Selectboard Members: Bradley Towne, Chair; Flo Smith, Co-Vice Chair; Justin Lawrence, Co-Vice Chair; John Quinn III, Secretary; Angelina Capron. Present: Tom Badowski, Assistant Town Administrator; Diane Isabelle, Town Treasurer; ORCA; David Delcore; Linda Mullen, Fothergill and Segale. All items are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

Call to Order

Chair Towne called the meeting to order.

Additions or Changes to the Agenda

None.

Public Comment

None.

Fiscal Year ’22 Budget Discussion

Town Treasurer Isabelle continued discussing the Highway Department Budget. Since the last meeting, changes were made to the Department’s budget. The overtime budget was reduced. Roadside mowing was reduced by $1,000. Asphalt and marking was reduced by $5,000. Lawrence joined the meeting at this time. Salt budget was reduced by $10,000. Road signs reflect a $1,000 reduction and supplies reflects a $2,000 reduction. Grant monies allowed that reduction rather than cutting that spending from the budget. These changes bring the highway department budget down to an increase of 4% compared to the previous budget which brought an increase of 6%. Badowski explained that the main source of increase in the department come from worker’s compensation and insurance which are out of the town’s control. The mentioned grant was received in October for $30,000. Of that grant, the $3,000 to account for road signs and supplies will be applied to the highway department budget. Towne asked Davis if he is comfortable with the $10,000 decrease. Davis responded that salt prices have remained consistent so he is comfortable with the budget.

Conversation then moved to the Berlin Police Department budget. There is one proposed change. Much of the budget is based on union contract and health insurance is not an avoidable cost. That reflects an increase because another person opted into the family plan. Quinn asked what the budget is like taking out the expenses over which the town has little control. Badowski spoke to the subject as he had run those numbers earlier in the day. He said that the budget would decrease from last year if excluding those mandatory increases. The Police Department has a $5,000 reduction in overtime expense. That change brings the department increase to 7%.

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With these changes, the overall budget increases by 6%. Quinn asked what expenses account for the 6% and their portion of that increase. The increases are not operational but are related to employee costs. Conversation then continued to the prospect of using unassigned funds to lower the tax rate while paying off debt. Isabelle explained how the accounting would reflect that strategy. $781,530 is available in unassigned funds and the Public Works board is sending $142,000 back to the general fund and there is $27,000 left of a grant that can be used for roads, including capital assets. Other ideas for those funds include fixing water and drainage issues at the bottom of Crosstown Road. The loader is also in need of a new bucket. The current one underwent repairs 3-4 years go to reinforce its sides and bottom but it warped in the process and is not flush with the ground. A replacement bucket costs $6,900 and are in stock in Springfield.

The board revisited the discussion of hazard pay for the police department. There are no funds currently available and the joint recommendation was to continue under the conditions of the current contract. Discussion continued briefly about COVID funds generally.

The municipal office budget reflects an overall increase of 2% after Isabelle enacted several reductions. The ambulance services increased by 7% and town administrator pay increased, causing the overall 2% increase.

Lawrence expressed interest in the Central Vermont Hospital contributing to town funds. Discussion continued generally about potential sources for additional revenue.

Quinn moved to adjourn. Seconded by Lawrence. Passed unanimously.

For the Select Board:

Bethany A. Towne