

Salisbury Budget Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2023

A meeting of the Salisbury Budget Committee was held on Monday, February 6, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. at Academy Hall.

Jason Hood, Chairman (2024)	Present	Marcia Murphy, Vice-Chair (2023)	Present
David Kelly (2024)	Present	Bill MacDuffie, Sr. (2022)	Present
Jennifer Hoyt (2023)	Present	Kevin O'Neill (2025)	Present
Eric Swendsen (2025)	Absent	Jeff Blanchard (2022)	Present
Brett Walker, Selectman (2022)	Present	Vacant	
April Rollins, Town Administrator	Present	Jennifer King, Recording Secretary	Present

Several members of the public were in attendance.
No one attended via Zoom.

Chair Hood called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Approve Minutes

Brett Walker **motioned** to accept the draft meeting minutes from the Budget Committee meeting of January 9, 2023.

David Kelly **seconded** the motion which **passed successfully**.

AGENDA ITEMS

Final Budget Review

The Budget Committee performed a final review of their proposed budget before the Public Hearing. General discussion occurred regarding the warrant articles and how they affect the budget.

Petition Warrant Article

The Budget Committee reviewed the Petition Warrant Article submitted by 29 registered voters.

"We, the undersigned registered voters of the Town of Salisbury request you to insert in the warrant for the 2023 Town Meeting, the following article:

'To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Thirty-Three Thousand Dollars (\$33,000) for the purpose of increasing police patrol coverage from 8 hours a week to 16 hours a week to ensure the safety of the motoring public and the safety of the residents of Salisbury.'

Brett Walker explained that the petitioned warrant article is requesting to double the amount of patrols performed by the State Police for the town. The Board of Selectmen voted not to recommend it, primarily because the State Police have not been able to fulfill the 8 hours currently budgeted due to being short-staffed, so it does not seem to be worthwhile to add that money to the budget for this year.

Bill MacDuffie Sr. **motioned** that the Budget Committee ***does not recommend*** the petition Warrant Article.

Vice-Chair Murphy **seconded** the motion which **passed successfully**.

Budget Discussion

General discussion occurred regarding the road improvement warrant articles and how those are budgeted for.

Jeff Blanchard suggested they cut the budget by \$20,000 in an effort to make the budget and Warrant Articles more palatable to the voters.

Brett Walker has concerns about cutting their budget too close. There are certain areas such as legal fees that can easily double and overspend their budget. Discussion occurred in other areas they could cut back.

Brett Walker called the motion.

Jeff Blanchard **motioned** to cut the budget by \$20,000.

There was no second for this motion. ***Motion failed.***

Chair Hood noted that their operating budget only increased by 2.3%, which is difficult to do in a normal year and he feels that they've done their best to 'trim the fat' where they can. The capital budget is slightly misleading due to the encumbered funds. He cautioned against deferring maintenance of their big-ticket items such as paving roads, etc.

Vice-Chair Murphy noted that the largest increase is the Warrant Article for Land Acquisition. Jeff Blanchard said that he feels there is room to trim this budget in other areas but they've chosen not to do it.

Bill MacDuffie Sr. noted that the request to cut the budget can be called for at Town Meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED 2023 OPERATING BUDGET

Chair Hood called the Public Hearing to order at 7:01 p.m. and asked for questions and input from the public on the proposed budget for 2023.

Resident Lorna Carlisle asked if there is any government grant money available to the town. Chair Hood responded that there is currently a Block Grant which is only used for bridge maintenance and construction.

Lorna Carlisle added that other towns are developing power committees to look at possible cost-saving alternatives for utilities; perhaps it is something to look at in the future.

Resident Gene Shaw asked about the proposed 8.9% across-the-board wage increase. Chair Hood confirmed that the wage increase is currently at 6.5%, noting the lengthy and involved discussion it took them to arrive at that number and they ended up among the state average. Mr. Shaw said that he commends their efforts.

Mary Heath asked for a list of the Warrant Articles. TA Rollins said that she didn't have copies on hand, but will email her a copy.

Chair Hood read the petition warrant article (as listed above). Brett Walker explained that the BoS and the Budget Committee have chosen not to recommend the warrant article because the State Police are unable to provide coverage for the 8 hours they have currently budgeted for. It doesn't make sense to raise the \$33,000 if they can't provide current budgeted coverage. Chair Hood added that the Budget Committee did discuss police patrols at length and determined that increasing the budget line for it at this time is not appropriate. Jeff Blanchard noted that from earlier discussion it was stated that any service provided on Rt. 4 and 127 does not count toward their budget because they are state roads. Vice-Chair Murphy asked if the State Police submit a record of where they patrolled when they submit their invoices. TA Rollins said that they do receive those records from them on a weekly basis.

Brett Walker read Warrant Article 11: ***To see if the town will raise and appropriate the sum of One Hundred Fifty-Two Thousand Five Hundred Seventeen Dollars (\$152,517) to be added to the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund established in 1996. (The Selectmen and Budget Committee recommend this appropriation).***

Brett Walker explained that things are going to be changing in terms of their highway department, which requires them to begin planning on how to proceed, whether it is building their own department, or finding another person with the equipment to take on the job. This discussion started a year ago, and just after Town Meeting the Highway Advisory Committee was put together to bring more people into the discussion. Their recommendation for this year is to start planning for a location to put a facility. This Warrant Article gives them the funds to have something to work with should a suitable piece of land be located.

Sharon MacDuffie asked if they are looking at a specific size of land parcel. David Kelly answered they are looking at 5 to 10 acres, as that is comparable to what other similar towns are using for their facilities. She recommended that they look for something on the larger side, noting that they will eventually need a town hall as well, which they could look at housing on the same property.

Brett Walker referenced an email received from a resident (*included on next page*) asking why they are not using the land at the transfer station as a site for a highway department. He explained that both the current and previous Road Agents have said that it is not suitable: it's not large enough and there is no power there. It is also sometimes difficult to access and is in the flood plain.

Mary Heath cautioned that if these funds are truly intended for the Highway Department, let's make sure that money is used for that purpose that they're talking about today. Brett Walker said that it is certainly their intention and explained the balance between being too specific and too general.

Seelye Longnecker added that they are grateful to the MacDuffies and to the committee that worked to figure out what to do going forward. Her concern that there is an implication is that they are committing to having a highway department which is big bucks going forward forever. She understands that a Road Agent needs to live in town, but she knows there are Road Agents that hire help from out of town. How many towns the size of Salisbury can afford to maintain a highway department with all their own equipment?

David Kelly said that they visited (he personally visited 5 or 6 himself) interviewed and studied several comparable towns, and they all had their own buildings, equipment and employees, and in general 5-10 acres of land was used for their Public Works department. Many of them were looking for staff. They contacted the highway departments of neighboring towns, none of whom were really interested in doing their road maintenance.

Chair Hood said that even if they were to find another road agent, they will someday again find themselves facing the same situation with a departing Road Agent with no one with the proper equipment to step into the position. The intention of this Warrant Article is to stay ahead of having to make surprise decisions.

Brett Walker added that he doesn't feel it is a final commitment. This will give them a place, which they need and a plan to start obtaining resources. Even if they find someone willing to handle the road maintenance with their own equipment, they will still need a location for vehicle storage. They would still have those funds to be able to use toward paying for that or at least having some of their own pieces of equipment. If they plan for it and someone comes along, that's ok. If they don't plan and someone doesn't come along, then they're in a tough spot.

Cindy Romano asked if there is a particular reason they are focusing on Rt 4 and 127 for a location instead. David Kelly said that those roads are centrally located and they are maintained by the state which would make their location easier to access. Brett Walker added that those roads are where suitable lots are available.

The Budget Committee addressed an email submitted by resident Louise Andrus:

February 5, 2023

*Board of Selectmen
Town of Salisbury
Academy Hall
9 Old Coach Road
PO Box 214
Salisbury, NH 03268*

Re: Salisbury Proposed Budget

Dear Board of Selectmen,

Am unable to attend the meeting on the budget for February 6th as I have a conflict in meetings. I have been following and attended some meetings of the Salisbury Highway Advisory Committee and want to thank each of them for all the hard work in compiling the information for the citizens of Salisbury. The following are my submission of my opinions and questions on the budget, and request it be entered as a matter of record for the meeting to be held on February 6, 2023.

- 1. Why is the proposal for the future Salisbury Highway Department taking away the rights of “we the people” in Salisbury in that we will not be permitted to vote for our choice for road agent? We have always voted for our road agent, and we should continue to do so as that is our right. In the proposal this right is being taken away from us. Why?*
- 2. Why does the Salisbury Highway Department proposal include the hiring of a “Highway Commissioner?” And then that person will hire someone to take care of the roads. It is unnecessary in my opinion and will be nothing more than another layer in administration of the town that is going to cost us more money.*
- 3. Why are we not utilizing the land at the “transfer station” for a highway department home base? The transfer station location is really not out of the way. If the current location of the transfer station is good enough for the citizens of Salisbury to drive to each week, it should be good enough for a highway department, and I believe we could make the location workable. It would save us taxpayers much money. If land is purchased on route*

127 or route 4, that land would not be taxable and would take away the possibility of someone purchasing the land and bringing in a business to the Town.

4. *I believe we should take a step back for another year and fully assess the report for a highway department, instead of rushing into something that we might regret. How do we know in a few years that there will not be someone with equipment to be a great candidate for road agent elected by the people and that person will take care of our roads as is currently happening? I do not believe our highway department should be turned over to a handful of people. Rather it should all be controlled by “we the people.”*

5. ***I am requesting that the Town of Salisbury cut the current proposed budget to last year’s level of spending.** We are in an unusual period of time. Inflation is high and it looks very likely we will have some type of recession this year. There are layoffs occurring. Many people are trying to figure out how to pay their mortgage or rent, buy gas to go to work, put food on the table and to pay for heat for their home and pay their property taxes. The **12 Month Percent Price Change from (Dec 2022) is 10.4% for food;** Gas is on the rise again the last few weeks. Let me give you a closer look at inflation: Recently my husband and I needed diesel for our tractor so that we could plow our dooryard. We paid 4.999 per gallon for 16.901 gallons or 84.49. A year ago average was 3.67.*

***Let’s discuss proposed budgets, Town, School and County:** Currently the **Merrimack County** budget is proposing a 2.9% increase in property taxes, or \$1,352,553 increase. As you know the **MVSD** is proposing for the 2023-2024 budget an additional 1,015,632 over the 2022-2023 budget or a 2.28% increase. **This does not include the Warrant Article IV** to raise and appropriate the sum of \$493,613 for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels. And the **Town of Salisbury** is requesting more monies in the proposed budget.*

***The taxpayers are not endless credit cards.** I feel this year we are at a point that we need to ascertain “**What is a want and what is a need and cut the budgets!**” And please do not say the State needs to do more. At the State level we are all still taxpayers and monies that come from the State to the schools, towns and county comes out of the taxpayers pockets. What is overall total increase of the Town budget dollar wise and percentage over last years budget?*

Respectfully,

*Louise Andrus
406 Raccoon Hill Rd
Salisbury NH 03268*

Chair Hood said that the only item that pertains to the Budget Committee is the request to cut the budget back to reflect last year's levels, which is something he's not really interested in even entertaining. He feels they did well in discussing their options in putting together this budget.

Brett Walker reviewed some points of the email addressing items in the Highway Advisory Committee's report that were misconstrued. For example the Committee's report was referred to as a proposal, which it was not. She also felt that they were taking away the option to vote on a Road Agent, which was also not the case. They also have not given control of the Highway Department to a small group of people.

This is a long process that involves input from everyone.

He addressed the question of using the land by the transfer station. The Highway Advisory Committee had mentioned a Highway Commissioner which was not a proposal, it was actually a reference to a Director of Public Works. The recommendation for a hired Road Agent down the road was merely a recommendation.

Harvey Peter agrees that looking for a location along Route 4 or 127 is best. That building will cost a lot of money to set up and run, which is why Rt. 4 is better because they have 3-phase power along that road.

Chair Hood closed the Public Hearing at 7:36 p.m.

Signing of MS-737

The Budget Committee signed the MS-737.

Selectman's Report

Brett Walker thanks his fellow Budget Committee members for all the time and work put into this budget over the last 6 months.

OTHER BUSINESS

The next Budget Committee meeting will be held on Monday, April 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Hood **motioned** that they adjourn the meeting.

Vice-Chair Murphy **seconded** the motion which passed successfully.

The Budget Committee adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer King, Recording Secretary