

TOWN OF WISCASSET  
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
March 13, 2008

The meeting was called to order by Chair Steve Mehrl at 6:39 PM at the Wiscasset Municipal Building.

Budget committee Members in attendance: Chairman Steve Mehrl, Judith Colby, Sherri Dunbar, Pamela Dunning, Robert Fairfield Sr, Richard Hanson and Karl Tarbox. Members absent were George Greene and Tony True.

The Committee met with Town Manager Arthur Faucher and Office of Planning and Codes Enforcement head Jeffrey Hinderliter to discuss the possible need to return the Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) position to full time. Jeffrey had originally planned for \$42,564 in the 2008-09 budget for a CEO to work 15-30 hours a week. Returning this position to full time would add approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000 in salary and benefits.

Jeffrey was asked what this expense would yield for the town. Jeffrey stated there were several projects he would like to work on that would further Wiscasset's interests but that he currently has no time to spend on them. One example would be working on the shore lands zoning that requires someone with field experience to complete.

The committee members all had comments for Jeffrey, voicing their ideas about the position. Pamela asked Jeffrey if supervising the committees that he began voluntarily is taking too much of his time. \$60,000 seemed like too much money to spend so the committees could be managed. Robert said that he thought Jeffrey did a good job and we were further ahead in these committees directly due to Jeffrey's efforts. Sherri pointed out that Jeffrey is filling 2 positions. Judy asked about the possibility of sharing a CEO with Woolwich as Jeffrey had suggested at the last Budget Committee meeting he had attended. Steve said he appreciated Jeffrey's dedication and asked how this request could be marketed to the public.

To highlight the need for Jeffrey's work on some committees, Bill Phinney pointed out that he would have liked to support the gasification plant but the ordinances that would protect the town from possible abuses by such a plant are not in place. It is very important that the ordinances are updated and address criteria to protect the town. Jeffrey also pointed out that it will probably take 3 to 4 years to rewrite the ordinances completely.

Steve questioned the need for the town to own properties that do not bring revenue. He spoke about the recent expenditure of \$80,000 on the Creamery and the town owning building and waterfront property that could be sold for good amounts and be removed from the town's maintenance responsibilities. It was pointed out that these properties enhanced the value of Wiscasset and were deeply embedded in town history.

Richard spoke of the need for Jeffrey to keep his job description accurate, set priorities and have a firm set of goals in place.

Pamela asked Arthur if some of the secretary's time could be used to help Jeffrey with the clerical side of his job, thereby freeing him to do more. Arthur Faucher reminded the committee that the current secretary would be leaving soon. Arthur suggested that the position be filled with as a general support staff would be able to assist in the clerical duties, be trained to do some of the more routine office tasks as well as do the secretarial work.

Judy asked about the position of Assessors' Assistant and if that position would remain full time or not. She wanted to know if there was any chance that the budget for that office would be going down or if the person in that position had time to help. Arthur reminded the committee that the person filling that position was not ready to retire and that the office would probably continue as is until that occurred.

Karl asked Jeffrey what skills were needed for someone to help with ordinance development and if it were possible to get someone with the licensing needed as CEO and ordinance writing in one person. It is Jeffrey's opinion that it would not be likely to get that level of experience for what we were offering to pay as a part time position.

Richard spoke about the possibility of having an outside contractor do the CEO work, as other towns have been known to do. A contractor would only be used as needed and would not receive benefits.

Jeffrey pointed out that he was on a time limit to do the ordinance work. The state requires the ordinances to be up-to-date and in compliance with the town's Comprehensive Plan. This is needed to be finished within 2 years of the plan being completed. There is the chance of having an extension of time if the town can show due diligence of the work in progress.

Arthur again said that he could see where the secretarial position could be changed to carry a better workload and cover more areas in the office. The support person could do clerical work for Jeffrey and the CEO as well as for the town manager and do some other tasks as they were needed.

Jeffrey pointed out that a higher caliber of education and experience would probably be available with a full time position of CEO with benefits. He agreed that a part time position could still bring in a good person to fill the position and that it could work with the clerical assistance from the support person.

When asked for his top 3 priorities, Jeffrey said they were to complete the revision of the town ordinances, make the CEO office more professional and better organized so the work could be completed more efficiently, and to promote the town of Wiscasset using the new website and brochures and other marketing options so it would attract more businesses and families.

Arthur sees the need to restructure some of the positions at the municipal building to be more efficient and more dynamic. He is willing to work with Jeffrey to draft an advertisement for the new support staff position that will replace the secretary.

At this point Steve polled the Budget Committee members for their opinions. The committee members favored the change of position from secretary to support staff as a way to better manage the workload. Richard wanted to know how the budgets would change and be clear what this would all accomplish. Arthur assured the committee that this structure would not change the budgets. He further stated that, between them, he and Jeffrey would write a job description that would cover everything required.

Bill Phinney asked the Budget Committee if they had any thoughts about the Capital Improvement Plan. It was pointed out to him that the Budget Committee has no power to enact any plans. Some committee members spoke in favor of such a plan. There was some discussion about the beginning stages of building such a plan. Arthur agreed that a workshop with the department heads to explain what was needed would be a good idea. Following a step-by-step method of training and paperwork could advance the writing of the plan. The difference between capital improvement, maintenance, and replacements were defined and discussed. Capital improvements were defined as any purchase of a new item worth more than \$5,000. Replacing an older item and maintaining a current piece of equipment would not be a capital expense and should not be budgeted as such.

There was some discussion about the use of fund balances and the possibility of them being used to offset the mil rate for the next year. There was also some mention of these funds being put in to the reserve account. There was a question as to how these things are decided. It is possible to have a warrant article on the ballot each year to vote this or have an ordinance voted in that settles the question. Arthur pointed out that an ordinance would limit the ability to use funds and that the town may not want to tie themselves down in that manner.

There was some discussion about the possibility of having as much as a 20% increase in taxes in the next fiscal year. This sparked further discussion about the real need for the policy that governs the use of the reserve account and if it is to be used to offset taxes or for capital improvements. It is strongly felt by most that the reserve account should not have the principal used and needs to be protected for the future.

There was a discussion about possible hauler fees being put in place at the Transfer Station. It is possible to charge by tonnage. There may be fees set that would charge out-of-town haulers a higher rate. These fees could be set per capita. Arthur mentioned that the Transfer Station had looked at windmill to generate some of their power. The windmill would cost around \$87,000. It was felt questionable that the public would be willing to support that expense at this time.

There was some discussion about the school budget. Committee members generally spoke about wanting to schedule a Budget Committee meeting after the school budget workshops where they could look over the numbers and put their thoughts together.

There was some discussion about the warrant articles for the school budget. It was questioned on whether the Budget Committee would be able to put their own recommendations in articles or if the school articles would stand alone. The law on this point is not clear at this time.

Budget Committee members will be attending the school budget workshops on Monday March 17 and Wednesday March 19 from 3:30 to 6:30 PM. The Budget committee meeting that was scheduled for March 18 is cancelled due to the Selectmen's need for the meeting space. A Budget Committee meeting was agreed to for the evening of March 20 at a place to be determined from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. Other scheduled meetings of the Budget Committee combined with the Town Manager and the Selectmen and department heads will be from Monday March 24 through Thursday March 27 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the Municipal Building.

The Selectmen will be reading the warrant and answering questions on Tuesday, April 15 from 6 to 9 PM at the Wiscasset Middle School. There is some concern that an evening meeting may not give everyone in town an opportunity to come in to discuss the issues. It was discussed that the Budget committee and the Town Manager would host an informational hearing on Saturday April 26 at the Wiscasset Middle School gym in order to allow members of the public a weekend meeting at which they can get information about the warrant articles.

Arthur stated that the budgets for the cost centers in town would be available in a few days. This would give committee members time to look them over before meetings with the department heads.

There was some more general discussion about the school budget. Committee members discussed the work that the administrators and school committee were putting into the budget. There was some discussion about the four tiers being used to find cuts in the budget. There was further discussion about the balance forward.

The \$207,000 amount being asked for contingency for teachers salaries in case a retroactive raise is given with their new contract was mentioned. It seems that the contingency amount put budgeted for this last year was spent on other things. There was some question about if there can really be a balance forward counted when the contingency fund was used to fill the budget.

Having no further business, Karl Tarbox made the motion to close the meeting. Motion was seconded by Robert Fairfield Jr.. Motion passed 7-0. Meeting closed at 9:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Pamela Dunning.