

**Town of Pownal
Select Board Minutes
Monday, March 11, 2024
6:00 pm Regular Meeting**

I. Call to Order by Chair Morris at 6:00 pm.

Members: Jon Morris, Andy O'Brien, Kate Day

Town Administrator: Becky Taylor-Chase

Fire Chief: Jesse Peters

Road Commissioner: Matt Nielsen

Budget Committee: Bo Chesney, Donna Watson, Gennifer Giuliano, Matt Roy

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Accounts Payable Warrant & Payroll Journal

- **FY24 AP Warrant #20 in the amount of \$61,410.22.**

Selectperson O'Brien motioned to approve FY24 AP Warrant #20 in the amount of \$61,410.22.

Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

- **Payroll Journal #358 in the amount of \$8,828.14.**

Selectperson O'Brien motioned to approve Payroll Journal #358 in the amount of \$8,828.14.

Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 3

IV. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- **February 22, 2024 Executive Session**

Selectperson O'Brien motioned to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2024 Executive Session as written. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

- **February 26, 2024 Regular Meeting**

Selectperson O'Brien motioned to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2024 Regular Meeting as written. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

V. Public Comment – Non- Agenda Items

None

VI. Department Head Reports

(Department head reports can be viewed on their respective website page(s))

- Select Board

Nothing new to report.

VII. New Business

Budget Presentations: Public Safety, Solid Waste, CIP, Compensation, Revenues, Both committees received budget spread sheets in advance of planned presentations. Chair Chesney also provided the Budget Committee with a summary presentation and workbook from the CIP committee. The budget presentation portion of the joint meeting began at approximately 6:05 pm.

Fire Department

Chief Jesse Peters reviewed each line of the budget, explaining variances and pausing for questions and discussion, as needed. In summary, the budget request for 2025 is \$184,839 up \$18,337 (11%). Chief Peters reported the good news that the number fire department volunteers has grown substantially in the last year – as a result, the primary driver of overall budget increases is coming from compensation and the need to purchase additional and replacement protective gear.

- Public Safety– Dispatch 3-year contract cost reflects basic annual cost increase. This will be renegotiated soon. EMS increase is a function of cost and call volume increase which was up in 2024. *No changes were recommended.*
- Administration – Computer cost for 2025 will be licensing and maintenance only, so this line item is down 40% over last year when the new software was purchased. Chair Chesney asked what the Insurance line covers. Chief Peters said it covered disability. He also commented that they had compared pricing with what is available from Maine Municipal but the cost was higher. *No changes were recommended.*
- Compensation – Chief Peters shared that he has added more officers which allows him to redistributed officer duties and keep the net increase in Officer Stipends line at 3%. The Chief Stipend is budgeted at 5% in line with COLA and merit percentages used for all other positions. Chair Morris added that expanding the number of officers is allowing the senior people to teach and train newer officers. All other compensation increases were anticipated and are generally related to COLA/merit and the increase in volunteers. Chair Chesney asked if this was the correct place to list mileage reimbursement. Ms. Taylor-Chase said that this is consistent. *No changes were recommended.*
- Buildings –Increase in Town Expense Rent reflects what the church expects to pay in taxes they charge the fire department for use of the land. Increases across utilities is estimated. Chief Peters did say that recently electricity bills were lower. Chair Chesney commented that the reduction was likely because the state’s “standard rate” was recently reduced. *No changes were recommended.*
- Operations –
 - Apparatus Maintenance and Communications lines are flat to 2024.
 - Equipment Maintenance, which Chief Peters noted is for materials only, is up slightly related to costs of extinguisher servicing. Chair Chesney pointed out that the budget for

Dry Hydrants has not been spent in past years. Chief Peters said he did expect to have expense this year related to a dry hydrant project on Poland Range Road.

- Fuel costs reflect increasing diesel costs.
- Training costs are up by only \$300. Chair Chesney asked if enough was being budgeted considering the increase in volunteers. Chief Peters said he believe it was since the department delivers most of the training directly which means the increase expense of training is reflected in compensation.
- Health and Safety includes an increase of \$10,000 in FF/EMS Protective gear in order to support the expanded number of volunteers and to replace worn out exiting gear. Chair Chesney asked if the Town could use ARPA funds. Chief Peters and Ms. Taylor-Chase answered that no more ARPA funds are available.
- New Equipment/Supplies line is down slightly.

No changes were recommended.

Chief Peters was thanked for his detailed presentation and his thoughtful management of the budget.

Solid Waste

Heidi Richards, Chair of the Solid Waste Committee presented Expenses and Revenue. In summary, the Town will face a net increase in cost of approximately \$48,700 with an estimated \$42,000 driven by Casella's requirement that the Town transition to a new two bin system this summer (*increase in solid waste hauling (-) cost of bags (+) lost revenue from bags*). There will also be an estimated \$5000 plus increase in Ecomaine tipping fees.

Chair Richards shared feedback received from the company ZeroWaste - they reported that referencing the town of Sanford as an example, Pownal may experience that the bigger bins lead to more waste. Chair Richards asked if the Town should try to estimate and plan for that. After some discussion, Chair Chesney recommended that it is probably not worthwhile to attempt to estimate based on the example given, and we will learn in the first year and adjust moving forward.

Chair Richards also reported that based on the research she has done and especially in looking at the town of Falmouth there will need to be considerable effort made to educate the community on the right way to manage the bins. She noted that Falmouth's town website provides substantial information to town residents. Chair Richards asked if, given that the Town's website does not have space to expand, would it be a good idea for the Town to pay for a small separate domain. Mr. Roy asked about best practices and plans for educating the town. There was some discussion with concerns raised about how best to do this with the transition approaching so quickly. Chair Chesney asked if Casella was offering help. Both Ms. Taylor-Chase and Ms. Richards expressed concern that Casella is not being responsive. Chair Morris explained that the change will be discussed in detail at a public hearing and that the Town intended to use Facebook to give residents access to the information they need. Chair Richards adds that there is a plan to have bins and examples of how to use them at the Pownal Community Day.

Shane Brady asked if there was an option to not use and therefore not pay for the bins. Ms. Taylor-Chase explained that even if the bins were not used, the expense of the bins will be distributed and paid by all through taxes. Later in the meeting, Jan Pieter van Voorst van Beest shared that his experience in Old Orchard Beach was that the bins come with pictures and instructions, and that if residents do not follow those instructions the bins are not picked up.

Chair Richards made a request for more volunteers to join the committee - which will be down to only 2 members – with so much important work to be done.

In further discussion, Chair Morris pointed out that the new two bin system is substantially different from the pay as you throw bags in that the expense is shared equally for not equal usage. Mr. Roy asked if Falmouth was still requiring bags usage. Chair Richards pointed out that each town is different and may have reason for wanting to continue the require PAYT bags, for example, some have been earning excess revenue from bags compared to Pownal where the cost of bags is set to generate only the revenue needed to offset the cost.

Chair Chesney asked if there will be a requirement that garbage placed in bins must still be in some sort of bags? Chair Richards will investigate what other towns require. Chair Chesney expressed concern that without a clear requirement for bags, the town could face an issue with loose trash on roads and property and suggested that the town consider requiring bags.

Chair Chesney pointed next to the logistics of the town meeting. Specifically that the warrant and vote to repeal the use of PAYT will come before the budget is voted on – so, in that case, it might make sense to keep the expense of the PAYT bags in the budget and then amend the budget before it is voted on provided that the PAYT provision is repealed, as expected. Later in the meeting, Chair Chesney further recommended that it may be best to exclude the PAYT revenue from the budget. Again, this is with the assumption that the requirement for PAYT will be repealed and so there will be no revenue. Chair Richards agreed. In summary, the suggestion on how to represent PAYT in the budget is to include the expense and exclude the revenue as a conservative approach that likely minimizes the need to make changes during the town meeting that negatively impact the budget.

Capital Improvement Planning Committee (CIP)

Paul Schumann, Chair of the CIP committee presented the capital investment plan. Please see the *Budget Committee Presentation, March 11, 2024*, that accompany these minutes. In summary, the CIP Committee is recommending that the Town appropriate \$155,000 in 2025 up from \$144,000 the prior year. Chair Schumann also emphasized that the committee is presenting a proposal for Year 1 (2025) with more analysis and work needed in order to reach a confident projection for Years 2-5 including assumptions for inflation rate and capital spending vs. tax commitment.

- Capital Investment Plan and Major Assumptions – Please see the accompanying presentation pages 2-3 for an overview of the overall approach and assumptions the CIP committee uses to provide guidance and recommendations based on a 20 year forward look. The purpose of the CIP plan is to enable the Town to plan for and ensure that funds reserved on an annual basis are sufficient to cover future capital needs, and to accomplish that in a way to smooth out the financial impact over time and protects the town from facing extraordinary spikes in uncovered capital expense and the related taxation impacts.
- Current Plan Highlights and Concerns - Please see the accompanying presentation pages 4-5. Chair Schumann highlighted the following:
 - Upgrade Excavator - will need to be done in 2027 at an estimated cost of \$236,000
 - Add Flail mower attachment – also in 2027 at a cost of \$34,000, which will be off-set by the savings of no longer contracting out for this service.

- Truck 2 – will need to be replaced in 2025, two years early based on wear - at a cost of \$268,000.
 - Diesel engine regulations – cost and timing is not yet clear but is inevitable.
 - Grant from Cumberland County for communications for \$62,719 which we expense and are then reimbursed.
 - Inflation rate – the committee is using 6% for 2025, but more analysis is needed to better project future years
- Items Under Review – the committee has also provided a list of potential expenses that are not currently in the plan should be considered and planned for as either Capital or Operations expense. *Please see the accompanying presentation page 6.* Chair Schumann commented that there needs to be more discussion with the Select Board on how best to plan and manage the budgets for Capital and Operating expense – they could be kept separate or blended with projections managed together.
 - FY25 Expenditures - are expected to include the following. *Please also see page 7 in the accompanying presentation.*
 - Public Safety: Air Packs - \$109,549, Communications \$26,312, Repeater System \$27,400
 - Public Works: Truck 2 replacement \$268,000

Chair Chesney asked for clarification on the air packs expense. Chief Peters explained that maintenance is included in the Public Safety budget and replacement cost is the expense above. Chair Chesney also clarified that any expense under \$300,000 is not bondable. Chair Schumann confirmed.

- FY25 Appropriation – *Please see pages 8-9 in the accompanying presentation.* The CIP committee recommends and appropriation of \$155,000 in 2025. Chair Schumann also emphasized that the committee is presenting a proposal for Year 1 (2025), however, the committee has more analysis and work to complete in order to reach a confident projection for Years 2-5.
- Appropriations vs. Tax Commitment – *Please see page 10 of the accompanying presentation.* Chair Schumann presented a chart showing a 20 year look forward for individual and combine expense of capital projects and debt service projecting the % of tax commitment spending. He commented that in historical years it has been 3%-4% of the tax commitment, however the analysis is showing that percentage dropping lower in future years which indicates that the town may not be spending enough – so more analysis needs to be done.
- In further discussion, Chair Chesney asked about the best way to estimate costs for future engines considering that the technology is not fully developed yet. Mr. Nielsen and Chair Schumann commented that today they use current costs plus inflation while trying to stay on top of how the technology and cost are changing. Also, Chair Morris shared that the Select Board will be considering if there is an opportunity to transfer a portion of the Unassigned Fund balance to support the CIP plan as has been done in some prior years. They will know by the end of March.

Compensation

Becky Taylor-Chase reviewed each line of the budget, explaining variances and pausing for questions and discussion, as needed. She explained that the approach for budgeting salaries/hourly pay was based on a 3% cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) and a potential additional 2% performance related increase for a base assumption of a maximum of 5%.

- General Government - Any variance from the approach above was explained. Increases in FICA and Medicare align with changes in compensation. 2025 includes the full year salary plus annual increase for the new Town Planner. Chair Chesney offered the reminder that the town planner position is offset by savings from no longer NorthStar. The Stipend Assessor line item reflects an increase of \$100 more per month for services. -Ms. Taylor-Chase is recommending the addition of an IT position for 10 hours a week at \$21.00 per hour. Mr. Schmidt commented that this rate was more of a “student” rate and that the Town might consider fewer hours but at a high “professional” rate to attract better talent. Chair Chesney asked if this person would do both design and maintenance. Ms. Taylor-Chase said that she would be looking for a person with good basic knowledge who could help make good decisions on how the current sight could be improved. The mileage rate is \$0.67 and this line includes the cost of attending local professional conferences. The new FMLA requirement is included for the first time and covers all departments. It was noted that the Budget Committee will make a recommendation on the stipend for the Select Board. *No changes were recommended.*
- Public Works – Any variance from the approach above was explained. Increases in FICA and Medicare align with changes in compensation. Mr. Nielsen highlighted that the PW Highway 4 position has been upgraded/promoted to a PW Mechanic. He is also requesting the addition of a PT Position for an average of 20 hrs. per week (will vary by week) to provide more consistent coverage when members of the crew take paid time off. Mr. Nielsen commented that the Select Board was supportive. Chair Chesney asked if pay levels were competitive. Mr. Nielsen commented that he monitors that and generally the overall compensation is competitive especially when factoring in benefits, which are generally better in Pownal. Chair Chesney further commented that an analysis is equally important for the Road Commissioner position which is salary vs. hourly. Chair Morris offered assurance that the Select Board does that kind of monitoring. Ms. Watson asked if the Road Commissioner receives comp-time for hours worked over standard. Mr. Nielsen answered that he does not. Ms. Richards asked if the town tracks how much time is worked by the Road Commissioner. Ms. Taylor-Chase said that yes, that all hours for all positions are carefully tracked. Chair Chesney commented that the Town should look into what may be new rule on how excessive hours worked by salaried employees must be handled. Chair Morris commented that the Select Board appreciates the concern and does carefully track hours worked by Mr. Nielsen to be sure they are not excessive. Ms. Watson asked how the Select Board was evaluating salary levels for all major town positions. Selectperson O’Brien commented that they had done a full analysis looking at surrounding towns not based on size but on proximity and that had result in salary changes made last year through a 7% COLA. *No changes were recommended.*
- Fire Department – Becky Taylor-Chase reminded all that this section was covered in Chief Peters earlier presentation.
- Human Services – *No changes were recommended.*

Revenues

Becky Taylor-Chase reviewed each line of the budget, explaining variances and pausing for questions and discussion, as needed. She highlighted that Excise revenue reflects current trends, Revenue Sharing is expected to be down, and Homestead and Veterans revenue reflect current trends. Ms. Taylor-Chase also pointed to the significant increase in checking account interest earned and that she will closely monitor that as time goes on. *No changes were recommended.*

In further discussion, Ms. Watson asked if there would be any expense implication to the Town from the change in Maine state license plates. Ms. Taylor Chase responded that the impact would in in staff time needed to manage issuing the replacement plates which will be done by towns vs. prior years when replacements were issued by the state. Chair Chesney asked in checking account interest on CIP accounts is accounted for in the model. Mr. Schumann responded that they do a projection and then add actuals once known.

The budget presentation portion of the meeting concluded at approximately 8:50 pm.

- **Economic Development & Sustainability Committee Request**

Paul Schumann spoke about the committee's work and felt a high priority item was to study the potential water supply to the village. We have secured a grant to help with this work so they will most likely ask for carry forward money from the current fiscal year.

- **Real Estate Requests Forms, Shane Brady: M6, L2;**

Both the Assessor and mapping company, View Shed, researched the property and they both concluded that it is a mapping error, and the parcel is not town owned. The lot does not exist in TRIO and should be part of the lot next to it, which is lot 8. Chair Morris stated the Select Board will need to motion to correct this and then go to the assessing agent and mapping company for correction. Selectperson O'Brien motioned that we delete map 6 lot 2 from the Town's tax map as a mapping error based on the recommendations of both our mapping company and town assessor, correction assessor's agent. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

Chair Morris stated that any fees paid by Mr. Brady should be remitted back. Selectperson O'Brien motioned that we remit any fees paid by Mr. Shane Brady and deny the claim as the lot does not exist. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Brady suggested that it be tabled and researched further. Chair Morris asked what evidence he had that contradicts what he heard in the meeting. He's open to further investigation but would like to know what other evidence there is. Mr. Brady stated the original deed in the 1930s was taken for back taxes. The Town Administrator stated she has no documents on this parcel. Chair Morris asked Mr. Brady if he had a copy. He stated he did not have it with him but could bring it over to the Town Office in the morning. Selectperson O'Brien withdrew his original motion.

- **North Pownal Community Club transfer of property**

Chair Morris recommends we put a warrant article to explore the opportunity to acquire the property. This would require investigating maintenance. We would acquire for one dollar. Chair Morris motioned that we put on the town warrant an article that allows the Select Board to explore the acquisition of the North Pownal Community Club on the Lawrence Road for use as a Town building. Selectperson O'Brien seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

Mr. Schmidt just wanted to clarify that as part of the investigation the Town will get some feedback on the building.

- **Solid Waste PAYT Program**

Chair Morris stated we need to put an article on the town warrant that repeals that ordinance. Selectperson O'Brien motioned that we put an article on the June town warrant to repeal the pay as you throw program. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Richards asked that it be placed early in the warrant. The Town Administrator stated it would be in the first section where all the ordinance articles go. It would be before all the budget items.

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

- **CIP Asset Removal Request**

The CIP committee is requesting to delete the item "refurbish engine two" from the asset schedule. This item **was completed in 2022.**

- **Port City Architecture Contract Addendum**

The Town Administrator stated this is an additional study the committee wants done so this is an addition to the contract the Select Board approved last year. The committee has the funds to support this and the attorney has reviewed this and approved. Selectperson O'Brien motioned to enter into a contract addendum with Port City Architecture to preform a wetland study on the proposed property for the fire station and public works an authorize the Town Administrator to sign the contract. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

Chief Peters informed the Select Board that on the previous Friday they submitted a grant application for air packs. We should have an answer this fall. The Select Board thanked Chief Peters for applying for the grant.

The Town Administrator summarized the Brown Tail Moth clipping event. This was a collaboration of the 5th grade Pownal Elementary School class and town residents. They went out in the community to clip nests as part of the mitigation grant we received from the State. Ms. Richards asked about the clippers and can residents check them out. The Town Administrator stated she needs to check on the liability first.

She also gave a brief summary of the March 5, 2024 Presidential Primary. We have 363 voters participate in the election. The day went very well. This was Maine's first semi-open primary. Ms. Richards stated that 17 year olds can vote in a primary if they will be 18 in November so we had some new voters take part. The Town Administrator stated the vice principal of Freeport High School made that announcement so we had several come in to register and vote.

Chair Morris stated that there is a skating rink at the school funded by taxpayer money and is available for public use. They saw increased used of the rink this year.

VIII. Old Business

The Town Administrator stated we received the final draft on the easement for Map 9, Lot 43 and she will be sending that for attorney review. Once we hear back from her it will be on an agenda for the Select Board.

IX. Correspondence

Selectperson O'Brien stated he received a call from Tom Estabrook requesting a meeting with the Select Board. The Town Administrator will reach out and set up a meeting. Selectperson O'Brien motioned that we remove from the CIP asset schedule refurbishment of engine two. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

Chair Morris stated the Brown Road again had some missed stops. The Town Administrator stated she came in to an email from Casella specifically stating that the whole road had been picked up. She received calls and emails from residents about missed pickups in other areas of the town.

X. Any Other Business

None

XI. Adjournment

Selectperson O'Brien motioned to adjourn the meeting. Selectperson Day seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes 3; No 0

The meeting adjourned at 9:09 pm.



Jon Morris

Andy O'Brien



Kate Day

