

Town of Nelson
Selectmen's Budget Caucus Meeting

7:00 PM

February 15, 2023

Executive Board Attending: Brenna Kucinski, Mike Blaudschun

Absent: Don Carlisle, Edie Drinkwater, Administrative Assistant

Brenna called the 2023 Budget Caucus and Warrant Review to order at 7:00 pm.

Brenna welcomed the group and stated that she would review the budgets for this coming year highlighting any significant changes. People were asked to raise any questions they might have.

The only question raised regarding the town budget was from David Birchenough who questioned the need for the Henderson Road crack sealing since the road had been recently paved. Mike Blaudschun responded that it had been 6 years since it had been paved and that the cracks that had developed needed to be sealed to prevent further deterioration.

Being no other significant changes in the budget no further questions were raised.

Brenna then turned to the rest of the warrant articles. Article 7 regarding the Millfoil fund and the amount appropriated generated some discussion. Janet Yardley, chair of the Conservation Commission and Kathy Schillemat, former chair of the Conservation spoke about the need for more funding to be placed in the account. The Select Board had rejected the request for additional funds of \$500 to be added to the usual amount of \$5,000. They both stated that more host programs needed to be funded as they wanted to include Silver Lake. They both stressed that it was important to prevent infestation as it is very hard to get rid of once it is established. John Bunce stated that he thought the funds for cleanup of an infestation and the lake host program should be separated and not included in the same account.

Mike Blaudschun spoke to the reasoning for Article 12 and the new fund it would create for energy projects going forward. Duane Schillemat and Ralph Walter questioned if we had any specific kw hours for the installations in place now. Mike gave them the data we had collected for 2022. Brenna stated that the town ends up paying approximately \$4,800 every year in excess of what the panels generate. Duane asked if the Master Plan should include some reference to solar. John Wengler, chair of the Planning Board responded that this year they were looking at the Zoning Ordinance but the following year they were going to look at the Master Plan.

The next article that generated some discussion was Article 14, in regards to the request to change the distribution of LUCT funds to a 50/50 split between the Conservation Commission and the General Fund. Janet Yardley and Kathy Schillemat again talked to the need for the funds to remain entirely with the Conservation Commission. They spoke to the importance of maintaining open space in Nelson and also the need to support the needs of Partridge Woods. They argued that open space lessens the tax burden as less people are living on

the land. Brenna questioned whether there should be much more support needed for Partridge Woods going forward. John Bunce questioned the need for more open space.

During discussion of Article 17 regarding the purchase of a new police cruiser Amy Whitney asked if it was going to be electric. Brenna responded no.

Discussion of Article 18 regarding repairs to the library raised a few questions. Duane asked why this has happened now and Brenna and Mike explained that there was extensive water damage from seemingly poor construction and lack of gutters. Ralph Walter asked if the town had gone back to the original contractor. The answer was no as it seemed too long now to do that.

For the Petition Article an Iselin spoke to Article 21 regarding funding for the Game of Villages. She said they had increased the funding this year is due to the increased cost to attend which is now \$850 and the increase would enable them to help 3 students.

Gordon Peery stated that Article 22 would be withdrawn at Town Meeting as Nelson in Common had come to an agreement with the Select Board for achieving the funds without the need for this article.

Lisa Sieverts spoke to the Article 23 and the need for the new solar array. She stated that it had been the mission of the Building Committee/Energy Committee to continue offsetting electric use in the town buildings. With the new HVAC systems installed this past year there was additional need for solar panels. She stated that the Town Hall, although not the perfect location, would offer direct feed that is cheaper. She stated that it would be paid for in 8 years. She also stated that with the Inflation Reduction Act would provide a 30% rebate on the project. While she was in favor of the Community Power option not enough green energy was available for purchase for everyone and it was better to have our own solar system. Dave Birchenough stated that the period from July 16th through July 26th 64,000 kw hours of energy had been produced. He further claimed that the library solar panels would be paid for in 8 years. He then showed a graph that showed the increase in electrical consumption since the new system had been installed. Mike Blaudschun noted that this did not take into account the reduction in fuel consumption. Dave agreed. Brenna spoke to the reasons the Select Board was not in favor of this article. The Select Board did not want to add additional tax burden this year with the library repairs, the board was not in favor of this project as they had requested the Energy Committee look at a more south facing area where more solar potential was possible along with the possibility for expansion in the future, the fact that Community Power was a better option that would provide green energy without the capital outlay and maintenance issues of a town financed array, and the fact that all committee members had resigned and there now was no committee to oversee the project along with no concrete estimates for cost and no contingency if the roof needed re-shingling. Gary Robison raised the question about whether the Master Plan should include adding solar in phases. Mike Blaudschun further stated that the Select Board was interested in pursuing a larger array on Turtle Hill behind the safety building. He read a statement the Select Board had just received from Eversource regarding oversized solar arrays that are sited for maximum solar potential that could generate excess electricity would allow for host metering and additional buildings could be included, such as the school.

Sienna Giffin spoke to Article 24 regarding the dry hydrant. She spoke to the need for fire prevention in the area around Tolman Pond and stated that this had been approved in the past but never implemented. Brenna stated that she was told that was due to the fact that no logical area had been found where it could be placed. Sienna asked where the money had gone and Brenna explained that all unused funding was returned to the unreserved fund balance at the end of the year. Brenna then went on to explain that the Select Board was supportive of the idea but not supportive of this article due to the fact that there was not enough money requested to accomplish the project and too many unknown facts. The board had wished the petitioner had come to discuss this with the board before it was presented so that an approvable article could have been drafted. A question was raised from the floor about a possible amendment to the Article. Brenna explained

that it could only be done at Town Meeting. Lew Derby then stated that only the dollar amount could be changed not the intent of the article. Brenna restated that the article was for purchase and installation of the hydrant, not permitting, research or legal fees. Gary Robinson spoke in favor of the article and thought the higher cost of \$30,000 requested in past articles had been due to surveying issues. Joe Sarcione, the Fire Chief stated that he did not think enough money was requested in this article as there were a lot of permits needed including contacting Fish and Game if an endangered species might be impacted. He thought, in his experience with the placement of dry hydrants, that it would be much closer to \$18 to \$20,000. He did think the area chosen was a good one. John Wengler asked if this could serve a wider area of homes. Joe explained that it only allowed for the filling of one truck to another in that area. Elaine Giacomo asked how many hydrants we have in the town. Joe stated he wasn't sure. Ralph Walter said he thought one or two but there could be more and suggested that should be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Brenna Kucinski, Chair

Mike Blaudschun, Selectman