

**Buckland Finance Committee Minutes
February 12, 2018**

Meeting called to order at Buckland Town Hall 5:35 pm

Committee Members present: Karen Blom, Larry Langford, Bill Knittle

Other present: Andrea Llamas, Dena Willmore – Select board member (BOS)

Senior Center budget presentation – present: Cathy Buntin, Ellen Ellers, Donna Liebl and Sylvia Smith

The Sr Ctr capital request was discussed and the finance committee stated it wasn't likely to be funded this year. The building expansion committee will be meeting on Feb. 22nd to discuss the status of sites.

Ben Murray arrives at 5:50 pm

Sr Ctr operating budget is up slightly due to health insurance increases. Another small increase is in substitute hours to cover the front desk when other staff not available. It was stated that the center uses 25,000 volunteer hours per year.

COA reps leave at 6 pm

Minutes from Feb 5th meeting were reviewed. Larry moved that they be amended to say "Police HVAC" not Town Hall HVAC. Ben seconded, amendment passed unanimously. Ben moved to accept the minutes as amended, Larry seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Budget Discussion

The budget is in a tough spot again this year. How long can we keep cutting and kicking the can down the road before it catches up with us? We are still above the levy limit by about \$2000 according to our latest budget sheets and there's no COLA or stabilization funds included. Discussed what a COLA would cost – 2.5% would be about \$24,000. BOS likely to recommend this. We have to pay towards TS Irene's debt and pay it off by 2020. MEMA reimbursement for \$550,000 could come with a supplemental appropriations bill that's coming up later this year. This amount would pay off our remaining loan with any remaining funds be used for stabilization.

Zach Turner, Select board member (BOS) arrives at 6:14 pm

Finance Committee members asked BOS to consider cutting operations, using stabilization funds and/or an override to balance the budget. We've cut all capital requests and suggested a few reductions in operating lines. There was some discussion that if we want to keep the town the way it is or improve it, we have to pay for it with increased taxes since our other revenue sources are flat. Or we could downsize and cut operating budgets by 5% to balance the budget. Can we use stabilization funds to cover some of our TS Irene debt this year?

The option of an override was discussed. We haven't had one in a number of years. Should there be one big request with funds to help a few years out or would 3 consecutive smaller amounts over several years be easier to pass. What's the tax impact? There was discussion of what to use the override for – school or town budget. In order to figure out an override amount we should project our budget for 3 years out. Any override needs a majority vote of the BOS, a ballot vote and town meeting vote.

Every year we bring a balanced budget, albeit with small tax increases to town meeting and it passes. Residents don't understand how we get there and why. The memo is our only communications tool. It was suggested that we hold a public hearing on the state of our budget in March to get a sense of what residents prefer. A public meeting of what to cut or not could get very divisive. We agreed that this would not be good use of limited time. Instead we'll work on revising the memo and getting it out press as early as possible (mid-April) before town meeting.

It was the consensus of the Finance Committee to recommend to BOS a multi-prong solution to the budget so that all areas of the town feel the pinch. Karen and Larry will attend the BOS meeting on 2/13/18 and bring this recommendation.

Motion to adjourn made by Larry, seconded by Bill, unanimously approved. Adjourned at 7:03 pm. Several members planned to attend the School Budget public presentation at 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Blom