They didn't need to increase that line to be able to do the additional work.

Chairman Carter wanted to know what Nearmap was and what it was used for. Mr. Irvine stated that Nearmap was their high resolution aerial photography; it's a subscription. Mr. Sawyer stated that it's the GIS, which the entire public had access to. Mr. Irvine stated that it was part of their more virtual data collection program.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to confirm that he was going to capture that money over two years and then do it. Mr. Irvine stated that his target date would be 2025. Councilor Bemiss wanted to know if it made more sense financially to just do it so they could capture another year's worth of revenue. Mr. Irvine stated that it could be done. Depending on how the court situation progressed, they might have information prior to that that helps them as well. He was open to it; he tried to spread it out a little bit.

Councilor Radke stated that having it every 2 years they would be on the same schedule as residential. Mr. Sawyer stated that this was a one-time. Councilor Radke stated that in 2 years he was going to do another reval, so they would do it then. Mr. Irvine stated that they were slated to do that at this point. Mr. Sawyer stated that once they have the utility model set up, they don't have to do that every 2 years; probably be more like five years. Mr. Irvine stated that he would have the same consultant do one, and then set him up with the templet. At that point, he would be confident that he could continue to monetize things that they hadn't in the past; transmission values especially.

Planning Department – Becky Hebert, Planning & Zoning Director

Part-time wages – to continue to hire a summer intern to help with the trails program.

Chairman Carter wanted to know if there were any grants associated with bringing on a summer intern. Ms. Hebert stated that there were grants that a summer intern would assist with the management of. The Conservation Commission received a grant for work at the Marsden-Dunlap conservation area to build a new trail head and parking

area. The trail intern would help to oversee some of that work and help make sure that the trail connections to the new parking area were easy to identify and user friendly and likely help with some of the minor trail improvements that weren't covered by the grant.

Councilor Gilbert mentioned upgrading the trails behind the EFJH, and wanted to know if that was coming from a grant, because it wasn't in the budget. Mr. Sawyer stated that there was a new CIP for that. Ms. Hebert stated that there was a CIP for trail work on park land that Jeff Foote was bringing forward, because lands that weren't conservation lands that fall under the umbrella of the Conservation Commission weren't eligible for conservation funds in the conservation trust. In the conservation trust fund, that money could be used for trail improvements, land management activities and land acquisitions. Councilor Gilbert wanted to clarify that it was conservation grant money that they got. Ms. Hebert stated that it was money that the Town collected as part of the current use change tax from current use. It could be used by the Conservation Commission for several different reasons, but primarily land management and land acquisition, and the trails program fell under the land management umbrella. Councilor Gilbert mentioned walking to the EFJH and down toward Amherst and wanted to know if they were going to do that portion shortly, because it was in sad shape. Ms. Hebert stated that they were plans to do that, but trail plans now was the wrong time of year. The trails committee would meet in early spring and prioritize their work projects.

Councilor Radke mentioned the capital reserve deposit for the impact fee study and wanted to know when they were going to do that. Ms. Hebert stated that the new impact fees were adopted in 2021; they would look to start the study again in 5 years. They try to update them every six years. Mr. Sawyer stated that the CIP document showed 2028. Councilor Bemiss mentioned the app you could use to identify things on the trail that needed to be fixed and wanted to know if the trail that Councilor Gilbert was discussing was on there. Ms. Hebert stated that she would have to check that data. It's a tool that Brandon Boisvert helped develop for the trail stewards, so when they were out in the field and they see a broken bridge or a tree down, they could enter it in. The Joppa Hill Farm trails were on the list of trails that needed improvements.

Chairman Carter wanted to know if there was a list of what conferences and training she went to on a yearly basis. Ms. Hebert stated that she tries to send staff planners to the regional conference and the NH Planners Association Conference. Those funds also included monies they use to send all of their land use board members to local and State held trainings: The NH Association of Conservation Commission meetings, OSI training & development series, NHMI legal updates, etc. She attends a national conference; they're part of the northern NE region. They are certified planners and they have continuing educational credits that they had to maintain in order to maintain their professional certification. The budget was for hiring a certified planner to be the land use and development planner; that position was still unfilled. Councilor Radke wanted to know if they hire someone that wasn't certified if there was money in the budget to help them with the cost to get them certified and Ms. Herbert responded yes.

Mr. Sawyer stated that Planning had revenues and it was unchanged from last year; \$30K from fees collected for applications to Planning Board, Zoning Board, and HDC. Councilor Radke wanted to know the last time they reviewed the fees for Planning. Ms. Hebert stated that they were due to look at their fees again.

Recreation – Jane O'Brien, Recreation Manager

Pool – decreased, because DPW was now going to take over the maintenance of it.

Professional Services – decreased, because pool opening and closing and life guard certification moved to DPW. There would be an increase in DPW for those items.

Events – 275th birthday – \$15K

Mr. Sawyer stated that the line under Recreation was just the employees and concessions for the pool and lifeguard training.

Councilor Radke wanted to know, regarding events, if it was typical to go every 25 years; she thought it was every 50 years. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was up to the Council. Ms. O'Brien stated that their thought was the Presbyterian Church was doing their 275th in 2024; the Town's 275th would be in 2025. Councilor Bemiss wanted to know what they spent on the last anniversary. Ms. O'Brien didn't have that information. Mr. Sawyer stated that in addition to the parade they had fireworks, concerts, dinners, tours, and there was a commemorative license plate, and a calendar. Ms. O'Brien stated that she had been checking with the Library and the Historical Society to get a copy of the calendar. Mr. Sawyer stated that he had one on his desk. Councilor Radke suggested that they leave it in for now and then make it one of their discussion items at the end. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was a want, not a need. Councilor Gilbert thought it was a need, because they needed to have more Town events and get more people involved; it was a new generation from where it used to be. Councilor Bemiss thought if they were going to move forward they needed to get it on the calendar, so all School events were cancelled that day, so there was public buy-in. Councilor Strand thought they should give it some thought in terms of what was going to drive that engagement. Potentially bring the younger, newer folks in Town together with some of the seniors in Town and get creative with what people wanted to see or do. It might be different than it was 25 years ago. Mr. Sawyer thought it was 10% or less of the money they would need to pull off a true celebration. It was seed money. They would absolutely have to get the community behind it and really driving it. It shouldn't be them driving it. Councilor Bemiss stated that the Stevens-Buswell would be up and running by then, so maybe they could partner with them. Mr. Sawyer stated that they could hold events there. The Historical Society might want to do kitchen tours or building tours. He could scan the calendar so they could see the lineup of events they held.

Summer day camp – no changes

Councilor Radke wanted to know if the revenue they brought in offset the money they spent on it with no losses. Councilor Greazzo wanted to know if there was an increase this year. Ms. O'Brien stated that they increased the fees for both pool and camp. Councilor Greazzo wanted to know if there was an increase in attendance for the camps. Ms. O'Brien responded no; the camps were still down. She thought because of COVID there were parents that still weren't sending their kids. She thought they had an average of about 50 a week and they did 7 weeks.

Mr. Sawyer stated that the revenue page shows that they met their revenue projection and exceeded it by \$1,100. They took in \$107,491.

Human Resources/Welfare – Pam Hogan, HR and Welfare Director

- Human Resources

Professional Services – large reduction; now in the IT budget (software)

Office supplies – down from last year

Criminal Records Check – \$100 increase

Miscellaneous – increase – no discount for annual appreciation turkeys for employees at Thanksgiving and an increase per pound.

Part-time position –

Ms. Hogan stated that Human Resources was created as a separate department about 4 years ago. It used to be under the Finance Department. The Director of Human Resources and Welfare was created and one position moved over from Finance. They are a department of two full-time people, however, when you do an FTE for HR, it's lower than one position, because of her dual role in welfare and the other person was an HR/Payroll Coordinator. About 80% of her job was payroll; payroll reporting, financial reporting, government reporting, and grant reporting. It's difficult for them to just focus on HR, so the FTE was about .75 of a position. When welfare is very busy, it's very difficult for her to split her time between both with routine tasks that could be done with a little bit of assistance. She's done surveys with other like-size towns, and all of them had more staffing. In their binder was a broader description, the amount of turnover they deal with, all the different areas of responsibility they have and the data regarding the like-size towns. Welfare had increased; the amount of clients tripled from last year. Everything seemed to be increasing in volume. New staff members had been added, but it's the turnover and the changes that had to be processed. All of their vendors were changing their platforms every two years, so they're having to test their equipment all the time and all of their process changes. They have new processes with HealthTrust; they're putting more on them that they used to do as far as all of the changes they put in for medical plan changes for the employees. All of the volume was increasing at the same time the workload was increasing. They just needed to right size the department in order to better serve the Department Heads and remain compliant. There were a lot of compliance areas that they oversee and they didn't want any of that to slip. They also needed to move forward with a lot of big projects that they needed to do.

Chairman Carter wanted her to explain HR FTE, PR FTE and Welfare FTE. Ms. Hogan stated that HR FTE was the % of positions devoted to HR. The PR FTE was Payroll, and what portion for Welfare. A lot of the positions like hers were shared with HR and Welfare or HR and Payroll. In order to get a true picture of what the percentage of people were devoted to each of those specific areas. That's why the FTE was used.

Councilor Strand wanted to know if the budget amount was enough to find somebody qualified to do that job. Ms. Hogan stated that she was hopeful, but not certain. Technically, the skills would be more general office support, so if a job needs to be posted and she's dealing with a welfare client, that person could go in, get the job posting started and then she could approve and post after, answering the phones, answering the routine questions, so people didn't have to wait; they could be answered timely. A lot of the changes with benefits had to be in by a certain time; they only have

so many days to submit their changes. Councilor Strand didn't know if the amount was enough, but appreciated her approach that she was willing to look at somebody who was office triage that she might be able to train. Ms. Hogan stated that's what she was hoping. She was a resident as well and wanted to make sure the budget was conservative. She would really like to try and get someone in as soon as possible and hopefully that dollar amount would work; the \$24/hour. Councilor Strand wanted to know about her personal productivity and how it would be affected by adding that person. It's difficult sometimes to quantify the opportunity cost of her not dealing with more customer/client service related functions or transactional processing type functions. He wanted to know if she believed there would be a substantial time savings long-term that could represent savings to the taxpayers by being freed up to do more director level functions. Ms. Hogan stated yes, she definitely believed so. Councilor Strand stated that as an HR professional, she was a member of the Society for Human Resources and was one of the founders. Ms. Hogan responded yes. The Society for Human Resources Management was the National one. She was on the board for the Manchester area Human Resources Association and the president of that before. She was one of the beginning members of that organization, but not the founder. Councilor Strand mentioned the bump to the longevity program being proposed. If they looked at some of the ancillary costs dedicated to professional development, training, employee appreciation programs, he wanted to know if there would be a negative impact on employee satisfaction if some of those other ancillary programs were curtailed taking into account substantial monetary increases via longevity. Ms. Hogan thought they would get mixed opinions. She thought they would still like to continue the employee appreciation; the turkeys were the only employee appreciation event other than the one the Council does. She thought taking away funding from the few programs they have would be difficult. She didn't know if it would be well received, possibly. Councilor Strand didn't want to shortchange professional development, but take a hard look at what motivates people. Councilor Radke stated that sometimes it's not only money. There were other things they could look at to motivate employees outside of money.

Councilor Radke wanted to know the role of the other full-time employee. Ms. Hogan stated that she was primarily payroll. She manages the major pieces of payroll. She's HR and Payroll. A lot of the HR functions were uploading the benefits applications, monitoring the costing, reconciling all of the billing for the HR side of benefits; all the medical and dental benefits, etc. Councilor Radke wanted to know how that differed from the Payroll Accounting Clerk in the Finance Department; were doing the same job. Ms. Hogan responded no, not at all. The Payroll Accounting Clerk was more of an entry level payroll person who takes in the timesheets; she didn't run payroll. She did the beginning stages and the end stages. She took in all the data on the entry of payroll, enters details for Police; all of that beginning entry. The person from her office was overseeing the whole payroll piece; adding employees, processing all of their leaves, accruals, creating pay codes, managing the MUNIS system for payroll, all the reporting to the retirement system, health, and taxes, all of the government reporting. Councilor Radke clarified not the bi-weekly payroll that was done by the Accounting Clerk. Ms. Hogan stated that they both do it together; it's a team effort, there's just different pieces of it because of the volume. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was a check and balance on the every 2-week payroll process to look for issues or mistakes or conformance with the different CBAs or personnel policies. Councilor Radke wanted to know if the Department Heads approve payroll. Mr. Sawyer stated that they do for their own

departments. Councilor Radke wanted to know if they were held accountable and Mr. Sawyer responded that you would hope so; there were a lot of employees and a lot of entries, and a ton of pay codes; there were around 300 pay codes. Ms. Hogan stated that there were a lot of complexities; a lot with Police and Fire especially. Mr. Sawyer thought that position could have stayed with the Finance Department with the split, but when they created HR they were trying to give some support to a brand new department. Councilor Radke stated that they have a Payroll Coordinator and a Payroll Accounting Clerk. Mr. Sawyer stated that both positions were often in Finance. Councilor Radke didn't agree. She thought payroll should stay with one person; they should do everything. Ms. Hogan stated that it was about 50/50, 60/40 or 70/30 mix. Sometimes it's in Payroll, sometimes it's in HR. If it's in HR, usually Finance was still signing off on it. Councilor Radke stated that there was confidential information in HR that should only stay in HR and should not go outside of it. Councilor Thomas stated that anybody that did payroll whether it's under Finance or HR were subject to confidentiality rules. Payroll was very often in a Finance Department, because it's paying out money. It's the same person, it's just what department they fall under. Councilor Radke stated that there were two people. Councilor Thomas stated that there would be two people anyway. They would still have a Payroll person and a Payroll clerk; it's just a matter of what department that person was in. They didn't have an extra person. When you're managing that many people's payroll, one person was not enough. Councilor Radke clarified that those two positions were doing two different things. Ms. Hogan added that the position in Finance also did the running of the checks.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to confirm that all of the positions were in person and Ms. Hogan confirmed that was correct. Councilor Bemiss stated that last year she mentioned a payroll company taking over some of those responsibilities. She had changed payroll companies with the greatest expectations and it didn't work very well. If it's not working for a company of 10, she would say keep doing what they're doing. Ms. Hogan stated that they also had a platform change this year, which was a challenge.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to put longevity on the table, because they were going to need to spend a lot of time with it; discussing that plan or policy. She didn't know if they wanted to talk about it now or how to handle that. Chairman Carter thought that fell under Town Manager. Mr. Sawyer stated that it did, but the Manager's budget wasn't until the 3rd workshop. If there was stuff they wanted answers on that they didn't have or needed to work on, it would be great to know what those were.

Councilor Strand wanted to know to how Ms. Hogan thought the longevity proposal would impact satisfaction, longevity and performance. Ms. Hogan believed strongly in it and that the employees would appreciate it. There had been a lot that hadn't been changed for a while and thought they needed to stay ahead of the curve on those things, because the turnover and everything else was just coming at them and believed the employees would generally appreciate the support of not only Mr. Sawyer, but the Board as well. She believed it would be money well spent.

- Welfare/General Assistance

Councilor Radke wanted to know if there was an increase in welfare requests. Ms. Hogan responded absolutely and other towns and cities were all struggling as well with

that increase. A lot of the State funding went away. She's had more challenging cases this year as well with disabled folks with no place to live. They can't send them to a shelter or assist them in other ways. They couldn't even find a place for them to live. It had been a lot more time consuming. Last year at this time she had 10 or 12 cases and now she's at 46. Councilor Radke wanted to know if there was enough money in the budget. As a town they're supposed to fund that. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was level funded; it's \$12K. Ms. Hogan did an excellent job making sure that applicants met the criteria. They require applicants to meet the letter of the law.

Councilor Strand didn't realize the local burden; he assumed it was State level. Councilor Radke stated that some towns don't do their due diligence and just hand out money. Mr. Sawyer stated that it's more emergency assistance, hotel rooms, families, higher cost items. The Town was required to do that; they have to find the money if it comes up. They've been able to make it work, but it's getting harder and harder.

Councilor Radke wanted to know if it would be more advantageous to have a part-time person doing just welfare. Ms. Hogan stated that she thought about it, but it's so cyclical; you have to have special posted hours available. It could be two months with no clients. Mr. Sawyer thought the new position could help; meet with a client, get paperwork, and make sure things were in order. Councilor Strand thought it was dependent on the person and how Ms. Hogan wanted to allocate what they're doing.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to know what they'd spent year to date. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was about \$2,400.

Councilor Radke mentioned how they don't give money to social service agencies; they didn't have a line item for that. Councilor Strand mentioned there had been more Meals on Wheels usage in Bedford lately. Mr. Sawyer stated that there was a good report on Meals on Wheels under Miscellaneous in their binders. They always get a request from CASA, and there were a couple of others as well. The Council as a whole made a decision in 2007 or 2008 that they would no longer fund social service agencies. Councilor Radke clarified that the Council used to fund those, but then took it away that year. Mr. Sawyer stated that they were being asked to submit 0, -2 and -5% budgets in those times and that was one of the things that got on the chopping block. Ms. Hogan stated that the Food Pantry had been very helpful to the clients. Mr. Sawyer stated that Meals on Wheels had over 400 clients in Bedford right now; that might be exaggerated, but it had more than doubled since the last time he last viewed their data. Councilor Bemiss thought that could reflect the large population in assisted living. Mr. Sawyer stated that they should be delivering to assisted living that had meals. Councilor Bemiss clarified independent assisted living. Mr. Sawyer stated that he exaggerated; it's 148.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to circle back to longevity. Chairman Carter thought they could discuss it after Fire to start the conversation and then they could do a little bit more next week. Councilor Radke stated that she didn't know that was coming up, so she only perused. Chairman Carter thought that most of them only perused it

Fire – Chief Scott Hunter and Deputy Chief Dubowik

Chief Hunter mentioned a potential oversight under the Revenue section under Grants. When they learned they were not going to be awarded SAFER for 2024, the Manager Recommended showed nothing in those lines. He suggested that those lines be \$170K of anticipated revenue. He anticipated writing for Assistance to Firefighter Grant next year, which was AFG, for a new compressor; their current one was on its last legs. Also swiftwater deployment that happened to Vermont this year. That was anticipated for every year, so they typically fund that in that line and other miscellaneous grants. Mr. Sawyer stated that they could talk to him about whether they would be State grants or Federal grants and give the Council a proposal to act on to put that into the Revenue section. Chief Hunter thought that would be a good way to proceed. Mr. Sawyer stated that it would be impactful on the tax rate; it would reduce it about 0.03.

Administration – level funded – gasoline was moved to Operations

Operations – apparatus acquisition – adding \$600k to the capital reserve

Chief Hunter stated that the \$600K would be for the purchase of an engine. They intended to buy an engine next year, however the cost had gone up astronomically. Fire engines were costing \$1M at this point and about a 3-year delivery time. A large portion of that was ARPA funding; towns were using ARPA money to purchase engines. He thought it would be years before there would be relief.

Councilor Strand wanted to know the anticipated operational life on the engines they were replacing. Chief Hunter stated 21 years. They have three fire engines and getting them on a rotation of every 7 years for a primary apparatus, secondary apparatus, and the backup apparatus. Councilor Strand wanted to know their oldest apparatus and Chief Hunter stated Engine 2 from 2003. Mr. Sawyer stated that it had to be there for three more years. Councilor Strand wanted to know if there were enough maintenance costs built into that line item was for additional needs for repair. Chief Hunter stated that they accounted for that going into next year. Their best estimate was in that line.

Chairman Carter wanted to know if the purchase of the new squad vehicle helped in lengthening of some of those. Chief Hunter stated that it had; especially Engine 4. That program was designed to scrub mileage off of Engine 4.

Mr. Sawyer stated that they couldn't use ARPA funds to order the fire truck, because they wouldn't have it by 2026; the funds had to be spent by 2026.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to know if they were fully staffed. Chief Hunter responded yes; they filled their last vacancy about three weeks ago. Councilor Radke wanted to know what enticed them to come to Bedford and Chief Hunter responded their people. They encourage a ride-a-long for a day; not a 1-hour interview. The culture and the people was a significant difference between departments. He encourages them to do ride-a-longs with other fire departments. They can pick what fire department they want to go to, which plays into the retention piece to the staffing request. They've gotten these people who have started with them and were committed to them, and they want to keep them. They know that the one thing that could keep them there was creating an environment that they want to work in. Councilor Strand thought Chief Hunter had his whole department recruiting and Chief Hunter responded no question; it was a full team effort. The ratified contract played into that also.

Chairman Carter stated that he was at the station and the first thing that struck him was the training that was going on; taking four 50 ft. hoses and make them into three, so they would fit into Engine 4's front bay. He learned how to get out of a house if it's burning and you're on the hose. Chief Hunter stated that the saying was 'bumps to the pumps'. You feel for the lugs on the apparatus fitting, because you couldn't see inside a smoke-filled room. You feel for the bumps and you go in that direction on the hose and follow the hose line to the door. There was a method to everything they do. Councilor Carter thought the amount of educational assistance they get was the main reason for a couple of them to come to Bedford. Chief Hunter stated that no matter how many hours in a day, they don't have enough hours to train the breadth of situations that they are asked to be prepared for. If you ask him what he was going to do with the time when they're not on calls, that's what they were going to be doing; they're going to be training.

Chairman Carter wanted to know if there was a way to make it easier to do the paperwork. Chief Hunter stated that the system they use was an online required system that everyone in the State was using.

Staffing –

Chief Hunter stated that they wrote a SAFER grant for 8 and were not successful and neither was any NH town and very few in NE. Councilor Radke wanted to know if they were given a reason. Chief Hunter stated that they hadn't been officially notified that they didn't get it. There was \$360M available in SAFER funding and they announced that they had awarded \$360M. That's how he found out.

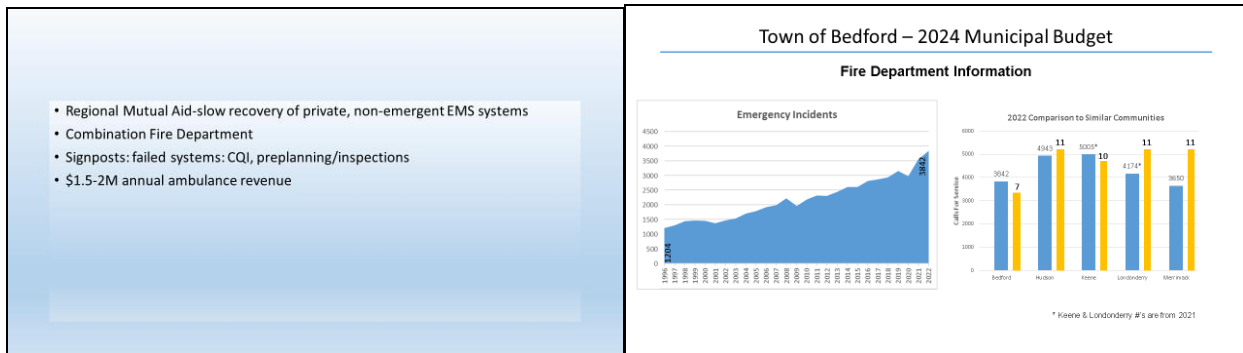
Councilor Bemiss wanted to know if they could reach out to their legislature and find out. Chief Hunter thought it was a possibility; they had been advocates for them in the past to attain those grants. The last one they got was 100% for three years; that comes to maturity this year. The funding for those in the grant funded payroll line moves to regular payroll. Two full timers came on last year; the funding was for July forward; only half a year of funding. They would like to increase that to a full year. They didn't fill vacancies from last year until recently. Mr. Sawyer stated last year meaning this year, 2023. Chief Hunter explained overtime.

<p>2024 Request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eight emergency responder positions (4 in June, 4 in September)• Minimum required staffing increases from 7 to 9• Continue voluntary OT to staff up to 10 for day shift	<p>Reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retention and Recruitment• Public Expectations: health, wealth, quality of life• Safety of the public, safety of the staff• Comparable Communities• Emergency Call Volume• Emergency Call Distribution• LTCF, medical offices, age-restricted housing, urgent care• Changing landscape: Rural to suburban: \$5B property value• Societal changes/expectations
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Councilor Radke wanted to know where he got the information regarding public expectations. Chief Hunter stated that he did informal surveys whenever he talks to a resident. Mr. Sawyer stated that even if they sent out a survey, those would be the answers. Councilor Radke wanted to know if they were getting complaints that they

weren't meeting the expectations and Chief Hunter responded yes. Councilor Radke wanted to know how often did mutual aid have to respond to Bedford calls and Chief Hunter responded about 10 times a month. Councilor Gilbert stated that the public perception about what an emergency was had changed. Chief Hunter stated that they respond to things previous generations wouldn't have considered an emergency.

Councilor Strand wanted to know Chief Hunter's expectation or target goal to reduce the need for mutual aid, in a perfect world. Chief Hunter stated that mutual aid was originally intended for times of crisis; not a typical day to day basis, but that's where they were at. Councilor Strand wanted to know the number that he would accept, 0, 1, 2. Chief Hunter stated that he would like to be able to handle all of their EMS calls, so 0.



they didn't want to play that game. It's going to cost money, but that's life. They've been messing around with it and kicking the can down the road and they needed to stop. They needed to staff up and make sure that people didn't have risk. Chief Hunter thought they needed a shot in the arm. They're going for 10, and his proposal gets them to 9. If the Council allows it, they will write another SAFER grant again for four.

Councilor Strand stated that they all wanted to be sensitive to taxpayer cost. Based on Chief Hunter's time as chief, his staff and personnel, and years as a firefighter, he wanted to know to what degree he believed that the longevity bonuses as proposed would impact long-term sustainable staff for the Fire Department. Chief Hunter thought it would have an impact. The plan had been introduced to him, but he didn't understand it fully. In the current contract there was longevity built in and he didn't believe it would have persisted had it not been useful.

Councilor Radke stated that she disagreed with what Councilor Gilbert said. She thought they had made progress and had been adding personnel in that department over the years. She wanted to know how many people they added to the Department over the last 5 years. Chief Hunter stated that they added 8 people over the course of those five years. Councilor Radke stated that they had been making progress. Councilor Gilbert stated that they had been making progress, but their call volume had gone through the roof; that's the problem. Councilor Radke thought he said they weren't adding. Councilor Gilbert clarified that he said they were treading water. Councilor Radke stated that they couldn't do it overnight, but they had been working up to this. Councilor Gilbert stated that that wasn't what he was saying. Councilor Thomas thought they missed 10 years; there was a gap where they should have added. They're catching up from that. Chief Hunter stated that the slide showed the history of the last five years and how it correlates to the call volume. The call volume had gone up just over 30% and the staffing provided over the last five years was just under 30%. Councilor Bemiss stated that for the last five years they've nearly matched their call volume. Had they not added any staff at all, then there would be a greater discrepancy. Councilor Radke thought they were doing good. Councilor Gilbert stated that they were doing okay. Councilor Radke thought Councilor Gilbert made it sound like they weren't doing anything. Councilor Gilbert clarified that he didn't say that; they're treading water.

Councilor Thomas wanted to know with 7, what the stress level was like. Chief Hunter stated that the stress level was high and the demand was high per person when you compare Bedford to their comparable communities and geographically close communities. Councilor Gilbert stated that they weren't able to do consecutive tactics versus simultaneous tactics. He stated that the Chief also talked about peer review and quality programs hurting and the collapse of the shift inspection. Those things weren't getting done now to the standards he wants to hold; they didn't have the people or the time to do it. Chief Hunter agreed and thought it was creating vulnerabilities in the community. Councilor Strand thought they may not see them tomorrow, but those liabilities were aggregate. Chief Hunter stated that they'd seen them already.

Councilor Strand thought one concern when adding staff was if that need didn't continue into perpetuity; it was difficult to unadd staff. He wanted to know the likelihood that the need for additional staff would plateau or decline. Chief Hunter stated that the emergency incident call volume slide demonstrated that trend perfectly well. He had no

reason to think that it was going to reverse itself anytime in the future. He thought the call volume was going to increase, especially on the EMS side. They weren't adding staff in anticipation of more calls. They're adding staff to take care of the years that they didn't. Councilor Strand clarified present and retroactive; not future planning. He wanted to know if Chief Hunter would characterize this as little to no risk and very strong investment. Chief Hunter clarified in needing to do a layoff in the future; there was little to no risk. Councilor Strand wanted to know if he would say there was a strong return on investment in adding staff in terms of long-term ability to provide required services. Chief Hunter stated in terms of health, wealth and quality of life, yes. Councilor Strand mentioned training time. Chief Hunter stated that that would increase with this. Only a percentage of the time should an emergency responder be on a call. They needed to be getting prepared for those next calls and staying healthy; mentally and physically.

Councilor Greazzo wanted to know what calls they got for incidences that he didn't think they should be responding to. People calling for things that in the past people wouldn't normally call for and they're calling for them now, which was driving the call volume, which increases the need for more staff. He wanted to find out what the drivers of that were and if there was a way to curb or educate the public that that's not something you call the Fire Department for and maybe they're not going to come for that. Chief Hunter stated that he wrote about that in the staff report, especially under the public societal expectations; that was an overwhelming task to try to reverse through education when it's pervasive throughout the entire country. In terms of the types of calls that they go on, he mentioned mental health calls, but also things like his Dad giving him a ride to the hospital when he cut his finger as a kid were now calls to EMS. It's not inappropriate, but different from what it was. Councilor Greazzo wanted to know if they would respond to somebody who called and said they cut their finger. Chief Hunter stated that they had a duty to respond if anybody calls 911. They had to go. Councilor Greazzo wanted to know regardless of what the incident was and Chief Hunter responded 100%; that's what the law says. That's the system that they work within. They have a duty to assess and then if it merits it, they have a duty to treat it, and a duty to transport. Councilor Strand thought once they get their first ambulance bill and see what the deductible was they might drive to urgent care next time. Councilor Greazzo was concerned that they were being called out for every little thing and that's what was taking up their time and resources; things they shouldn't necessarily be responding to. Since it's a larger task to deal with educating the public, he thought it needed to be dealt with on a different level. There should be some criteria that they didn't necessarily have to go; they inform that person that they need to seek care. Chief Hunter responded no doubt, but they're working within the system that they had to work in. To his point on education, they focus their efforts on their long-term care facilities and educating them on what services they offer and what's appropriate for their services. Councilor Greazzo mentioned that the long-term facilities didn't have their own ambulatory care; they rely solely on the Town. He thought they should be required to provide rather than relying on the services of whatever town or city that they were located in that benefits their business. Chief Hunter stated that they were working within the system they have and they needed to respond when they call 911; then they need to assess and if it warrants it, treat and transport. There was a shortage of EMS and medical staff throughout the whole region. They used to call private ambulance services for some of those non-emergent calls. Those ambulances weren't available now, so they are the call. Councilor Greazzo thought there should be more of a requirement of them providing

their own rather than having to call for help. They should have a staff of their own with EMS; just to have an onstaff physician at certain points, they should have an onstaff EMS to transport and deal with individuals that have emergency situations. He wanted to know if it was more of a legislative resolution than him being able to determine whether they're required to go to a cut finger. Chief Hunter thought that would be the appropriate place to bring something like that up.

Councilor Thomas thought people felt that they pay taxes, therefore they should come. If they call 911, they should get a response, they're a taxpayer. She thought that's where a lot of people were at these days; expectations had changed.

Chief Hunter didn't want them to get the sense that they were going to those calls every day. When he said somebody cut their finger; it was a severe cut, not to go put a bandaid on, but that happens as well.

Councilor Bemiss stated that if they go to a call and somebody was having a panic attack or drunk but maybe their having a stroke and they didn't bring them to the hospital. There was a lot of medical knowledge that's going on with the EMS staff and they needed to make the right calls, so when they have to, they err on the side of caution. Chief Hunter stated that they have to do an assessment of that. Councilor Strand wanted to know if it was a borderline question, he assumed his team would always ensure that the potential patient had an option to accept or decline care even when they're onsite. Chief Hunter agreed. There was a lot of legality in that; abandoning a patient or potentially kidnapping a patient against their will. Those were the types of laws that they needed to consider in working with patients. They have policies and protocols that they follow that help protect them from risk.

Mr. Sawyer mentioned that there was a request for a 10th dispatcher, which impacts the dispatching on the Fire side as well and wanted his thoughts on that position. Chief Hunter stated that he had to support that position. There were times that they're the reason why their call volume was high in the dispatch center. When they have multiple calls and there was a single dispatcher, which this was designed to solve, that's an important piece for the safety of Fire responders. That would have an impact on their responders; safety in having someone on the other end of the radio when they need them. Mr. Sawyer added and residents; they want somebody to be able to answer the call. If they're on another call, they can't answer the phone.

Chairman Carter reminded everyone that the next budget workshop would be next Wednesday starting at 6:00 PM.

The Town Council started a discussion about longevity.

Mr. Sawyer stated that there was a full staff report; it was a pretty easy proposal.

Councilor Radke wanted to know if they could get a list of positions showing how many people had been there x number of years. Chairman Carter stated that that was done and in the report.

Mr. Sawyer stated that the proposal covered 85 individuals; 75 were full-time and 10 part-time. The current plan was \$100/year starting at 5 years, so a 5-year employee gets \$500, a 10-year employee gets \$1,000, etc. That policy had been in place since 2009 with no increase to it. The proposal was to double that amount from \$100 to \$200 per year for years 5-9, and triple it for years 10 and beyond with a cap at 25 years, so you would never get more than \$7,500 in longevity.

Councilor Greazzo wanted to know if they were taking it from general funds; no specific program and Mr. Sawyer stated yes. There was no offsetting revenue other than taxes.

Councilor Bemiss stated that she had a hard time wrapping her head around this, because the numbers seemed different to her coming from the private sector. At five years you get \$500, but then it's compounding. At 6 years you get \$600, at 7 years you get \$700, and that's added to your salary in addition to your annual raise or merit. At the end of your 25th year, you're getting \$2,500 for every year. At the end of that time, you would have gotten \$31,000 just for being part of that program. She wanted to know what the goal was of the program; was it to retain staff or to reward staff. She thought they had more turnover between 1 and 5 years; that's when people were more likely to leave. She would rather give some more money to that pocket and then 5, 10, 15, however they wanted to arrange it. She looked at the State and other towns and no one was doing compounding. At 5 years you get \$500, at 6 years you get \$500, until you get to your 10th year then you get \$1,000 or whatever you decide on. The way the current proposal was, at the end of 25 years, an employee would walk away with another \$91,000 in salary and that's a lot of money when you look at it from that perspective. She's not saying that she didn't value the employees; she really did. But when you're adding that kind of money into your salary, it's expected. It didn't have the same benefit and value that it would if it were at an anniversary date. Councilor Radke wanted to clarify that instead of compounding it, she would just do something at an anniversary date. Councilor Greazzo thought instead of doing it yearly, do it by milestone, and Councilor Bemiss responded yes, and do something in those earlier years. Do a 2-year, because you lose people during that first 5 years. Once they're here after 10 years, nobody was leaving. They needed to look at what their turnover was.

Councilor Radke wanted to know how many people left within the 5 years. Councilor Bemiss stated that they currently had 18 people in their first year, and then 45 in that 2-5 year window. Councilor Radke wanted to know how many people left during that 1-5 years. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was an equal offsetting amount. Councilor Bemiss stated that between 1-5 years they had replaced 81 people. Mr. Sawyer stated that some of that was additional employees like the 6 firefighters in the last 3 years, so it's not quite that number, but it's not far off. Councilor Radke wanted to know how many they lost 5-10; how many stay after 5 and how many people leave between 5 and 10. She thought the numbers would be lower; then from 10-20. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was a natural progression in every place of employment. Councilor Strand stated that working in staffing, you often see attrition in 1-2. There were tiers; 1-3, 3-5. Once somebody gets to over 5, he thought there was a lot of attrition between 5 and 10 depending on existing compensation plans. He thought it was valid to consider that when someone begins to approach retirement, given step programs, merit bonuses, pensions, and retirement matching, they were less likely to leave. He would also highlight that because the longevity program was so outdated right now, it's next to

nothing, it's not expected and the positive signal to employees both unionized and non across departments for an aggressive over market plan like this, it would put them as one of the highest in the State, would have really positive consequences. People go to work for money. They could do bells and whistles and talk total comp and benefits and employee appreciation all day long, but people go to work for money. Ideally they love their job. There was a valid case for this program whether they go with the Town Manager's proposal intact or modify it. There's no surprise where he stood on this.

Councilor Radke stated that the longer they stay, based on the longevity plan that they have, which was pretty lousy, they're still staying. They have department heads that have been there 10 years plus. They're not leaving; she wanted to know why they were staying. Councilor Bemiss didn't think their current plan was out of date. For Derry, they get \$260 in addition to their regular salary. UNH did it on the anniversary. The State had a very specific plan; it's minimal. Merrimack had a percentage increase. Manchester didn't have one. Somersworth had \$208. Mr. Sawyer stated that Somersworth changed theirs this year. They start at \$1,000 for a 3-year employee, \$1,500 for a 5-year employee. Councilor Bemiss stated that it was reflected in their current online policy for 2023. Meredith was \$440. She didn't think their current program was that far off. She wanted to bring up what the goal was of that. She didn't want to be just throwing money at something because they thought it was going to achieve one thing and it's a lot of money. Councilor Strand agreed with big pieces of she was saying and taking a hard look at it and determining what the goals were. There were differences between trying to retain talent and trying to appreciate talent. He thought maybe the towns she mentioned didn't have the most robust longevity programs, but might have been over market in terms of regular comp and merit base. He assumed that their merit based bonuses probably weren't parallel to the private sector where people were getting a 10% bonus. Councilor Bemiss thought that's where it was difficult to compare one position here and one position in Merrimack, because Merrimack might be including all of that in their salary and we're not, so it looks like we're paying lower, but when you add all of that other stuff in, they're above market. Councilor Strand stated that he was subjective in that category; it didn't mean that there wasn't room for a robust discussion. He believed that they always get the best return on investment when you're over market on employee compensation no matter the industry or the job. He thought it was one of the few things you could guarantee, but it's hard, because it's invisible. You don't know you have a turnover problem until you have it. The reason people leave and stay jobs was a nuance thing, multiple variables. Money was always number one. It's hard to sit there and prove that if they do this, they're going to get this result, because you can't. He thought it was the closest thing to a guarantee in terms of money well spent.

Chairman Carter stated that if anyone had further questions to get them to Mr. Sawyer. This was a first step and they need to discuss it.

The budget workshop ended at 8:31PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Boufford