

THE TOWN OF FORT FAIRFIELD
TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS
First Public Budget Hearing 2022/23 Budget
April 28, 2022

Town Council opened the Public Hearing at 6:00 p.m.

All Councilors are present.

Staff: Andrea Powers, Town Manager and Neadra E. Dubois, Town Clerk, Tony Levesque, Darren Hanson, Ella Leighton, Dep. Chief Fenderson, Jennifer Gaenzle, Kevin Senal

Citizens: Tammy Deschesne, Chris Perkins, Paula Perkins, Gary Sirois, Sharon Ouellette, Thomas Towle

Budget Advisory Committee: Pat Canavan, Kevin Bouchard, Aaron Brown

Mr. Kilcollins – “Well, I, I, I look down at this first page I won’t say it’s 21-22, but it is. We’ll change that to 22-23, and I knew that by the way, but anyway. Anyway, and along with this, I’m sure there’ll be a lot of questions, hopefully we have the answers. We’ve, we’ve had couple weeks, going over what we had, and it’s still a lot to review that we have left to do, but, I, I know we’ll, like I said we’ll try to get the answers that we have, and if we don’t, we’ll see to it that the Town Manager would have them or we could get the answers. Also, we have our Budget Committee present. I think if we could get a raise of a hand to see who is here tonight that’s on this new Budget Committee. Two, three.”

Mr. Pelletier – “Aaron back there, in the corner, he’s [inaudible].”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Is there any that?”

Ms. Powers – “They’ll be watching.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “So, I’m sure with information that that have, and we together can look at what we’re considering for budgets and can work through this, and, and hopefully make this work for everybody at this time. Do we move on to what you have? I know Code Enforcement and Tax Assessor and Community Development, but I didn’t know if you wanted to have just a, I know a lot of people that...”

Ms. Powers – “I’m confused, Sir. Traditionally we, this is, this is a work session for the Council.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Right.”

Ms. Powers – “And, so, it’s my responsibility to present the budget. So, I’m not really sure what you’re asking me to do here.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Well, no. Basically, I know a lot of people just picked up the budget. I don’t know how much time you’ve had to review it, any of yours. If there’s any questions going in, we can just start. Or, do you just want to present?”

Ms. Powers – “Well, I would like to just reiterate that this just a draft. This is not the actual proposed budget.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “That’s right.”

Ms. Powers – “This is just the numbers as they come in to us based on it costs for us to run services for the community. And, everything is, you know, up for discussion, for sure, as it always has been, so…”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes, Gary?”

Mr. Sirois – “If I may?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes, you may Gary.”

Mr. Sirois – “You told me that there could be opportunity to ask questions, but first let me make some observations. The proposed budget as presented provides for a deficit of \$2,000,000. \$2,000,000 equates to what mil rate? Roughly 31 mils? Andrea?”

Ms. Powers – “I don’t have that number.”

Mr. Sirois – “You don’t have that?”

Ms. Powers – “No.”

Mr. Sirois – “Well, calculating it out, it’s around 31 mils. 19.5 to 31 mils if you adopt this budget. I don’t know who wants to pay that kind of money, but I sure don’t. Total expenditures on this proposed budget is a million dollars more than last year. That’s a lot of money. And, I’m not going to go into the different departments because some departments are fairly close, some departments are way off, but a million dollars. And then, of course, the revenue is down, another million dollars. We’re talking 2 million dollars here for a small community. Firstly, I don’t think we can afford that. And you 5 as Councilors have the responsibility to the rest of us citizens to hold that, so our taxes don’t go up dramatically. And I hope you can do that. I suggest, and I have suggested to some of you, that you charge the Town Manager with the responsibility of bringing this budget in line, with a percentage increase of whatever you think is reasonable, and she has the responsibility of going to different departments and getting that decrease to keep the taxes in line. Only she can do that, she has charge of all the Department Heads. When I look at the Department Heads, I see substantial increases in this budget. I’m not smart enough to know which is right and which and wrong. All I know is that the total, the total expenditures exceed expenses, income by 2 million dollars. Small town, 2 million’s a lot of money. And, I implore you, as Councilors, to charge your Manager with the responsibility to bring that budget back in line. Thank you very much.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you, Gary.”

Ms. Powers – “Are you ready, Chairman? Okay. If you break down the Consolidated Expenses, County Tax is \$277,209.00. We don’t have our numbers from the School Administrative District yet, so I have used last year’s number, which is \$2,142,385.00, and the Municipal share of that is \$5,925,540.00. We bring in an income of \$6,325,908.00. So, you subtract our income from our Municipal part that we’re responsible for this budget that you’re looking at, because you have to remember that what we have to present to you is not just the Municipal Budget but also include the School’s Budget, which we have no control over, and the County Tax Budget, which we have no control over. That would actually leave us with an overlay of \$400,368.00. The County Tax and the School Administrative District also have incomes that come in, and what they send to us for a bill is above what they bring in for revenue. So, we are responsible, the Municipality is responsible for making up their difference, their deficits. So, our actual income, the \$6,325,908.00 more than covers what the municipality is asking for, which is \$5,925,540.00. So, it is very daunting when you look at that. And, I understand that because it gets very confusing if you do not understand the Municipal Budgets and you do not understand where these numbers come from or what they’re for. But if you read on the left-hand side, the back page of the Consolidated Expenses, you will see the County Tax and the School Administrative District is also in there. And, you have to subtract those from the actual final budget for what the Municipality is actually responsible for, and that has a lot to do with when we give out the percentage of where the money is coming from, where it’s going to, on your tax bill. When you get your tax bill, it tells you [inaudible] broken down. Just last, this last year’s tax bill, with the mil rate of 19.5, the County was responsible for 7.38 percent of the tax bill, the School was responsible for 59.07 percent of the tax bill, and the Town was only responsible for 33.55 percent of the tax bill. So, I think, when we have these conversations about budget, it often gets confusing when you don’t remember that you have to remove the School and the County Tax from that bottom line. So, yes, it shows a deficit of the \$2,019,00 and change, but we have to remember that that’s not all on the Municipality. You have to, the County Tax and the School Administrative District are added into that final number. So, it’s important to remember that, when we have these discussions tonight over each individual Department’s budget. Now, you, this is the third presentation that I’ve given to Council, so you know that this is a process and this isn’t the final numbers, but these are the numbers that are coming into us and it is irresponsible of us not to inform you of what those costs are and the rise in the costs. Just yesterday fuel was \$4.70 a gallon, today it’s \$5.40, just in less than 24 hours for fuel. So, we have to keep in mind that changes are happening all around us and, yes, we are going to be as responsible as we possibly can be with those numbers, but we also have a responsibility to the citizens to provide those services for them, and it’s important that we let Council know what those actual costs are so we don’t get in a situation where, and traditionally Council does not put contingency funds away for these types of situations. Council uses Reserve Accounts for their Capital Funding, there’s no, we do not go after large sums of money from our Municipality in order to provide for these Capital Funding projects. So we are a reactive community versus proactive in the sense that we don’t have the funds set aside for these types of inflation rates, so, we are giving you real-time numbers for what we’re funding. So, as we go into each one of these departments, you’ll see. With Code Enforcement Tax, Tax Assessor and Community Development, they don’t, theirs doesn’t really change from year to year to year. He has a set of expenses that are in line with what needs to be done. Clearly, any changes would be for training state fees, that sort of stuff, so none of that has really changed for Tony. Does anyone have any questions on the Assessing, Code Enforcement, Community Development?”

Those numbers have not changed from the last presentation, they're the same numbers. Council, ready to move on to the Library? We can move on to the Library."

Dave Dorsey – "Are we all done with discussions, or?"

Mr. Kilcollins – "Oh, no, this is just starting. Please if you've got anything, stand right up Mr. Dorsey."

Mr. Dorsey – "I got a couple items. They haven't been brought up yet, but it's a good time to bring it out when we're looking at tax revenues. Our largest taxpayer, ReEnergy, hasn't paid its' tax bill three or four years. It amounts to about \$462,000.00 and I suppose if we add the fines it'd probably be 25,000 30,000 a year. Anyway, I talked to Ella about it and they don't seem to be too interested in accepting some kind of a compromise payment with them. They've merged with another company last April, they've kind of changed their, their program around a little bit, so. My question, I guess, is what, what do we do? We're carrying 42, \$462,000 on an accounts receivable, current accounts receivable. Accounts on current receivable are cash, bank deposits, and so forth. When you get into a credit problem, it's no longer a quick asset, it's got to be out of there. Now I don't know if they're gonna make an arrangement for this year, and I don't know what effect they'll have on your budgets but it represents a hell of a chunk of money and they didn't pay their tax, so I don't know if it goes back against paraded over several, several years on our taxes or it goes on in our capital. Because you've got to remember, three of you, the last two years, you, when you talk about budgets to actual, you overspent your budget \$1.3 million. It's right in your Annual Report, right? And last year, you spent over a million dollars, so you you've lost \$2.2 million dollars out of our capital, the, the value, and it's in your report. So, I guess I've been getting sticky about your budgets is that because when I get this budget today at the increase, I didn't know whether somebody's either smoking something wrong or drinking water, but. I mean, I'm a banker, 40 years on budgets. Nobody's gonna put that, but I don't care how many Department Heads you have, if you'd of said, listen I'm drawing the line to ten percent unless it's actually necessary, gas, whatever it is. But anyway, I'm getting off a little because I, I just couldn't get over this one. What, what happens to ReEnergy's debt to us? To the taxpayer? When do to take it off your asset and reduce it because it's a credit problem?"

Ms. Powers – "Are you asking me, Sir?"

Mr. Dorsey – "Yeah, somebody, I don't know."

Ms. Powers – "So, there's actually a few options that we are working with the Auditors to ask them what is the best solution for the Town, but the Council, not this particular Council, but the Fort Fairfield Town Council has carried an over \$100,000 debt on Farm Park for very, a very long time."

Mr. Dorsey – "Can't it get resolved?"

Ms. Powers – "I've asked to have that resolved."

Mr. Dorsey – "Look, when we start looking at bottom lines to what you need to run this place, we better start looking at a lot of other IOUs. Look, what gets me is this, I'm retired so I'll go along with it, but

look at the people in this town. We're not a Commercial Town, we don't have a manufacturing, it's a retirement, bedroom community, a lot of people on fixed incomes and now they're hitting with all kinds of expenses so I guess I get a little bit testy, but when I see somebody up here with a big increase in the Department Head, I'm saying maybe they ought to be able to get along without a little bit. Anyway, the other thing I'd like to throw out, it would really be helpful to everybody, I had it for years, when you compare budgets, if you compare budgets to actual, because, right now we're looking at this budget. We've already experienced nine months. So, we know what the actual is. So it's pretty easy to look, look, we're in line, we're okay. If, if those expenses are legit, they'll show up. I know it's hard for you to do that, but there must be a way to simplify this and take the sting out of it for everybody. If we see our gas up, then it goes up."

Ms. Powers – "Right. So, I think you mean year-to-date spent for this particular fiscal year. Is that what you're talking about versus actual?"

Mr. Dorsey – "I was looking at actual this year 21/22."

Ms. Powers – "Yes. So, year-to-date spent is different from actual. Actual Municipal is the end of the fiscal year. So what was actual spent versus budgeted and year-to-date spent, which is what you have for your reserve the reserve accounts, that was requested and the new information that was handed out to you. And, so, that is a year-to-date spent. But, if you would like to see that, I mean, I look at those every month."

Mr. Dorsey – "Do you see what I mean though? If you're a numbers guy looking at it and you go down and they're there, they're there. I mean, don't argue it's there."

Ms. Powers – "That's right."

Mr. Dorsey – "But when you start looking at. I kept looking at my last year budget and I said well, I know it's there, but I don't know how we actually made out and I won't know until."

Ms. Powers – "So, we ran into an issue with our accounting, TRIO as well. We used to have a button at the end of the year that gave us all of our actuals that we could go back to and they stopped doing that in 2019. So, we have to research all of our information. It's not at the touch of a button anymore. It has to go, we have to go back through all of the paperwork in order to get that information, but we are working on that to make sure we have that."

Mr. Dorsey – "Getting back to ReEnergy, do we get any kind of a BETA? I call it a kickback, a reimbursement from the State, like you would on your home's?"

Ms. Powers – "Betty? Tony, Betty on ReEnergy?"

Mr. Dorsey – "Betty. It doesn't amount to anything."

Mr. Levesque – "ReEnergy is not currently taxed and hasn't been for three years."

Mr. Dorsey – “So, that’s out then?”

Mr. Levesque – “They weren’t getting any Betty either, because they were exempt. As a utility, they couldn’t qualify for anything.”

Mr. Dorsey – “I was just digging around looking at that. I hope that the next time we get together, that somebody really does a job at this.”

Ms. Powers – “I hope that you go to the School Board Meetings and do the same thing there as well.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Well they haven’t really moved around much. I can’t seem to pick at them, but when I look down here and I ran the percentages this afternoon, and I’m not picking on anybody, I just look at things that stick out. You get a Recreation Department that went up 56 percent increase, 100,000 bucks.”

Ms. Powers – “Well, you have to remember, though, last year, because of COVID, we didn’t really have a Rec Department, so we went after them hard last year, and we have a full functioning Rec Department again this year, so.”

Mr. Dorsey – “I’m looking at a million two over. Okay, and with times the way they are, I, I don’t think that we want to live with that. And you three that have been on here, you’ve been through this. You’ve been short on your budget for two years.”

Mrs. Libby – “We were also able to decrease our taxes last year, if I’m correct.”

Mr. Dorsey – “I only look at the expenses. I just look at this and you’re Annual Report, it says revenue and in the last year, your revenue was \$5,900,000, and you spent \$600,900,000. You spent a million dollars more than your revenue, that’s in your, your report. So, I didn’t manufacture that, did I?”

Ms. Powers – “No, but you’re, I can’t, but you’re pulling information that doesn’t really have any, it doesn’t have an effect on the actual final numbers. We have not been below budget at all since I’ve been here, but at the end of the fiscal year when we close out at budget.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Well, then you want to have Giselle change that around then.”

Ms. Powers – “That has a lot to do with Capital versus Actual numbers. So Capital, Capital versus Actual numbers is not the same thing, and, as I said at the beginning, Council traditionally does not budget Capital Expenses higher than what we should be doing to made sure that, that, and those numbers that you see there, change.”

Mr. Dorsey – “But as our Capital decreases, our cash flow shortage increases and we, we’ve got low, we’re, we’re cash low, we’re low, we’re stretched.”

Ms. Powers – “Have traditionally have been. Because we don’t budget for that. Capital for us, is not our cash flow. Capital money is not in Municipal, it’s what we have.”

Mr. Dorsey – “It’s worth. It’s worth.”

Ms. Powers – “It’s worth. And, that’s very different than the money that we actually have.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Yeah, well, I’d hate to lose \$2 million in net worth.”

Ms. Powers – “Me too. I would too. But you also have to remember we have a brand new department that has a lot to do with that.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Yeah, that Department’s very expensive.”

Ms. Powers – “It saves lives, Sir. Yes.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Well, yeah, I’m sure it does. But, I talked with the gentleman in Mars Hill, Trent Ladine, Chairman of the Council, they started out with used vehicles. It’s going to cost less than \$70.00 per person next year.”

Ms. Powers – “Correct, but their service that they provide is not the same service that we provide.”

Mr. Dorsey – “But they do have about 3,000 people.”

Ms. Powers – “And it, it’s again it’s the time to get to the person to the [inaudible] that sort of stuff.”

Mr. Dorsey – “We started right out with a Cadillac.”

Mr. Butler – “No we didn’t. We started out with refurbished stuff. I get tired of hearing. We started with the best of the used stuff we could get.”

Mr. Dorsey – “You didn’t spend that kind of money on refurbished. If you, I talked to the Chairman of the Town Council in Presque Isle today and they told me just exactly what they bought, now they’re going to new but they had used stuff. They didn’t spend that money. They spent a million three last year, we spent a million six, anyway, I didn’t mean to get off the subject but somehow you gotta tighten up.”

Mr. Butler – “Okay, I, I agree with a hundred percent. But I wanna give you some figures that we started with before and we went to the School Department, and I’m gonna, I’m gonna relate to that. On the School Department last year, she gave the figures, so I figured out the last three years, okay, and we talked. I’m a senior citizen and I do look out for the safety of the people around and I look at the senior citizens. In my last three years on my taxes alone, I paid \$2,287 for the School, which I do not use.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Well, I don’t.”

Mr. Butler – “Well, okay, that’s what we’re saying. I paid eleven hundred dollars for services I do need. Okay, so the services that I do need you want to cut that service that I do and you want me to pay more for the services I don’t use.”

Mr. Dorsey – “No, I don’t want to cut. I want to use it better and better utilization.”

Mr. Butler – “We have. We have used them. Every Department come in under budget last year. Every Department come in under budget.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Well, that’s great then. We won’t have a problem then will we?”

Mr. Sirois – “But this year’s budget is substantially higher than last years.”

Mrs. Libby – “But it’s not finalized, it’s just the beginning.

Mr. Kilcollins – “Well, it’s just a presented budget right now. This is…”

Mr. Dorsey – “Well, why go through all this, if it could have been cut down and simplified and?”

Mr. Levesque – “Mr. Chair?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes.”

Mr. Levesque – “I would like to remind you, the purpose of this Public Hearing is not to debate, it’s not to discuss, it’s to take comment.”

Mr. Sirois – “No, it’s not. It’s for discussion, discussion of the Budget.”

Mr. Levesque – “Gary.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Gary, Gary, Gary, let Tony speak. Thank you.”

Mr. Levesque – “This is a published Public Hearing to receive comment. It’s not to debate but not put on the seat for debate or answer questions or be put in hard spots. It’s to receive comments about the proposed budget and it is just proposed, as been stated by the Town Manager. It’s subject to change several times before it is adopted which is not going to happen until the summer meeting. So, again, to keep you on track, the point of order here is it’s a Public Hearing, yes, Gary. It is a Public Hearing and you’ve been in that position before.”

Mr. Sirois – “And I’ve asked the Chairman if we could ask questions and he said yes we could, therefore.”

Mr. Levesque – “But not debate. Both of you were debating with them, trying to get an answer out of them, when they didn’t have any.”

Mr. Sirois – “Just pointing out the facts, Tony.”

Mr. Levesque – “I’m just bringing you back to what the purpose of this hearing is. And, if you’d like I can go get the notice and read it.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you, Tony. Thank you. So at this time we’re, we’re all looking at changes and, and to move forward, it’s it’s, it’s going to be, it’s gonna to be tough and I think that we, we can make budgets work this year, provide applicable service for everybody in our community and we can put this behind us, but, we’re, we’re, we’re not gonna gain ground by looking at what we have in front of us. It’s just a projected budget, we had to start somewhere and to keep this, which thank you Tony, in line. It’s hard because a lot of you people haven’t had a lot of time to review where we are on the budgets. But let’s try to keep this civil and, and look at some concerns and move this meeting along and, and, hopefully we can all learn from it.”

Ms. Powers – “Okay, the Library. So, Council gave the directive to have the Librarian find out the Slate Roof repair and what that would be, and she as placed that in there for you. And, we also have had the request, based on our insurance provider for liability, we can’t have entities using the different buildings in the community like the Library, Town Office, any of those places without staff present, so this also reflects adding an additional 20 hour a week person for that, so that people can use the Community Room. And that’s what that looks like.”

Mr. Sirois – “Excuse me, are you saying that community functions can be used there at the Library?”

Ms. Powers – “If there is a staff person present, yes, in the Library.”

Mr. Sirois – “And, you said you’ve added 20 hours a week to the staff?”

Ms. Powers – “For an additional person, yeah.”

Mr. Sirois – “So, that if an organization wants to have a meeting there, they can probably still do it?”

Ms. Powers – “If, if we are allowed to do this, yes, yes.”

Mr. Sirois – “Thank you.”

Ms. Powers – “You’re welcome. I had two different clubs reach out to me.”

Mr. Stratton – “I’m just curious why you can’t use some facilities, but you can others? A good example would be Riverside Park Pavilion. That doesn’t have to be manned by an employee and people use that all hours of the day and night. Why must the Library now have an employee there at the time?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “For insurance purposes.”

Ms. Powers – “For the ladies that work there. According to our insurance underwriters for liability purposes, if you have employees who work and man an area, that is exactly what they are used for, and they need to be present when you are in their facility, whereas Pavilion and Puddle Dock are not, I don’t want to say manned, but they don’t have staff that are there, they are just rentals for the community. “

Mr. Stratton – “So, as far as liability, if something should happen at Puddle Dock or Riverside after hours, there’s no concern of liability.”

Ms. Powers – “Well, of course there is, that’s why we have liability insurance.”

Mrs. Libby – “It’s a little bit different. Yeah. The way that liability insurance works, is if it’s a manned facility, then it’s expected that when there’s public there, that there will be staff there, where it’s not a manned facility, there’s not normally staff there on a regular basis, then the liability gives you different type of coverage. So, and it can’t cross, like, you can’t say well we have staff here part of the time but not the other part and be covered when there’s not staff there. It’s either it is, or it isn’t.”

Mr. Stratton – “So, rather than having another staff there to fill this easy ending hours, we can’t have part of our liability insurance cover this place after hours?”

Mrs. Libby – “It won’t allow if it’s a normally a staffed facility then it has to be staffed in order for it to be used by the public. That’s just insurance, that’s not the Town, that’s the way it is.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you, Ken.”

Ms. Powers – “Does Council have any questions?”

Mrs. Libby – “We’re not making a decision on that at this point in time, we’re just discussing?”

Ms. Powers – “Oh gosh no.”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay.”

Ms. Powers – “This is, this is just the beginning. There are no decisions being made right now.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Tom, did you have something you’d like to add?”

Mr. Towle – “Tom Towle, by the way. When you’re doing this presentation, I assume you’re going from top to bottom? And, we had talked about Administration, I know you talked a lot about Tony’s different hats and responsibilities, but I had a question as to the Administration line, the Town Office line on top. Could you explain how or why it’s going from \$540...”

Ms. Powers – “So, this is going to take a really long time if we have to keep doing this and not allowing me to just go through the presentation with Council, and when we get to that point, if you would like to ask a question about that, I’d be more than happy to answer it.”

Mr. Towle – “Okay. I was just curious why you, you skipped over that [inaudible].”

Ms. Powers – “I didn’t skip over anything. We’re going through the book with the Council. [inaudible] If we just went through consolidated, you wouldn’t be able to hear any of the other outlier that we discussed, so.”

Mr. Towle – “Thank you.”

Ms. Powers – “You’re welcome.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you, Tom.”

Ms. Powers – “Any more questions on the slate roof, or any of that? No? Okay. Parks and Rec. So, there are, there’s added information at the back of your Parks and Rec Presentation, which is on the other side of the budget itself, and this was given by Director Senal to give you information about the other communities, Presque Isle and Caribou, just so you can see what they’re doing and what their costs are and what they’re putting their, their funds into for that. We are providing pretty much the same service for a lot less. So, when you have a chance to go through theirs, I would encourage you to see that and your numbers that. And, your numbers that you’re seeing are very similar to the last presentation. The slight increases that you’re seeing in some of these budgets are due to fuel costs, most specifically. Any questions for the Rec Director? There’s a lot of good information in there, when you get a chance to take a look at it. It’s, it’s very, very interesting, what we are able to do with services we provide through the Rec Department.”

Mrs. Libby – “I mean, I’ve reviewed each of the different Departments’ budgets and kind of gone through and looked at any increases from last year versus, you know, what they’re asking for this year. Rec Department, I mean the biggest chunk of the increases is, you know, obviously we have another person, so it’s all within, like, salaries, benefits, retirement, pool maintenance was a big increase, but necessary.”

Ms. Powers – “A one-time increase, though.”

Mrs. Libby – “Right. Yes.”

Ms. Powers – “Because we are purchasing the maintenance books and information and taking that over ourselves, rather than having to pay that person every year.”

Mrs. Libby – “Right. So, and another substantial increase was like, the Rec repair and maintenance, again necessary. So, you know, I understand the increase, but I think that it’s pretty well justified on here, that’s my thoughts on that one, so.”

Ms. Powers – “Okay, if you’re ready to move on to the Fire/EMS, tab four. So, you will notice a change from the last presentation to this one. Significant change in health insurance. And, then, what we’re asking for in the Reserve side.”

Mr. Sirois - “Bob?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes.”

Mr. Sirois - “the biggest increase in that Department is for employees. Will somebody tell me how many employees we have in that Department?”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “If Council would allow me, I’d like to make some comments on this before I can answer the question directly.”

Mr. Sirois - “The number of employees is what I’m asking.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “I would like to make some comments, if I could.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “I will answer the question. So to start with, I’d like you all to remember our first meeting we had about this budget when we talked about why our employee expenses were increasing so drastically, or why we were asking them to. When minimum wage went up, two of our full-time employees needed to have their rate of pay increased because they were below minimum wage. What we have done, we have asked for the lowest paid person to make what a janitor at McDonald’s gets paid. The lowest paid person has to be Basic Fire School Trained, which takes six months, must have an EMT Basic License, which takes six additional months and is charged with saving lives, for the same thing that the person who sweeps the floor at McDonald’s makes. So, it’s a significant increase. All of the increase is not from adding additional employees, it’s from paying employees a rate at which they can live on and to be commensurate with the duties you all expect them to be able to perform. There is no increase in the number of employees.”

Mr. Sirois - “How many employees do you have? That’s the question.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Full-time, or part-time?”

Mr. Sirois - “Both.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Our total Department is 25 people. I have 9 Career Staff, myself and the Chief.”

Mr. Sirois - “How many part-time?”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “The total Staff is 25. I have 9 full-time plus the Chief and I.”

Mr. Sirois - “14 part-time.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Part-time and paid-call, they’re classified as the same.”

Mr. Sirois - “You’re telling me that, that some of those employees were below minimum wage?”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Two full-time.”

Mr. Sirois – “What is minimum wage today?”

Ms. Leighton - “12.75 an hour. Plus they now have to be compensated for one hour for every 40 hours that they work.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “So, again, that’s two full-time staff. Every part-time Staff member makes minimum wage plus they get incentives for any education and training they have so every one of those 14 others had to have their wages increased as well, but two Career Staff, who do this as their only job had to have their rate of pay increased to be at minimum wage.”

Ms. Powers – “Does Council have any questions on any of the reserve that we’re looking for?”

Mrs. Libby – “Can you show me where the changes are from last so I’m not. I’m seeing the same in this binder, it’s the same paper as I have from the last binder. So, I just wanna make sure I’m looking at the right thing.”

Ms. Powers – “I did give you the update. You did have it already, I didn’t realize I gave it to you already.”

Mrs. Libby – “They were the same numbers, so I just wanted to make sure. Okay.”

Ms. Powers – “Council should be aware that I have put in for CDS Funds, the Professional Foundation spending for [inaudible] Engine Tanker, that does more than one job, and with Senator Collins Office, so because we are working with very aged equipment that is not functioning the way that it should be.”

Mr. Pelletier – “Good. So, is that a grant?”

Ms. Powers – “Yes.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “How long does that?”

Ms. Powers – “I, I, I don’t know. Usually, it’s after the first of July that we would hear from, it’s through USDARMD, so hopefully we are successful with that one. Because we need it very badly and that would help us greatly and strengthen our mutual rate.”

Mr. Sirois – “If I may, while we’re on that Department?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes, Gary.”

Mr. Sirois – “Income for EMS Ambulance Service/Fire Department is the same as last year, \$408,000.00.

Ms. Powers – “Again, if I can get through all of this presentation, when we get to those things, we can entertain all those, but we don’t have our numbers yet from the bill, so we have to use last year’s numbers until we have the new numbers.”

Mrs. Libby – “Do you know when we’ll be able to get an update as like year to date? I know we’re, I know that the billing sometimes takes a while because we bill them, but it’s not necessarily paid immediately.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “So, right now, our billing is submitting bills for December of 21. So, I update, Ella gets the updated numbers every, every time we get the information from [inaudible] usually once a month they have end of month totals. But, she’s only working on December numbers so that, it’s hard for me to give you an accurate number now, when we’re still in December of last year, versus nothing from this year.”

Mrs. Libby – “So, why is billing like, like that? Why is that structures it, due to insurance and things like that?”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Well, the vast majority of the time constraints is dealing with insurance. Everything has to be coded properly and the reason we chose this billing service is because when we get initially denied, if we get initially denied, they spend the extra time to figure out why we got denied, appeal that, and they’re usually very successful at getting that money back for us. Problem is, anything with the Feds takes forever and, I forget the exact percentage, but I think it’s something like 88 percent of our calls are paid by the federal government, Medicaid, Medicare and MaineCare. So, we have to just wait a long time to get the money, they’re doing the best they can and insurance takes a long time to pay. Ambulance isn’t a money maker, it’s recuperating some of our costs.”

Mrs. Libby – “Right, thank you.”

“So, I guess a comment on this one too for me would be if there’s a place that we can look, because obviously all of the budgets we’re going to have to look at different places we can decrease, so my suggestion would be in the Reserves, and I know that’s a hard place to decrease because we decrease it now and we pay for it later, and I completely understand that, but my thought process on that, for this specific Department, is that once we can get some of those larger loans paid off, would be when we could look to funding more heavily those reserve accounts. It probably won’t be the same for every single department, but for this department, that would be my recommendation.”

Mr. Sirois – “Stick to it.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “If I could just comment on that?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Sure.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “I understand what you’re saying. I want to remind the Council that contrary to what has been stated tonight here, we did not buy all new things to start with. The only things we had brand new were Ambulances, and if you ask anybody that actually works with an ambulance in Presque Isle, they can tell you how great used ambulances are and how they last for maybe a year before you have to buy another used ambulance. So, when, when it’s time when these loans are paid off it will be time to take out more loans out to replace the things we have now. Our fire trucks are well beyond their useful life. Our SCBA Packs have a set time frame on them, we haven’t saved for them at all, and if you, some of you may remember a few years ago we were in that same boat and had to come up with a large chunk of cash. Just so you know the price of those has already gone up one-third in three years, so the amount that’s in there for Air Pack replacement is just to have the amount of money we spent three years ago on Air Packs. So, just having that is still not going to be enough. So, it’s, it’s very important that we think about the large purchases because the large purchases is what is causing a lot of the animosity at these hearings, and if we keep pushing, kicking the can down the road, there’s going to continue to be animosity and we don’t want, we’re not, we’re not in Cadillacs, we’re in 2002 Honda Civics with 300,000 miles on them, duct taping them together trying to do the best we can, so, that’s all I have to say about that.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you.”

Mr. Pelletier – “You know, I, I’d just like to say something. I want to comment on what you just said. You, you’ve compared Fort Fairfield to Presque Isle a couple times here tonight, when you’ve gotten up there. Well, Fort Fairfield’s nowhere near the size of Presque Isle and we don’t have anywhere near the calls, the size that Presque Isle does.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “If I could comment on that?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes, you may.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Presque Isle Fire has 18 full-time Firefighter/Paramedics, a Deputy Chief and a Chief. They have four ambulances. We do not staff that. We do not compare. One of the other things mentioned earlier was comparing our budget. If you look at their budget, their actual total cost for Fire and EMS is more than double ours. The way their budget is presented in Presque Isle is different than the way our budget is presented. So the one million that was said earlier is what didn’t get covered from EMS billing, so their budget is twice as much as ours because we don’t have the call volume, because we don’t have the staffing. It’s a different Department, and I compare it because others have brought up the fact to compare us not because we’re comparable, because our goal here is to provide the best service in Aroostook County.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you.”

Ms. Powers – “PD. Tab five, the Police Department.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “I would just like to state one thing. Our Police Department is actually getting renewed, started up. There’s a lot of expenses we could be seeing this year because of where our PD was, and

where it had to start over, so I, I just want to let everybody know that you can almost look at this as a, as a, new Department. I think personally they've done a phenomenal job on what they've had to work with and so I just wanted everybody to keep that in mind."

Ms. Powers – "So, for the Police Department, you'll notice that the education and training has gone up significantly from last year to this year, and that is because we have to send one of our Staff to the Academy. \$18,000.00 to send an individual to the Academy to earn their Blue Pin. And then, the other significant increase you'll notice is vehicle fueling and lubes and that's because we have the Staff working now to use the vehicles, which last year we did not, so that's why you're seeing a significant increase there. The overall increase, in general, is indicative of having almost fully staffed police department. We are one officer of being fully staffed."

Mr. Sirois – "May I ask how many officers you have now?"

Ms. Powers – "Three."

Mr. Sirois – "Three?"

Ms. Powers – "Plus the two. Well, the third one hasn't started yet, [inaudible]."

Mr. Kilcollins – "So, the budget that proposed is including the three plus the Chief."

Ms. Powers – "Correct. And, actually, for us to have one more."

Mr. Kilcollins – "I think, yeah, that's added in too."

Ms. Powers – "So four, and that is what Council voted on prior to, was the four officers. Chief Cummings is not here, he is at the Academy right now."

Mr. Kilcollins – "Any question on the Police Department?"

Ms. Powers – "Okay, if Council turns to tab six for Highway/Public Works. These numbers reflect the Union Contract that was agreed to for the three-year Contract. And then, the only other, of course paving increase, those costs, fuel costs go up, paving increase goes up as well. The only other, really that's the only significant increase. The other increases that you've seen are because of the real-time costs that are going up for us. Director Hanson is here if want to ask him some questions on what he's seeing for a cost increase."

Director Hanson – "It's hard to compare our last year's budget for this year's budget. Ours is purely driven by inflation. We, we stock up on our pipes. This year's pipes were bought last summer, we'll do the same again this year. We've just got word that our, the culvert increases are 75 percent."

Mr. Kilcollins – "Wow."

Director Hanson – “So, I mean we have some in stock which is a bit of reserve, but that’s just, that’s just one item that we used. We haven’t bought any yet, we’re still shopping around. I assume, because of COVID, one of the major suppliers that we had, [inaudible], they’ve gone out of business. It’s, it’s tough times. Fuel, our cost of fuel in the last two days has gone up 70 per.. 70 cents a gallon. I wish I could get a [inaudible].”

Mr. Kilcollins – “I just talked to somebody that owns and operates his own fuel and gas station and as of 3 o’clock this afternoon he paid, now this is off the tank this is from the truck to him, \$6.29 a gallon for diesel at his facility.”

Director Hanson – “I believe with the budget that I have presented you tonight, Ms. Powers has presented you tonight, that we will still have to curtail services in some way, shape or form by late next winter. And, I’m not excited about that, I can tell you that. Thank you, Council.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you.”

Mrs. Libby – “Yeah, looking at the budget for Public Works, I mean, the biggest increase is just in the, again, the benefits and salaries and stuff like that, which was part of the Union Contract. So, there’s really not much increase in this budget at all, it’s very, very minimal.”

Ms. Powers – “Tab number seven, which is Administration and Potato Blossom Festival. So, really our largest increases, again, are salaries and benefits. And, you’ll also see in there at the bottom, it’s not individual, it’s just so that you understand that, that is also a part of mine, so when you see the Code Enforcement Assessing that, that’s all part of my budget as well with the Administration, but it’s not in addition to the one that you were already presented.”

Mr. Sirois – “The Town Office budget was up 25 percent, is that additional Staff?”

Ms. Powers – “I just, yes, I just said that. That the increases you see are in the Staff and the benefits. The salaries and the benefits.”

Mrs. Libby – “But it’s necessary to have extra staff, especially with the amount that the staff are having to do at this point in time. They’re fielding a lot of calls, a lot of questions on, you know, the budget, and things like that, so they are doing additional. There’s a lot of extra going on that they were not doing before.”

Mr. Sirois – “I beg your pardon; they are not dealing with the budget issues. They’re not dealing with those at all. Andrea deals with those.”

Mrs. Libby – “The Staff still has to deal when people come into the Office, the Staff has to answer questions when people call in, the Staff still has to direct calls to Andrea. There’s a big increase in phone calls and Staff work with them dealing with the controversy that’s been going on over the budget. So, I mean am I incorrect in stating that your workload has increased?”

Ms. Powers – “No, the workload has increased but it’s we should also remember that we’ve been running short staffed for two years.”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay.”

Ms. Powers – “We haven’t had the staff that we should have had for the last two years because we were forced to make cuts and we’re unable to do that and under the current budget that we have we are still able to do that. We stopped some projects in order to be able to better service our citizens because ultimately that’s really what this is about, is the service that is provided to the citizens. There are many times when in the past we have had one clerk out front, and if you’ve ever been in here when it’s busy and it’s, it’s busy a lot, that person can be standing there for four to five hours straight without a break, because it’s customer after customer after customer after customer. So we, yes, we are a small town but we are a very busy, high functioning, small town.”

Ms. Dubois – “I mean, it goes in waves, but.”

Ms. Powers – “I mean, we had Staff who weren’t able to take a vacation for a good year, because we were so short staffed. Any other questions for Admin? Okay, tab eight, which is your Other Expenses and Unclassifieds. Now, does the Council have questions on Other Expenses? We’re looking at insurance, the Community Center, this building here, safety and sanitation, which is a public fire, street lighting, street light repair, AWS, and other. You notice our Workers Comp has skyrocketed. Where we were in 2020 to where we are in 22, this is quite a difference. And these are, these are costs generally that we don’t have a say over. It’s not like we can go in and say well, we’re just going to cut back on unemployment, insurance, liability, the bond, all of those things are costs that are given to us that we must pay, and as those increases come in, we have to make sure that we let Council know what those are.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “I mean, I, I see projected amounts but I’d like to at least let everybody know when it comes to, for instance, building repairs, that’s another subject in itself that we’ve got to start looking at, and I know we’ve been doing a lot of band-aids over the years.”

Ms. Powers – “We have. And, we again, didn’t put in for the roof here at the Community Center, which really needs to be done.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “It’s, there’s a lot of band-aids been done even before Andrea started as Town Manager and it’s, it’s inevitable that there’s expenses in these buildings that we’re, we, we’re not gonna have any choice. Either we got to fund the Reserves, or it’s, it’s, it’s gonna catch us. And, I know some of that already has.”

Ms. Powers – “I mean, at this point, with the cost of fuel and heating oil continuously rising, we, we may not have budgeted correctly, because you cannot predict what type of a winter you’re going to have.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Well, just the difference, Darren if I may? Just the difference today, one day, if you had to, you didn’t have any Reserve, the total gallons of fuel, looking at your Department, Police Department,

all the departments, of a dollar a gallon today, what's that total figure roughly, unexpectedly, in your budget, if you set your budget?"

Director Hanson – "\$35,000 increase."

Mr. Kilcollins – "Increase in one day. I, I, I see there's areas and I know everybody's going to look at and say we need, but there's an inevitable amount that we can't because we're all."

Director Hanson – "Right now, it's gone up \$3 a gallon from where it was this time last year."

Mr. Kilcollins – "But I was just leaving a statement to show in one day, in 24 hours, what fuel can do to your budget."

Director Hanson – "Again, that's without the reserves, right. We talked about last year's budget, what was spent. And, one thing that isn't seen in there, is that last year at this time we had 12,000 gallons of diesel in a tank. Right now, we have about 4. So, just put the dollar [inaudible]."

Mr. Kilcollins – "That's right. Yeah. The difference in that is well."

Director Hanson – "And, I'm not sure if we're going to have the money to fill our tanks at the end of the year like we normally do. There goes part of your Reserve, right there."

Mr. Kilcollins – "Like you normally do. That's right, that's right."

Ms. Powers – "The cost is so much."

Mr. Pelletier – "Andrea, is that Workers Comp rate as high as it is because of incident rates, or is it just is it?"

Ms. Powers – "Ella does the Workers Comp."

Mr. Pelletier – "Oh Ella, I'm sorry. Our Workers Comp rate is it as high as it is because of our incident rate or is it just been going up?"

Ms. Leighton – "It's because of our incident rate. We've had people out on Workers Comp for over a year."

Ms. Powers – "Yes."

Mr. Pelletier – "You know what our Mod rate is right now?"

Ms. Leighton – "I, I don't really, no [inaudible]."

Mr. Pelletier – "Okay, it's a lot of money."

Mrs. Libby – “Are there programs that the town can participate in for different safety?”

Ms. Powers – “We do.”

Ms. Leighton – “We do.”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay, so there’s no other things that we can do. We’re doing what we should be doing.”

Mr. Pelletier – “And that does help.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yeah, it does.”

Ms. Leighton – “We had actually questioned some of the Workers Comp that has been approved, and it didn’t get us anywhere. Correct?”

Ms. Powers – “That’s right.”

Ms. Leighton – “Because, there was one in particular that we did not feel should have been paid. But, they make the final decision, we don’t.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yeah, they make the final decision.”

Mr. Pelletier – “Good luck with that one. [inaudible]”

Ms. Leighton – “We do keep close tabs on it. We question everything, but the bottom line is what they decide to pay.”

Ms. Powers – “And then the next page, the Unclassifieds. This top section, the outside agencies, this, we do have control over. However, I caution Council, these are entities that we actually work very closely with and have citizens that are benefited by all of these agencies. And then our other costs, at the bottom, again, you’ll notice in there; County Tax, Maine Municipal Association, The Meadows, Northern Maine Development Commission, SAD 20, State Group Insurance and TAN Interest.”

Mrs. Libby – “So, we discussed with the School Department at all if there’s going to be any relief offered since they’ve received large amounts of funding this year.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Course they have.”

Ms. Powers – “I have not received any information [inaudible].”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay, so in order to address that, would you, would, should we go to the meetings for that, or is that something that you can reach out on behalf of the Town, which”

Ms. Powers – “I absolutely can and have reached out, I’m just waiting to hear back.”

Mrs. Libby – “And when did you last reach out on that?”

Ms. Powers – “We Discussed before the Department Head Budget Presentations.”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay.”

Ms. Powers – “And they weren’t ready yet to give us [inaudible].”

Mrs. Libby – “Can you follow up and CC the Council, please?”

Ms. Powers – “Yes, I will.”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay, thank you.”

Ms. Powers – “Any other questions on the Other Classifieds?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Nope. We’re good.”

Ms. Powers – “Okay, this section on the Reserve Accounts, this is where I would suggest you put in the year-to-date behind the information on the Reserve Accounts. Council have any questions on those?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “What number’s that?”

Ms. Powers – “Number nine, tab number nine and then the information that I gave you, the General Ledger. This one here, the handout, the General Ledger.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Oh, okay. Got it. Yep.”

Ms. Powers – “One of the ones I can point out to you is the Paving Reserves. If you notice, that’s only at \$225,083.93, which really doesn’t get us anywhere we wanted to be at this point, moving forward, again the Pandemic put a stop to the direction that we were heading with the Paving Reserves at the 2020/2021 Budget and again, last year, with 21/22 Budget. But, we really, that’s a, not even a quarter of a million dollars and to pave a mile of road?”

Director Hanson – “A hundred thousand, shim, pave, a hundred thousand.”

Ms. Powers – “And, we have some roads that are in need of complete repair.”

Director Hanson – “It’s all of our roads that are in need of complete repair.”

Ms. Powers – “Well, but there are some that are in need of [inaudible]”

Director Hanson – “At a minimum, you know, we need a shim and an overlay to get 10 years out of our roads. I don’t think anybody here has gone down a Town road whose been happy with the condition of it, I’m not happy with the condition of it.”

Ms. Powers – “We just don’t have the budget.”

Mr. Butler – “The cost of the road will go up with the cost of fuel.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Oh, yeah.”

Director Hanson – “Again, the, the paving, had we stuck with this original plan, the paving that we would have done, a million dollars worth of paving three years ago, would have cost us \$68 a ton, it’s somewhere over a hundred dollars a ton now.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Double.”

Director Hanson – “I’m sure we’re going to see prices up to \$125, so that’s the difference, what, what you’re gonna get out of that million dollars. so every, everyday, every minute, every week, every year that we put this off, it’s costing us more money. And, the shape of the roads is deteriorating, it’s just getting worse, and that costs you more as well. You know, the worse the road gets, the more the shoulders lay over, because, you know, the water draining.”

Mr. Pelletier – “Our roads have gotten to the point they’re actually getting dangerous.”

Director Hanson – “I agree, Sir. I agree. But, we can’t do anything about it beyond what we’re doing without funds.”

Mr. Pelletier – “I know.”

Director Hanson – “I, I wish there was a magic bullet that could fix it all, but there is not. We put in for other grant monies and we’re really, really hoping for that. But the scope of those is narrow, it will be on flood areas where we can raise the road and that will be full base construction the whole deal, which will make that a very nice section of road, but it’s limited where we’ll be able to use those funds. It’ll basically be Riverside and Russell. If we’re awarded these funds. There’s no guarantees.”

Many people talking [inaudible]

Ms. Powers – “I’ve also put in for, from McShea Siding Bridge down Presque Isle Street, through the light to Main Street to Sam Everett Road, including sidewalks and retaining walls. [inaudible] budget.”

Director Hanson – “I’d like to commend the Town Manager on that. That, that is not a Town road but is has become a safety issue over the last few years, and, and there’s just nothing being done about it and she’s trying to do something about it. That won’t be us doing the work, but she’s trying to find the funds to make it happen. Thank you.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you, Darren.”

Ms. Powers – “Any other questions on the Reserves? Okay, so, if you go to the Consolidated Expenses. Does Council have any questions on any of the Departments Consolidated Expenses, their final lines? So these, the numbers that you’re seeing here under Consolidated Expenses, the highlighted number for each of the Department it does not, it should not include the Reserve Account because we have a total Reserve Account on the other, the second page. So, for the Library, you’ll see that her Reserve Accounts includes the cost of the slate roof for the historical part of the building, as well as her regular Reserve Account number and then her number for the Library without the Reserves. If that helps you read that. Did Council have any questions on the Potato Blossom Festival. This is our 75th Anniversary, so you do see a difference in the operations, simply because it’s our 75th. I anticipate that it’s a one-time cost for a lot of those things. And, again, through the Pandemic, things were taken out of the Festival that we normally would have had in there, so we put back in this year. And, so, these Consolidated Expenses are compilation of the final costs that are being presented to Council throughout each individual budget and this just compiles it all together for you, so you have it all. [inaudible] And, just a reminder that, that grand total that you’re seeing at the bottom, you will need to subtract the School and the County Tax to get to the number that I gave you earlier, so that you have the municipal cost versus the, the total number that you’re seeing there, for the, the total budget.”

Mr. Butler – “So, MSAD, the \$2,140,000, that’s figured into the total expenditures in Excess Deficit, that, that’s counted that school.”

Ms. Powers – “That total, grand total that you see, and the Excess Deficit is all included. So, the grand total that you see \$8,345,135, that includes the School and the County Tax, so we can remove those two from there to get that number.”

Mr. Butler – “So, remove the 277 and the 2.1 million dollars then that would be off, be off the eight million, right? So it’s not really, we’re not two million dollars in the hole on this budget.”

Ms. Powers – “Well, the municipality is, because we, we have to pay for whatever they give us for a bill.”

Mr. Butler – “For the School.”

Ms. Powers – “And, again, they have revenues that they also bring in to cover their costs, and then, the bill that we get is in addition to. So, for us, the bill that, that, if we were just doing the Municipality, and didn’t have to School or the County Tax. So if you take the County Tax out and you take the School, you would have the \$5,925,040.00 that I was talking about earlier when we first started. And that’s what we are asking for as a Municipality in order to provide the services that we provide for our citizens. And, if you take our income, which is the \$6,325,908 and you subtract what we are asking for which is the \$5925,540.00, you actually have an overlay of \$400,368.”

Mr. Sirois – “Yeah, but you still have to pay the School and the County Tax. It’s coming out of the Revenue.”

Ms. Powers – “I just said that. Yup, I literally just said that.”

Mr. Sirois – “It’s still coming out. I don’t care how you slice it, we’ve got to pay for it. So, take it out all you want to. But it’s there. It’s a bill. You gotta pay it”

Mr. Butler – “It is a bill we have to pay, but the, the, the thing is 50, 58 of our 58% of the taxes that I pay, go to the School, which I don’t receive”

Mr. Sirois – “I argued with that point with you before. It’s not true, because there’s other revenue in the Town, like Excise Tax which you’re not even counting.”

Ms. Powers – “The Excise is in the, it’s right on the income page.”

Mr. Sirois – “I know, but it’s not on the Tax Bill. The Tax Bill doesn’t show that.”

Mr. Butler – “So the Tax Bill shows where you’re, where the money the taxes you pay, where it’s distributed and that’s what your Tax Bill showed, that 58% of my tax bill went to the School last year.”

Mr. Sirois – “I understand that.”

Mr. Butler – “And, and, and less than that went to the Town.”

Mr. Sirois – “It’s deceiving though.”

Mr. Butler – “It’s not deceiving, Gary, when I’m paying more taxes to the School and you, and you’re saying that the Municipal spending money hand over fist, but I’m paying twice as much for the School that I don’t use.”

Mr. Sirois – “I didn’t say that. I’m not saying that. All I’m saying is that the Municipal Budget this year is proposed to be \$2 million short. \$2 million.”

Ms. Powers – “Not the Municipal Budget.”

Mr. Sirois – “Not Municipal, Total Budget. But you’ve got to pay the Tax for the County, you’ve got to pay the School, so it’s part of your budget, it’s gotta be part of your budget.”

Mrs. Libby – “So, but are we also going to be going to the School and talking about these things?”

Mr. Sirois – “Have you been to the School to talk to them about that?”

Mrs. Libby – “Have you? I’m just asking, because everyone is on the Town and on the Department Heads, but has anybody gone to the School? Do you guys sit at the School meetings and do this? Okay, then, good.”

Mr. Sirois – “You guys are responsible for the budget. You guys are responsible, why don’t all five of you go down to the School Budgets.”

Mrs. Libby – “Why doesn’t everyone who’s concerned go, just like you’re coming here?”

Mr. Sirois – “I have. I have.”

Mrs. Libby – “Okay, good. And that’s what we should be doing.”

Mr. Sirois – “I’m sitting there all alone with all school teachers and administrators and I’m the only one asking questions. You five have a responsibility for this community.”

Ms. Powers – “I was there, as well as Councilor Butler was there, Mr. Towle was there, the same meeting that you were at.”

Mrs. Libby – “And that’s good. And we should continue to do that.”

Mr. Sirois – “We need to.”

Mrs. Libby – “Yes. So, it’s good to do that, I agree.”

Deputy Chief Fenderson – “Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to touch on something we just discussed, things we need to pay. By law, you are required to fund Fire Protection. By the end of this Legislature cycle you will be required, by law, to provide ambulance service, required by law. Some of our expenses in our Department’s line item, whether we’re here as an active department or not, you will still have those expenses. So, I just wanted to comment on those when we’re talking about things that we have to pay. It’s important life safety property, it’s very frustrating for everyone, all of the Town employees to deal with this constantly. Thank you.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you.”

Ms. Powers – “Any more questions on Consolidated Expenses? Turn to tab eleven, that is our Consolidated Income. And, we have gotten as close to these numbers as we possibly can with the known numbers that we have, keeping in mind, we are still waiting to hear from billing on the Fire Department [inaudible], so we’re just going with the same number from last year. The excise, pretty spot on, every year for the last four years.”

Mr. Sirois – “Last actual year \$699,000 excise tax.”

Ms. Powers – “And then cable franchise fees. That’s the number that we are given, we don’t have really much on that, they give us an income of that amount.”

Mr. Sirois – “I’m wasting my time here.”

Ms. Powers – “And then, if you look further down, for local roads assistance, that is given to us as well, from the State. And then, the PILOTs, that’s the agreements that we have with the Fort Fairfield Housing Authority. The only one that really has not been significantly addressed and has remained a PILOT, which is a Payment In Lieu Of Taxes, in case any of the Councilors are unaware of that, is AWS. And, since our reveal I feel like it would be significant to ask them for an increase in the Payment In Lieu Of Taxes. Do you recall any increase at all from the 10,000?”

Mr. Levesque – “Not in 25 years. Before they became this type of economic venue that they are now, it was a Coordinate Discussion on how much services they were requiring from the Town and how much value they had in the property. That’s significantly changed, and it’s coming up on an annual basis that we can renegotiate because the agreement is antiquated.”

Ms. Powers – “So, if Council would allow me to renegotiate that, I have a meeting with AWS tomorrow, I can bring it up.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “I would like that.”

Ms. Powers – “And then if you turn the page over. The rent income has increased from last year to this year, due to the availability of our programming, significantly. We’re looking at \$5,100 more on income from the Rec Department. Municipal Revenue Sharing, that is a number that is given to us by the State, do not hold fast to that number, as I warned you before, that number changes significantly in August and September. So, that’s where we’re at, at this point in time, but that does not mean that, that number is going to hold true. This is the part where we have to project what we will be receiving and their formulas change based on the revenue that they receive versus what they give for Revenue Sharing for the Municipalities. And that’s, there’s a whole formula that is based on our Town valuation versus what they receive versus how that gets distributed to each of the Municipalities. So, as of right now, that is the number that the State has posted that we will be receiving. And if, that may change before the next Public Budget Hearing, that may change before the next budget vote in June, but, and we will produce that number to the best of our abilities, with what they give us, but I can’t guarantee what that number will end up being. Any questions on the income side?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Not here.”

Ms. Powers – “Okay, Capital Improvement Planning, again this is the information for Council. This is traditionally, has been very reactive, you use your Reserves as your Capital Improvement Planning, and if Council is comfortable with that, then that’s where we’ll leave that for this year. I have lots of projects I can present to you, but I don’t think this is the year to do it.”

Mrs. Libby – “Unfortunately, I don’t think that we have much choice on that, so.”

Ms. Powers – “I think we started out in 2019’s budget year 2019/2020 with our investments and really helping move a lot of projects forward with that fiscal year. And, thankfully we did, because that’s what really helped us when the pandemic hit and we were able to not lose any services, we didn’t have to lay anyone off, it worked very well for us. So, it is a good example for us to go back to and research when we

are in a position where we can do that. And, then of course, these are just the postings for the two of our Public Budget Hearings, that's information ready for you. And then pages at the end. So, I will, I know everyone's, everyone wants to talk about the Mil Rate, right? That's what everybody's most interested in, and, honestly, for me, the Mil Rate is one of the last things that I deal with because you don't really do that until September. And, for me the Budget starts in November, once we receive the Audit the next fiscal year budget begins. So, I don't really worry about the Mil Rate, I guess I don't want to say worry, but I don't really have enabling of what the Mil Rate will be. Just because we don't get those numbers. And, we currently are still working off last year's values, because the finalization of the new reval has not been completed."

Mr. Levesque – "Right."

Ms. Powers – "We are still working through that process of the new information we have, but I will tell you, if you're looking at comparing where your Mil Rate amount goes, for this particular fiscal year, the 19 and a half Mil Rate, 1.44 of that Mil goes towards the County Tax, 11.52 of the 19.5 Mil Rate goes towards the School and 6.54 of your Mil Rate goes towards the Municipal Budget, so percentage is easier for some and some prefer to hear where the number of the Mil is going. But 1.44 Mils worked out to \$267,563. So, the statement that it's going to be 31 Mils. I mean just based off of those numbers, it'd be more like 26 Mils."

Mr. Towle – "I just have a question, if I could. What is the Town's Valuation? Is that a Tony question?"

Ms. Powers – "1850..am I close?"

Mr. Levesque – "185 million."

Ms. Powers – "185 million. Thank you."

Mr. Towle – "Thank you."

Ms. Powers – "So, I'm hearing Council would like us to re-look at our budgets, re-value what it is we would like to accomplish this year, given the inflation rates, cost of living is now at 8.5 percent, but they're looking at true value numbers at 17 percent. So, that's why when you go to get groceries, the \$300 that you spent for groceries for a full cart of groceries is not even a third of your cart anymore. So that's something that we have to keep in mind as well, so we will and it is not something we are unaccustomed to. We are very, I don't want to say happy, but we're ready to do the job and we will do it, so. Remember that next Thursday is the Second Public Budget Hearing at 6 pm here in the Council Chambers and any questions, comments, concerns can be brought to the Town Manager's Office prior to for discussion with Council. Don't forget Council you received an email from a citizen that they wanted you to take a look at in the information that I handed out to you when you received your information."

Mr. Kilcollins – "Tammy, did you have something to add?"

Mrs. Deschesne – “Tammy Deschesne. Been a resident in Fort for eight years, business owner for 14. I’d just like clarification. When the Department Heads do their budget, they have to try to figure out what the cost is going to be for fuel for the year coming, they have, and, and health insurance, if anything increases they have to put that in their budget to be passed for the next year?”

Ms. Powers – “Yes. So, when we get the information, we reach out and find out what these costs are going to be and as we get that information, we put that into the budget for the Council, for them to take a look at and decide what they want to do with that budget that’s presented. So we present, they present to me, I kick it back to them and we go back and forth for several months over their budgets, and then we have the Department Head Budget Presentation in March and then we have the First Public Budget Hearing in April, Second Public Budget Hearing in May, and then June Council Meeting is the Budget Vote. So, we have a, that’s the final one.

Mrs. Deschesne – “So, that’s the most difficult thing to do for the Department Heads in this Town is to figure increases that may come up.”

Ms. Powers – “That’s right. We have to project what those increases will be.”

Mrs. Deschesne – “Okay. Thank you.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Thank you, Tammy.”

Mr. Dorsey – “Robert? Question. Back on ReEnergy. Have we considered hiring a large firm, law firm that would take us on a contingency basis so we wouldn’t have any out of pocket expenses and maybe get some settlement out of this?”

Ms. Powers – “I can find that out. We’ve worked with our Town Attorney, who”

Mr. Dorsey – “Yeah, but that’s a different league.”

Ms. Powers – “Yep. Who worked very diligently to try to get our 2019 taxes back for us, but was unsuccessful. We are not the only community that was unsuccessful. But Council’s wishes, we can discuss?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Yes. I, I would, I would entertain that if we could forward some business plan on that to see if in fact there’s any hope.”

Mrs. Libby – “I’d say it certainly doesn’t hurt to try.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “That’s right. That’s right.”

Mr. Sirois – “If I, if I may? The Annual Report for the Town shows uncollected taxes of much less than what ReEnergy owes. Where does that ReEnergy figure come in?”

Ms. Leighton – “Under the Liens.”

Ms. Powers – “Under Liens.”

Mr. Sirois – “It’s uncollected taxes.”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Well it is at this time.”

Mr. Dorsey – “It shows, Gary, though, it shows the \$460,184 but there’s going to be some kind of a credit in there that reduces it.”

Ms. Powers – “Any other questions, Councilors?”

Mr. Kilcollins – “Nope, nope, we’re fine. And I want to thank everybody for coming in. I know it’s a lot of information in a short period of time, but hopefully what you have for literature, you can review and we’ll meet next time and maybe more of it will make more sense, but I thank you.

Public Hearing Adjourned at 7:35 PM