

Town of Canterbury, NH
Board of Selectmen
Date: 2025 January 7
Location: Meeting House

Selectmen: Scott Doherty (Chair), Kent Ruesswick, Beth Blair

Town Administrator: Ken Folsom

Budget Committee: Cheryl Gordon, Bob Steenson, Jan Stout, Briggs Lockwood, Calvin Todd, Kelly Short, Bob Scarponi, Tyson Miller

Others Present: Edgar Rivera (Libertad Press NE), Rich Marcou (Solid Waste Committee Chair), Greg Meeh (Planning Board Chair), Chief Shawn Brechtel (Penacook Rescue Squad), Al Edelstein (Treasurer), Tom Franco (Community Power Committee Chair), Kal McKay (Welfare Officer)

1. Call to Order
 - a. The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m.
2. Budget
 - a. Several documents were distributed: 2025 Budget Draft rev 1/7/24, 2025 Budget Highlights, Capitol Reserve Accounts, and Proposed Wages.
 - b. Scott began the conversation by going through the 2025 Budget Highlights. Some items led to further discussion.
 - i. The preliminary operating budget presented tonight is \$3,499,820, which is an increase of \$176,367 (5.3%) over last year.
 - ii. This budget includes a proposed 4% raise for all employees.
 - iii. The Town switched the health insurance to NH Interlocal Trust, reduced the employer contribution for the existing plan, and offered a new plan that is cheaper. 5 employees have chosen the buyout instead of accepting coverage.
 - iv. Fire Department line is down because the full-time EMT retired and the position was switched to “per diem”.
 - c. Penacook Rescue Squad (PRS)
 - i. See Selectboard minutes 12/16/24 Section 8.c. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Scott and Chief Brechtel of PRS summarized the ongoing discussions with PRS.
 - iii. PRS is a non-profit organization providing rescue services to Canterbury, Boscawen, and Salisbury. The towns fund payroll and PRS bills patients/insurance companies to fund their capital reserves. Currently towns are billed based on population, not call volume.
 - iv. Merrimack County has the nursing home and jail in Boscawen. During COVID, the County stopped paying a private ambulance service to serve those two facilities, so PRS has been taking those calls. PRS call volume is up significantly and the County accounts for ~33%.
 - v. The towns and PRS asked the County to contribute. They agreed to a one-time payment of \$50K. This amount will reduce Boscawen’s payment for 2025.
 - vi. PRS has been using their Unreserved Fund Balance to reduce the amount they charge towns. Long-term that is not sustainable.
 - vii. In 2025, Canterbury will pay \$185,122 (up 11.4%).
 - viii. Scott spoke in favor of PRS and pointed out that despite the increase, they are still a bargain compared to private companies and neighboring municipal sources.
 - d. ARPA Funds
 - i. See Selectboard minutes 11/18/24 Section 2.d.viii. for previous discussion.

- ii. The town has a little over \$250K in ARPA funds that need to be spent by the end of 2025.
- iii. The Selectboard is going to use those funds to repair dirt roads. There was a struggle to find a contractor who could do it. Eventually they decided to sign with RD Edmunds for the material, and use the Highway Department for labor.
- iv. The roads haven't had material added in 20+ years and some cannot be graded anymore because they are scraping ledge. The worst roads will be addressed first.
- e. Legal Fees
 - i. See Selectboard minutes 1/6/25 Section 6.c.ii. for previous discussion.
 - ii. Ken went through the invoices from 2024 and found that the legal expenses (line 4153.3) included \$7,563 for Planning Board, \$668 for ZBA, \$3,623 for RSA 91:A training.
 - iii. The Planning Board is concerned that they will again have high legal expenses in 2025 and would like to have it's own legal budget. (See 12/30/24 Section 3.c.)
 - iv. There was discussion about the legal risk of upcoming developments at Exit 18.
 - v. Greg spoke in favor of having the Land Use Administrator position to manage things so that the legally required timelines can be met.
 - vi. There was discussion about the RSA 91:A violations and complaints from last year. One incident is what caused the Town to host the training session.
- f. Direct Assistance
 - i. Kal explained that generally this line is completely unpredictable. The budget is up this year because there is one anticipated case.
 - ii. The 2025 Highlights needed to be corrected. The increase to this line was \$12K.
- g. Wages
 - i. Jan wrote a letter discussing her concerns with the cost of the Library increasing from 2 full-time to 3 full-time staff.
 - ii. Bob Steenson discussed how calculating wages should also include the cost of benefits. The Town has tried to stay part-time whenever possible to reduce those costs. He reviewed the run rates of each department and noted that the Library's rate was significantly higher than the other departments. He suggested asking the Library Trustees to reconsider their budget.
 - iii. Kelly brought up that there is no personnel structure so each department gets to run their own show. That can lead to issues with fairness, but with such a small organization, it is very hard to make a formal pay scale.
 - iv. There was a discussion about how hard it has been to hire people, how keeping people is even harder, and how cutting wage lines could affect this.
 - v. Bob Steenson noted that he is on the School Budget Committee and they were cutting the budget carefully to keep the increase this year below 2%.
- h. Scott reviewed the proposed warrant articles. This is the last year for the Goldstar bond payment.
- i. Petition Warrant Article for Packer Truck
 - i. There is a petition warrant article for \$60K to purchase an electric compactor to replace the packer truck at the Transfer Station.
 - ii. There was discussion about why this project is infeasible and would require a lot more than \$60K.
 - 1. An electric compactor would need 3-phase power. To bring 3-phase power from the Center to the Transfer Station would take \$100K.
 - 2. The town doesn't have a truck that could transport the container for the compactor, so a new vehicle would need to be purchased, or a contractor hired.
 - 3. The compactor would need to be on a concrete pad. Because the Transfer Station is on a landfill, the ground cannot be broken, so no one present knew where it could go.

- iii. Rich explained that although the person who brought this petition forward is on the SWC, this warrant article is not at all supported by the SWC.
- j. SWC Warrant Article for New Transfer Station
 - i. See Selectboard minutes 1/6/25 Section 3 for previous discussion.
 - ii. Rich explained that the SWC is proposing a warrant article to start a Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) for the purpose of building a new Transfer Station. They are asking for \$10K as an initial deposit.
 - iii. Rich explained that the SWC has been trying to solve a number of problems with the current site for several years and every solution has been a no-go because the current site doesn't have enough space and it is on an uncapped landfill that is heavily regulated by DES.
 - iv. Rich reviewed some of the potential benefits of a new site.
 - 1. 3-phase power would allow equipment like the electric compactor from the petition warrant article.
 - 2. More space would allow multiple lanes.
 - 3. They could get a drive-on weighing scale which would allow them to more accurately charge for construction debris. Gilford recently did this and more than earned back the cost of the scale within one year.
 - 4. There would be room for composting. There is a new state law requiring any individual business that generates one ton of food waste per week to have a composting program. Canterbury currently doesn't have a business that meets those requirements, but this closer scrutiny of food waste by the State indicates that this may need to be added in the future. It is estimated that removing food waste from our waste stream could save 25% on tipping fees at the incinerator.
 - 5. Not being on an uncapped landfill would allow breaking ground. There would no longer be a looming threat of the State suddenly telling the Town to cap it.
 - v. In 1985 a CRF was made for the "implementation" of a Transfer Station. That was built in 1988, and a small amount was left in the account. It may need to be two separate warrant articles, but that remaining \$6K could be moved to a new CRF to build a new Transfer Station. The remaining requested \$10K could be raised by taxes.
 - vi. The suggested timeline would have the SWC spending 2025 on finding a location, engaging the community, and planning/budgeting; at the 2026 Town Meeting they would propose a warrant article to buy the land; 2026 they would focus on working with engineers to get firm costs and seek grants; and at the 2027 Town Meeting they would propose a warrant article for the new facility.
 - vii. There was discussion about if a new Transfer Station is really needed.
 - 1. Engineers have not yet been brought in to confirm that the existing site couldn't be reconfigured. If the salt shed was moved to the Municipal Complex, there might be enough room to rearrange things.
 - 2. The SWC survey showed 60% of respondents were in favor of exploring a new site. There were just under 400 responses.
 - viii. There was discussion about if a project so vaguely defined could be a CRF. The \$2M number is not backed up by actual estimates.
 - ix. It was suggested that the SWC change their warrant article to ask for money to fund a study, similar to the School Withdrawal Committee in 2023. This would fund getting an engineer to look at the current site to determine if rearranging is possible. If it is not, the engineer could come up with specs and estimates for a new site.
 - x. Scott directed Rich to find out how much a study would cost. \$10K may not be enough.

- xi. The SWC has previously looked into contracting with a company to haul trash rather than have a Transfer Station. Their estimate found that it would be cheaper per capita, but only if they did away with recycling. The community has consistently shown support for recycling, so this would likely be unpopular.
- k. Warrant Article for Waste Oil Burner
 - i. Currently the Transfer Station collects waste oil from residents. Normally someone will come take that oil so they can burn it as fuel. In the last few years, there have been problems with finding someone to take it and with contamination.
 - ii. When no one wants to take the oil, the Transfer Station has to stop accepting it from residents and when it is contaminated, the Town has to pay a hazardous waste company to come pick it up for thousands of dollars. (See 11/18/24 Section 2.d.iv.)
 - iii. If the Town had its own burner at the Municipal Complex, it could use that oil to heat the Highway Bay instead. It could also burn waste oil generated by the vehicles at the Highway, Fire, and Police departments. Such a burner would cost ~\$20K.
 - iv. The oil from the Transfer Station would need to be transported 55 gallons at a time and if a spill occurred, it would be very expensive to clean it.
 - v. Tom suggested getting a burner that generates heat and electricity instead. These devices are cheaper and it could filter out contaminants before burning. He will get information about that to Ken.
- l. Warrant Article for Sam Lake House Garage Renovation
 - i. Ken got two estimates for renovating the SLH Garage so that it can be used for long term file storage. Both came in around \$80K. Estimates for demolition and rebuilding from scratch were similar.
 - ii. The estimates includes a new roof, siding, windows, hvac, drywall, insulation. It would keep the outside looking the same including the rolling garage doors. The estimates did not include lead abatement.
 - iii. There is \$72K in the CRF for the SLH and another anticipated payment this year of \$12K. So this would have little to no tax impact.
- m. Warrant Article for Voting Machine Equipment CRF
 - i. Town Clerk Sam Papps would like to start a CRF for Voting Equipment. There is a new state law requiring all towns to have handicap accessible voting machines at all elections including state and local. We currently borrow our equipment from the State, but theirs is old and they may not be lending it out much longer. \$5K in a CRF plus grants should cover purchasing our own equipment.
 - ii. There was discussion about if a CRF was needed or if purchasing the equipment could just be a straight warrant article. Ken will talk with Sam about it.
- n. Warrant Article for Voting Machine
 - i. The Voting Machine was in the 2023 budget and encumbered in 2024 but due to an extensive testing process, it was still unavailable. It should be available in 2025, so the Town is asking for the funds again, but using a warrant article this time.
 - ii. Line 4140.16 Voting Machine is for the maintenance of the machine and the cards. The budget did not go down for that line even though this year there is only a local election because Sam would like to use the machine for all elections going forward.
 - iii. Bob Steenson suggested using the machine for local elections was nice but not needed and that could save the Town money.
- o. Warrant Article for Library Weatherization
 - i. Tom explained that Library Director Rachel Baker has been looking to replace the heating system at the Elkins Public Library building. There was a Level 2 energy audit that found the building is barely insulated, so weatherization should be the first step.

- ii. The work would cost \$20K, but Unitil will provide rebates to bring it down to \$15K. There may also be rebates of 30% available. Over 25 years, it would save the Library \$50-70K in energy costs.
 - iii. The consulted contractor has seen Unitil give rates from 5% to 35%, so the 25% estimate comes from that.
 - iv. Unitil offers no-interest loans to residents for these types of projects, Tom can check if they would offer the same no-interest loan to the Town. So the funds could either be a loan or appropriation. Bond rates are too high for a small warrant article like this to be worth it.
- p. There was a lot of discussion about individual budget lines.
- i. If a wage line is up more than 4%, that is due to a change in hours.
 - ii. 4210.6: PD dispatch is down by \$12K because they did an upgrade last year.
 - iii. 4210.10 and 4220.70: PD and FD Subcontractor lines are for Details that get paid back through invoicing customers. No way to know how many will happen in a year. So the lines look overspent, but the Town actually makes money on those.
 - iv. 4311.2: The Highway Subcontractor line is for when we hire a tractor trailer to bring in salt.
 - v. 4311.4: The Highway healthcare line needs to be adjusted to account for all four positions, including the two that are vacant, incase they get filled.
 - vi. 4323.20: The Solid Waste Committee (SWC) proposed having a Hazardous Waste day. The last one was in 2016.
 - vii. 4321.4: Transfer Station phone went up 47%. Not sure why. Maybe can get rid of hardline.
 - viii. 4191.2 PB Secretary was overspent because there were more meetings than anticipated and while Michelle was trained, she and Lois overlapped on time.
 - ix. 4191.17: Several spoke in favor of keeping the Land Use Administrator position.
 - x. Electricity lines were overspent because the transition to Community Power took longer than expected, so the Town was paying the higher Unitil rates for 4 months.
 - xi. 4194.2: The floors in the newer part of Town Hall had to be replaced because of a water leak. This line was over expended, but was covered by the Building Maintenance CRF.
 - xii. FD radios and hoses also appear over expended, but those funds came from grants.
 - xiii. The fire engine approved in warrant article 2023-2 should be arriving in 2026. The Town can encumber the money already approved and will either get the bond in July 2025 or January 2026.
 - xiv. CASA contacted the Town and asked for a donation. All present spoke in favor of adding that line.
- q. Secretaries
- i. Bob Steenson suggested that some boards could do without paid secretaries. The Conservation Commission has members take turns instead.
 - ii. Scott explained that organized secretaries are key for preventing RSA 91:A violations. If a rotating secretary doesn't post on time, the Town could be fined.
 - iii. Bob Steenson and Briggs discussed the merits of brief minutes rather than transcripts, specifically in relation to the Zoning Board.
- r. The Budget Committee concluded by asking the Selectboard to try to cut the budget down to a 2% increase, about \$85K.
- s. The estimated revenues for 2025 have not been calculated yet.
- t. Unpaid taxes are at a record low.
- u. Ken will speak with the department heads to try to get the overall budget down to 2%. The amount per department will have to be tailored since some are already negative.
- v. The Selectboard will have a work session next week to work on this further.
3. Adjournment

- a. Kent made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m. Beth seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Next Meeting: 2025 January 20, 5:00 p.m. at the Meeting House

Minutes submitted by Kathleen McKay, Administrative Assistant