

**Town of Nelson**  
**Selectmen's Meeting**  
**7:00 PM**

February 13, 2024

Executive Board Attending: Brenna Kucinski, Don Carlisle, Mike Blaudschun, Edie Drinkwater, Admin. Assist.

*Absent:*

Others attending: General Resident Attendance and Department Heads

Brenna opened the February 13, 2024 Budget Caucus at 7:04 PM. She explained that the evening's presentation would be a review of all articles that will appear in the 2024 Annual Warrant as well as a review of the overall operating budgets for the town.

- Article #2 Primary Operating Budget includes all elements of Government operations including all departments, Boards, Commissions.

Changes Noted: Election requirement stipends for Selectmen due to number of elections in 2024

Budget for Full-time Police Chief including standard insurance and retirement benefits

Pay increases for employees

Family insurance benefit for the Highway department employees

Cemetery Board increases due to New Cemetery design and legal cost to obtain Ownership title for the Munsonville Cemetery.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector increases due to 2024 Elections

Fire Dept. - Need for Gear due to new members joining the department

Planning due to help from SWRPC on Master Plan

Town Clerk/Tax Collector increase due to number of elections in 2024

- Discussion opened regarding the Police Department transitioning to a Full-time Chief. Brenna explained that, during the first Public Forum there was interest in exploring a sharing of police services with another town. With that potential goal in mind, the Board began weeks long research that included multiple meetings, phone calls, and compiling as much data as possible about Police service needs from Nelson and potential partner communities. They also met with the Police Chief from Temple/Greenville, two communities sharing a Full-time police department. Sullivan was contacted but declined participation as they are in the first year of a three-year contract with the Sheriff's department. Stoddard just lost their Police Chief to retirement and were interested in further discussions because they had considered a contract with the Sheriff's department but were informed that due to officer shortages they could not guarantee service to Stoddard at this time.

The Board met several times with Stoddard and what they discovered was an initial cost savings that would need to grow very quickly with the addition of multiple officers. Both towns have vehicles, offices and equipment that would remain in use and would need maintenance. Budgeting differences including different fiscal years would also pose issues. While Nelson could develop an approximate budget, the delay of Stoddard's Town meeting, two months after Nelson, posed the risk of Stoddard not voting to go forward. In addition, Nelson and Stoddard have different methodology for determining Police Costs.

The differences, in the town's area and larger population of Stoddard as well as their history of an increased number of calls for Police Service, drew concern that Nelson's interests could be jeopardized.

At the second Public Forum, the research and the Board's concern was shared with the attendees. After hearing from several audience members who shared the Board's concerns, Zack Byam recommended that the Board move forward with the position just for Nelson. Brenna asked the audience for a show of hands for support of this recommendation. There was nearly unanimous support to go forward with Nelson alone. Therefore, that is how the Board developed the currently proposed budget.

Tom Buttrick proposed a plan to pay the Town of Harrisville \$500 per call and proposed that they completely cover Nelson. Tom based his calculations on calls from the previous year and selected only certain types of calls he expected would need to receive this service.

Brenna responded that Harrisville is still seeking additional officers and their covering Nelson would pose the same issues for them as Nelson covering Stoddard, their own town coverage would suffer. Brenna noted that Joe Filipi is also a fully certified and experienced EMT. This would add a much-needed value to the position. Brenna noted the greatest responsibility of the Select Board is to provide the community with Fire, Police, Road care, and Administrative services to cover the safety of the community and running of Government operations.

Don shared that his initial response to this proposal was not favorable, but as the research continued and the realities of police service and the shortage of officers became shockingly evident he became convinced that Nelson must take some action or have nothing. The many issues uncovered in the shared option posed a high risk that Nelson may not receive an equitable benefit from this plan.

Gordon Peery warned that not taking this step now could result in Nelson losing everything.

Mike told the audience that he became convinced, through their research, that this is the right thing to do for Nelson.

It was noted that there is no "Mutual Aid" if Nelson only expects to receive and has no aid to offer another community.

Other audience concerns: Why offer family Health Ins.

Taxes are already too high

Don asked that no one take this lightly. He stated that he is confident this plan as presented is the best advise the Board could give the community.

Brenna continued to review the budgets. Someone questioned why there was a line for drug testing in the Highway department. Brenna explained this is a DOT requirement.

Emergency Management remains the same.

Health Officer remains the same.

Library shows a very small increase in Salaries.

Social Services requests an increase in donations due to increased need from Nelson residents who received over \$200,000 in food, services, discounts, and direct assistance in 2023.

Capital Reserve accounts remain the same as in previous years.

In planning for a new Solar Array, it was determined that the Town Hall roof needs new sheathing and shingles before the installation. This is included in the article.

The article for Forest Fire costs with anticipated reimbursement remains the same.

New standard road signs are being brought forward as a safety issue. Incoming ambulance and emergency vehicles from other towns cannot read the old, worn, wooden signs causing delays in response arrival.

Another article is for two new Welcome signs on the approaches into Nelson center.

Audience members expressed their fondness for the old road signs but Police Chief, Joseph Filipi informed everyone that it is truly a safety issue.

There is also an article for a standby generator to cover the Library, Town Hall, and Town Office in the event of a lengthy power outage.

Another community safety article is for a dry hydrant to be installed in the vicinity of the Dam at Granite Lake.

The final article, by petition, is for support of the Game of Village 2024.

● With nothing further, Brenna made a motion to adjourn.

Mike seconded.

The motion carried 3-0.

Town Caucus Adjourned 8:25 PM

Caucus Minutes for February 13, 2024

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Brenna Kucinski, Chair

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Michael Blaudschun, Selectman

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Don Carlisle, Selectman