



# Town of Barre VERMONT

## BARRE TOWN BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

### AGENDA

1. Call to order.....6:00 p.m.
2. Consider approving agenda
3. Consider approving March 12, 2024 meeting minutes
4. Acknowledge guests, if any, for non-agenda items
5. Questions about material received and reviewed to date
6. Review Proposed Cemetery Fund Budget
7. Review Proposed Highway Fund Budget (revised)
8. Review Proposed Sewer Fund Budget (revised)
9. Review Proposed Sewer Capital Improvement Fund Budget
10. Review Proposed Water Fund Budget (revised)
11. Review Proposed Records Retention Fund Budget
12. Handout Replacement pages of other revised budgets
13. Miscellaneous handouts (if available)
14. Public comment, if any.
15. Adjourn

### MINUTES

The duly warned meeting of the Barre Town Budget Review Committee for the proposed 2024-2025 fiscal year budget was held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024 at the Barre Town Municipal Building, Emergency Operation Center, Websterville, VT.

**Budget Committee Members Present:** Norma Malone, Paul White, Justin Bolduc, Bob Nelson, Mike Gilbar, Chris Neddo, Todd Provencher, Jamie Cushman, and Lindsey Lozier.

**Budget Committee Members Absent:** Josh Howard.

**Staff Members Present:** Town Manager Chris Violette, Town Clerk Tina Lunt, Finance Director Katelyn Kran, Town Engineer Josh Martineau, and Cemetery Sexton Dwight Coffrin. Those present virtually: DPW Supervisor Richard Tetreault.

**Others Present:** Dwight Harrington, Alan Garceau, Brian Littlefield, Nancy Pope, Kristin Baumann, and Angela Labrador.

**CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Malone.

### APPROVE THE AGENDA:

*On a motion by Bob Nelson, seconded by Justin Bolduc, the Budget Committee voted unanimously to approve the agenda as presented.*

**APPROVE THE MINUTES:**

*On a motion by Bob Nelson, seconded by Todd Provencher the Budget Committee voted unanimously to approve the March 12, 2024, Budget Committee minutes with minor spelling and grammatical corrections.*

**GUESTS:**

Aldrich Library Director Kristen Baumann and Aldrich Library Board Chair Nancy Pope were present.

Ms. Baumann and Mrs. Pope were present to address the Town's level-funded proposal. Ms. Baumann said she would like to remind the Town that the reason the Library asked for a level-funded request from the City was because of the flood concerns. She reported that the City has since agreed to a 12% increase, which is higher than what the Library asked for and more than the 5% request they are asking the Town for. Ms. Baumann shared that Barre Town is paying \$80,000 less for equal services. She said if the Town would consider approving the 5% increase this would leave a \$70,000 difference. She noted that the community want more use and services from the Library. Additionally, Mrs. Pope added that she believes the voters would support a 5% increase. Furthermore, Ms. Baumann noted she has applied for several grants to help fund library capital improvement projects.

Mrs. Malone asked Ms. Baumann if the City had given the Library any assurance that they can sustain this increase in the future. Ms. Baumann said they had not. Mrs. Malone stated the Barre Town appropriation to the Library, as a percentage of the overall operating budget is 33% higher than the City's appropriation. The Town's share is 2.5% and the City's share is 1.8% of the respective operating budgets. Mrs. Malone noted the cost of the Town's flood-related infrastructure damage exceeded the City's and, while the City is receiving a \$1 million appropriation through the Budget Adjustment Act, the Town is not receiving any additional funds. There are many unknowns at this time related to the costs of flood repairs. Mrs. Malone stated the Committee is trying to be "frugal but functional". Ms. Baumann stated she understands the Town's position, however, she wanted to update the Committee on the City's revised appropriation.

In closing, the Committee thanked Ms. Baumann and Mrs. Pope for coming in.

**QUESTIONS:**

Paul White shared that he had a conversation with Tony Campos from Video Vision. Mr. Campos confirmed that the Town does not pay anything to have meetings broadcasted as it is paid through a grant. Furthermore, the Town's costs will be going down as they will be changing to a web-based channel.

**CEMETERY FUND:**

Cemetery Commission members present: Angela Labrador, Brian Littlefield, Dwight Harrington, Alan Garceau and Cemetery Sexton Dwight Coffrin.

For the record this is a warned Cemetery Commission meeting.

Proposed 2024-2025 budget amount: \$144,391 (+78.81%)

The Cemetery Fund provides the maintenance for the Town's three cemeteries. The fund pays the wages for what are typically three seasonal workers including the Cemetery Sexton. Additionally, the Cemetery Fund also pays for operational costs from fertilizer to rent for DPW equipment.

There is a notable increase in the miscellaneous contracted services line. This is to preserve the historic wrought iron fence surrounding the Maplewood Cemetery at the intersection of Farwell and Nichols Road. The Manager stated there is hope for grant funding, but no guarantee. It is noted that there is \$2,800 in the current fiscal year budget for this work to be completed. He recommends carrying this money forward to next year to help refurbish the fence. Another notable increase is the paving of the northwest corner entrance of Wilson Cemetery.

The largest expense is wages, which is up \$37,091 over FY24. This is largely due to the Cemetery Sexton working 40 hours vs the 35 hours budgeted in FY24, and budgeting for an additional 40 hour a week position to hire and train a new Cemetery Sexton. The Manager reports that there is concern on filling the position of the Cemetery Sexton. He recommends waiting until next year to fill this position and taking more time to find an ideal candidate. Cemetery Sexton Dwight Coffrin agrees and suggests bringing the new hire in at the end of next April. Additionally, Mr. Violette suggests budgeting for similar staffing as last year.

Discussion continued as the Manager thanked the Sexton and Cemetery Commission for their good work. Additionally, Mr. Coffrin thanked the Manager for inviting him to the Budget meeting. Mr. Coffrin shared his appreciation for the Cemetery Commission and for their support over the years.

Mr. Coffrin inquired about his wages, stating he is currently the lowest paid department head. He is requesting a 2% increase over the 8% that the Manager has proposed. Mr. Coffrin said he has done a good job for the Town and continues to work over the winter months taking phone calls and promoting the cemetery. Mr. Coffrin stated his hope is the standards he sets for the Town of Barre cemeteries are carried on when he leaves. It is noted for the record that the Selectboard will take the wage increase request under advisement. This item was added to the whiteboard for consideration.

Mr. Provencher inquired about the trend of alternative burial options. He asked about future lot sales and if this will continue to generate revenue. Mr. Coffrin noted the Town is not fully subsidized, noting that 70% - 80% of services are cremation, which includes niches. Additionally, Mr. Provencher shared concerns regarding delaying the process of hiring a Cemetery Sexton. Mrs. Labrador said she shares these same concerns, noting this is a very skilled position. Furthermore, she said she supports a salary increase for this position which will also be beneficial in attracting a new hire.

**HIGHWAY FUND:**

Proposed 2024-2025 budget amount: \$4,183,441 (+12.59%)

The Highway Fund was previously presented to the Committee during the February 20 meeting. At this time, Committee members asked Town staff to take another look at the budget and see what they could do to lower the revenue required from taxes. Town Manager Chris Violette and Finance Director Katelyn Kran have revisited the fund to see what they could do to temper the proposed 20% increase while maintaining most of the budget's integrity. Most of the original increase was due to increased paving costs and transferring equipment purchases to the Highway Fund from the Equipment Fund.

The Manager notes that the biggest change from the Highway Fund presented on the 20<sup>th</sup> and the one being presented now is moving the cash purchase of the large dump truck to the principal line item because he is now proposing to lease the truck. This line item is reduced by \$281,800. Other notable reductions include lowering the guardrail budget (\$10K), eliminating the ASSHTO reference book (\$1K), and removing the 3-acre permitting (\$20K) which will be accounted for elsewhere. The overall reduction in expenses will increase 12.59% over FY24 or \$468,101.

Furthermore, there is a change to the revenue side of the Highway Fund. Mr. Violette reports that Finance Director Katelyn Kran and himself looked at the rent that should be paid to the Highway Fund from other departments that use DPW equipment, explaining the methodology also that was used. Equipment rental adds \$100,185 to Highway Fund revenue. The sale of used equipment was also added to the revenue side, resulting in an additional \$113,000. Between the rental and sale revenue lines, a total of \$213,185 was added to this fund. The Manager notes with the reduced expenses and the increased revenue, the revenue needed to fully fund the Highway Fund from property taxes decreased by \$490,909 from the first Highway Fund budget proposal.

Committee members agreed to add the pavement marking grant of \$35,000 to the whiteboard.

Mr. Nelson inquired about the current leasing/financing rates. Mr. Violette said he is not sure what the current rates are, however, from a budgeting standpoint 4% was used. Additionally, Mr. Bolduc inquired about the \$113,000 for the sale of equipment revenue. Mr. Violette explained that, unfortunately, in most cases these vehicles are not sold for what is expected.

Conversation continued as Mrs. Malone inquired about the 3-acre permitting that is being proposed to be removed from this budget. Mr. Violette noted the Committee needs to decide where this money should reside. Mrs. Malone notes that all other stormwater permits reside in the Highway Fund and feels this line item needs to stay within this department. She asked if there was any hope of receiving funding from the State Revolving Fund. Mr. Violette gave an update to the Committee regarding this matter. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee at this time of funding. Conversation continued as Committee members discussed the best options. The Committee suggests putting \$100k back into the Highway Fund for 3-acre permitting. This item was added to the whiteboard for further consideration.

### **SEWER FUND BUDGET:**

Proposed 2024-2025 budget amount: \$1,227,811 (+6.36%)

This budget was originally reviewed on February 20<sup>th</sup>. The only change to this revised version is the Sewer Fund is adding equipment rental fees for Sewer Fund use of DPW equipment. Based on a three-year average, \$21,940 in equipment rent was added increasing the proposed Sewer Fund budget to \$1,227,811 which is \$73,456 over last year or up 6.36%.

During the February 20<sup>th</sup> meeting Mr. Violette shared a projected customer rate of \$370.00/unit. Mr. Violette believes with increased revenues the rate will be between the range of \$350 and \$370. Mr. Martineau said there will be at least a \$100,000 increase in revenues from BOD from one customer.

**SEWER CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND:**

The Sewer Capital Improvement Fund accounts for expenses related to sewer improvements and collects revenue. There are no expenses for this fund this year but like past years, sewer connection and line extension fees as well as interest account for \$48,000 in revenue.

**WATER FUND:**

Proposed 2024-2025 budget amount: \$622,596 (+19.55%)

This budget was originally reviewed on February 20<sup>th</sup>. The only change to the Water Fund is the addition of equipment rental fees. The Water Fund is a big user of DPW equipment and as a result, sees the largest increase of any other fund for rental fees at \$43,340. The fees are based on a three-year average of use and the FEMA reimbursement rates for equipment. A notable increase in this fund is the wages for an additional hire for a full-time water operator.

Mr. Violette said during the February 20<sup>th</sup> meeting it was suggested to raise the base fee to \$75.00/quarter. A rate increase spreadsheet was shared with the Committee. Three versions of proposed rates (base and usage) were shared with Committee members for review. Those include the following rate options:

1. \$67.00/base \$8.78 usage
2. \$75.00/base \$8.27 usage
3. \$70.00/base \$8.66 usage

Mr. Gilbar inquired about the infrastructure. Mr. Violette reported that Barre View Street and the Websterville areas need updates. Mr. Gilbar noted this would be a prime fund for a capital reserve account. Additionally, Mrs. Malone inquired about the Websterville customer special assessment fee. There are concerns that this may not be paying the expenses of the loan. Staff will look into finding out more information regarding this matter.

**RECORDS RETENTION FUND:**

This budget is for the purpose of preserving and restoring official records most of which are attached to the Town Clerks Office. Revenue is received by this fund from a portion (\$4.00) of Town land records recording fees.

Clerk Lunt reported that she is currently in the process of working with Kofile on a digitization project of back scanning land records. This project will allow title searchers to be able to access records back to 1895. Currently, the town has documents indexed back to 1895 but only imaged back to 2001.

**BUILDING FUND:**

Proposed 2024-2025 budget amount: \$90,000 (+34.39%)

The Building Fund is similar to a Capital Improvement Fund. All Departments/Funds which own buildings pay into the Building Fund. This fund organizes all major projects.

It is noted that two projects were added to the Building Fund. These include the fire station roof and the municipal building air handlers.

Budget Committee Meeting of March 19, 2024 Continued:

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.

**ADJOURN:**

*On a motion by Bob Nelson, seconded by Todd Provencher, the Budget Committee meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.*

APPROVED MINUTES

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Barre Town Budget Committee

Filed in the Barre Town Clerk's Office on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2024.

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_, Barre Town Clerk.