

TOWN OF WISCASSET
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
November 6, 2008

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM at the Wiscasset Municipal Building.

Budget committee members in attendance: Judith Colby, Pamela Dunning, Judy Flanagan, George Greene, Richard Hanson, Steve Mehrl and Greg Shea. Member absent was Sherri Dunbar.

The meeting began with Chair Steve Mehrl explaining that Jeffrey Hinderliter would not be talking about the town's new website. There were some technical difficulties involved when Firefly, the website developers, tried to present the site to the Selectmen. The site should be ready for presentation at the November 18 Selectmen's meeting.

Steve also explained that the scheduled meeting to discuss the Wiscasset Police Department with John Allen would not take place. Officer Allen had not had enough notice to be able to plan to attend.

There was a brief discussion about the voter participation at the November 4, 2008 election. 2,200 Wiscasset residents voted.

There was some discussion about the next school board meeting on November 11 at 6:30 PM. It was thought that the meeting might cover the school closing issues since the bond article to rebuild has failed and about the new RSU that has passed.

Chair Steve Mehrl notified the committee that Tony True has resigned from the committee. Steve wrote an email to Tony accepting his resignation and thanking him for his service to the town.

Steve shared some information about the reserve account with the committee. As of September 30, the account has lost \$559,935 due to problems with the stock market.

There was a brief discussion about the town giving 100% health insurance to municipal employees who retire after 20 or more years of service. This insurance is given until the retiree is of age to receive Medicare.

The total tax commitment for the town is \$6,117,263.11. The first tax bills were mailed out in October. The town has received \$2,698,468 so far. This was thought to be a good response.

George Greene had a question about funding the school renovations if the article should pass before July 1, when the new RSU takes effect. He asked if the RSU pays part of the bill and if Wiscasset would be responsible for just the 37% that the contract outlines as our portion of the RSU funding. The answer was yes, Wiscasset would pay only 37% of the bond payment.

Buck Rines joined the meeting to discuss upcoming issues at the Waste Water Treatment Plant. It was recognized that the plant is very clean and well-run. User fees brought in to date are \$119,243 and expenses to date total \$98,991. The budget has had to cover the repair of a broken line due to CMP damaging it during a construction project. This started a discussion as to how these repairs should be paid. Should the WWTP have a contingency line in its budget or should the money come from impact fees.

The WWTP has run into a problem with the upgrade to digital phones for the pump station alarms that was approved by voters. The station alarms will not communicate with the digital phones. Buck is still working on trying to find a way to get the system to work but is not sure that it will be viable. A radio system lease would cost approximately \$9,499 installed. That is \$2000 more than voters approved and has a \$648 monthly fee which is \$350 to \$400 a month higher than the digital phones would cost. Buying our own radio system and renting tower space might be less expensive but the equipment would not be covered for repairs, testing and service. New installations are leaning toward scutter systems that run by computer. This would be very expensive, approximately \$90,000. There is some pressure to resolve this issue as the analog phones will cease working soon. Buck is going to look into the possibility of finding grant money to help pay for the upgrade once a decision is made as to which upgrade to pursue.

Another issue at the WWTP is the \$100,000 repair to the outfall pipe. The pipe is supposed to lie 4 feet under water at low tide. The pipe is either broken or disconnected 100 feet short of where it should be. This pipe carries 253,000 gallons of water a day and can not be shut off so repair will be extremely difficult. This is a high priority issue as the EPA is pushing the town to resolve the problem. Since there is a potential for high ecological impact, there may be grant money available to help with this problem.

The stairs at the WWTP have not been fixed yet. The repairs will take place before winter.

Buck stated that it should not make sense to take out a loan and do a partial repair again, as he did this year. It might be a better idea to take out a more significant loan and do a total system upgrade all at once..

There was some discussion about the 1965 vintage temporary generator that the WWTP uses during power failures. Buck would like to see this mounted to a pad in the plant. He would like to be able to purchase at least 2 smaller portable generators (35, 000 to 40,000 kw) to use in the pumping stations. These would probably cost about \$6,000 each.

There was a brief discussion about the impact fees and the law that governs how they may be used. The fees may be used to fund improvements to the plant. There is some question about spending this for capital improvements, which the Selectmen and Town Manager have deemed as anything over \$5,000 in value.

There are only 3 employees running a station built to have 4 employees. Most work is being kept current. Sewer lines are not being cleaned as often as they should. The WWTP has used Highway Department personnel at times. This may be an option, although the Highway Department is currently very busy.

Does the town have any options other than to continue to run the WWTP? The town could apply for Wiscasset to become a district and thereby have the plant become a public utility. It is not known what impact this would truly have on the town and the WWTP.

There was brief discussion about the state shortfall of over \$150,000,000 and that money due to municipalities for the school systems will be delayed. More delays and cuts in funding are expected in the near future. Superintendent McIntire of the Wiscasset School Department has issued a spending freeze.

There was some discussion on when the audit is required to be done for the year. It was thought that it had to be completed before the school could bring forth a budget. It has to be done before the mil rate can be set.

Judy Flanagan spoke about the difference between meetings and workshops. Anytime the committee sits and conducts business, it is a meeting.

There was a discussion as to if the budget committee is overstepping its boundaries in some areas. Should the committee be pushing for the website to be put into operation? Does the committee need to really know about the restructuring of personnel? Can the committee be more helpful to the Town Manager and the Selectmen?

Having no further business, meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM

Respectfully submitted by Pamela Dunning, Clerk