

**Town of Richmond  
Special Selectboard Meeting  
Minutes of October 15, 2024**

**Members Present:** Bard Hill, Adam Wood, Bard Hill, David Sander, Jay Furr, Lisa Miller

**Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Duncan Wardwell, Assistant to the Town Manager; Linda Parent, Town Clerk; Finance Director Connie Bona.

**Others Present:** MMCTV Erin Wagg, Lauria Dana, Acrisure Health Insurance Gail Lafond, Jack Linn, Fire Department Chief Dennis Gile, Library Director Rebecca Mueller,

**MMCTV Video:** Recorded by MMCTV by Angelike Contis  
[https://youtu.be/1-v8wHsuxwI?si=E763Y\\_7TqngYkV9X](https://youtu.be/1-v8wHsuxwI?si=E763Y_7TqngYkV9X)

**Call to Order:** 7:00 pm

**Welcome by:** Sander

**Public Comment:**

Jack Linn from Lake Iroquois Recreation District wanted to know when his subject would be discussed. Arneson replied they could talk about under appropriations. Hill pointed out that making the conference room speakers ADA compliant and having connectivity to hearing aids for people who have difficulty hearing and microphones for the hearing impaired may be important to add to the meeting room. Furr stated his former church had a designated FM band, which today is old technology.

**Additions or Deletions to Agenda:**

Timestamp: 0:02

Hill added that he would like to see an agenda item regarding what's our target for inflationary index. Arneson answered that this could be added after the overview of the budget was presented. Sander added it's important to pair the upcoming budget with annual cost of living parity, the Selectboard works extremely hard to not to exceed that. Hill continued that the Burlington City Council in June approved a budget which has a roughly 11% tax increase for property taxpayers in Burlington, which was on top of an 8% increase last year.

**Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**

**Consideration of approval of 2025 health insurance plans for Town staff**

Timestamp: 0:06

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People who participated in discussion: Sander, Arneson, LaFond, Bona, Furr, Linn

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Arneson explained that currently the Town pays 90% of the premium on the MVP Platinum plan and the employee pays 10% using Acrisure (a subsidiary of Hickok and Boardman). There are also two other levels with a higher deductible, Gold and Silver, where the Town pays 100% of the premium and then the difference of that premium and 90% goes into an employee health savings account for each employee that elects to be in the gold and silver. The other option would be to switch back to Blue Cross and Blue Shield, but their plans have higher premiums that have increased 21% in the past year. Gail stated that overall medical plan deductibles have not changed very much, except for prescription copays. In-network healthcare is VT or NY states only, out-of-network is outside of that regional area, where Acrisure partners with Cigna. There is no out of network coverage, Gail explained to Furr. Linn asked what if someone were covered by their spouse's Health Insurance, and Arneson replied that if the person were covered and single they would receive \$2,500 per year, or married with children they would receive \$5,000 per year. Linn feels that Richmond has too many staff employees based on the number of inhabitants in the Town. Hill disagreed, giving an example of the Wastewater treatment plant how it is now running so much more efficiently than only a few years ago, where it had broken parts and lacking maintenance. Arneson added that due to recent flooding just managing FEMA and Emergency Watershed grants in addition to Elevation and Buyouts the Town has needed to add more staff. Furr added that he has always been pleased with the assistance he has gotten dealing with Hickok and Boardman for his own health insurance.

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*Furr moved to offer MVP platinum plan with 90% of the premiums paid by the town and 10% paid by the employee, and to also offer the MVP gold and silver, higher deductible healthcare plans with the town paying 100% of the deductible and contributing to a health savings account in an amount equal to the difference between 90% of the platinum premium. Miller seconded.*

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*Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Miller, Sander, Wood in favor. Motion approved.*

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## **Review of draft FY26 Budget**

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Timestamp: 0:25

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167 People who participated in discussion: Sander, Arneson, Bona

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169 Arneson elaborated that this was the first pass through the FY26 Budget and that all  
170 Department Heads had been asked to attend to review their needs, including an increase  
171 in staffing. Furthermore, not all figures are in, for the draft audit of FY24, particularly the  
172 unassigned and restricted funds, similarly the total cost of the 2024 flooding. He  
173 continued that he is working on a total cost submitted to FEMA for the 2023 storm  
174 reimbursements received to date, and those we are still expecting to receive. All of this  
175 will be important to understand how much money we might or might not have to put  
176 towards the budget. In the last few budgets, we've put a significant amount of unassigned  
177 and unrestricted funds towards the budget to offset the tax rate. Last year, we put  
178 \$433,000 towards the budget to reduce the amount we had to raise taxes, that information  
179 will be available for the November meeting. Furr and Hill mentioned that the target tax  
180 increase is 3.4% currently, with Social Security being 2.5%. Bona asked if she was  
181 required to rework all the payroll numbers. Arneson interjected that he had done a payroll  
182 CPI and assumed all salaries will be going up 3% and everybody going up 2% on the  
183 grid. All the benefits tied to salary, VMERS, Social Security and disability and insurance  
184 have also been calculated based on that adjustment.

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187 1. Library Department: Rebecca Mueller

188 Richmond Library has the highest circulation per capita in the State, and the  
189 highest visits per capita. Which is good, but an increase in the number of guests  
190 increases the workload. Mueller reviewed that she would soon be retiring, and her  
191 replacement has been chosen, which is a savings in salary. She added that there is  
192 an increase in traffic of visitors to the Library and they are in desperate need of a  
193 clerk or assistant for a position that would require 12-15 hours a week. This is not  
194 a job that volunteers can do. They are asking for increases for office supplies, post  
195 office box and postage, file storage support, heat, and electricity. Also asking for  
196 a slight increase in the Library reserve funds. Furr concurred that the Library was  
197 doing a fantastic job bringing in visitors and that certain jobs could not be left to  
198 volunteers who came to work sporadically. The Library book sale is coming up

199 and that income goes to the Friends of the Library, whom the Library would then  
200 ask to subsidize expensive things. Hill wondered if that income should be added  
201 to the Library Budget, to which Mueller replied that anything the Friends of the  
202 Library paid for was not included in the Library budget.  
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205 2. Fire Department: Dennis Gile

206 Gile explained that salaries have increased to \$70,000. Cell phones, Water, Sewer,  
207 Electric bills, and office supplies were all to be kept the same. Furr wondered how  
208 last weekend's coin drop went and Gile said \$3,200, which is considered income.  
209 They want to increase their budget for education and kids, but they want to drop  
210 the heat expense significantly since they just had a heat pump installed.  
211 Maintenance for the fire trucks has increased because the oldest truck is starting  
212 to show its age and needing more maintenance. Hill wanted to know if the  
213 increase in electricity will cover the use of the new heat pump, to which Gile  
214 stated he hoped so, depending on what it will cost in the summer to use it for  
215 cooling. Hill and Furr mentioned with the new bridge completed it may be  
216 necessary to increase signage and lights to make people slow down past the Fire  
217 Dept. Hill asked why there were more calls around Town for the Fire truck, and  
218 Gile said all kinds of calls have increased, but not in fact structure fires. Arneson  
219 explained that volunteers are paid \$1.15 above minimum wage, and they get paid  
220 based off the calls they go on, the training they attend, or inspection of the trucks.  
221 40-60% of calls require them to go out onto the interstate. Gile would like to have  
222 someone who could perform oil changes and maintenance on the trucks. Hill  
223 suggested a mechanic could work for both the Water and Sewer dept, in addition  
224 to the Fire Dept. Hinesburg now has a paid Fire Chief.  
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227 3. Planning and Zoning: Arneson on behalf of Keith Osborne

228 Arneson added that salary increases, and health insurance increases have been  
229 added to the salaries for Keith Osborne and Tyler Machia (Zoning Administrator).  
230 Otherwise, the budget will stay the same.  
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233 4. Police Department: Arneson on behalf of Chief Cambridge

234 Arneson explained we estimated staffing one sergeant, one corporal and two  
235 officers and a contracted police chief, which is the current budget situation. We  
236 do have one Corporal hired and a shared Chief with Hinesburg. We still have  
237 openings for a sergeant and two officer positions. We did add an administrative  
238 assistant for 40 hours plus benefits. We have not started to rehire after Diane left.  
239 The hope is to share the admin person with the Hinesburg police department, like  
240 we do with the Chief position, since they also need someone, and admin work is  
241 increasing for the police as well as everywhere else. Currently more discussion  
242 with Hinesburg PD is needed. Hill wanted to know if we continue to share Chief,  
243 an officer and now an admin with Hinesburg, what would a long-term relationship  
244 look like in terms of budgeting this sort of cross-over policing. Arneson continued  
245 that we are now budgeting for a combined 9 officers for a seamless integration  
246 between the two towns. Presently we have 6 officers across the two Towns. It was  
247 pointed out that we would need four cruisers for four officers here in Richmond.  
248 We had planned to replace a cruiser in FY26 for \$80,000. Bona made a note that

249 when we are talking about an increase in salary lines for the police, because of the  
250 current contract, we only increased that 2% versus the 3% that we're doing for all  
251 other departments. Furthermore, on the capital reserve line, which would be  
252 \$80,000 plus what we already have in there, if we didn't end up coming to full  
253 staff and needing that fourth vehicle, which should be replaced, then we could go  
254 back to zero the next year. Linn asked why we need more officers because he  
255 believes we have too many already. Furr explained that Hinesburg could choose  
256 not to renew the contract at any time and that would leave us with only one officer  
257 and without a chief. Additionally, he said it would be nice to be able to have two  
258 on duty at the same time to back each other up. Arneson replied that we need  
259 more speed officers, since that is the biggest complaint Town's people have.  
260 Arneson said that parking along Dugway would have been more of a problem this  
261 summer if we didn't have the flooding again this year. Hill pondered what we  
262 could expect if we were fully staffed, what services we are going to pay for or  
263 need in the future.  
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266 5. Highway and Recreation & Trails: Arneson on behalf of Pete Gosselin  
267 Recreation & Trails makes a minor increase in wages. Lake Iroquois District can  
268 levee a fee of \$3,000 toward the Town. Linn explained that the Lake District is  
269 used far more now than before, and they have significantly reduced invasive plant  
270 species. The herbicide that is used is objectionable to the Conservation  
271 Committee, which is why this fee is not coming from their budget. Miller  
272 wondered if Andrews Community Forest had said anything about improvements  
273 they want to make, to which Arneson replied that they have their own budget and  
274 should be coming to the Selectboard for approval of that budget.  
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276 Arneson continued regarding the Highway budget, the salary line item was  
277 changed due to changes made in staffing this summer, including associated  
278 benefits for those employees. Furr interjected that Gosselin has changed out a  
279 multitude of culverts over the last year due to flooding and Arneson explained  
280 that every time there was flooding resulting in a blown-out culvert, those culverts  
281 have been upsized. Arneson stated funds FEMA has agreed to pay for the  
282 upsizing of culverts is only one size larger (as opposed to two sizes). Sander  
283 added that we are not replacing the same culverts over and over.  
284 Reserve funds were in place for replacement of sidewalks, particularly Bridge  
285 Street. One recommendation is to move money into the new transportation  
286 infrastructure reserve fund. Bona inserted that stormwater and sidewalks budget  
287 line item is a routine item for maintenance. Bona explained that the new sidewalk  
288 reserve has \$65,000, if this money was moved into the infrastructure reserve that  
289 would provide more flexibility.  
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292 6. Town Administration and Assessors: Josh Arneson  
293 Arneson confirmed that Linda Parent is retiring in March 2025, and he has  
294 budgeted for a new Town Clerk, assuming pay grade and a step start for that  
295 person. He has also budgeted for a deputy town manager at a grade seven step c.  
296 He wants to add a new position, Deputy Town Manager, hoping that Duncan  
297 Wardwell will move into that position, and then keeping the Assistant Town  
298 Manager position that Wardwell presently has. Linn Caroleo's position is only

299 temporary and is not budgeted for in FY26. Hill asked why Fire protection has  
300 gone down. Arneson replied because this is related to a gap-loan that is going  
301 away. Hill added his concern for the stormwater issues in Southview and  
302 Greystone, and how perhaps it would be prudent to budget for the Town's portion  
303 of this. Does the Town need to create a grant where tax revenues would pay for  
304 stormwater damage to private properties or the three-acre rule? Miller pondered if  
305 the lawyer should be asked about this. Arneson said he would run it by VLTC  
306 first, since that's free, and perhaps an increase to the line item that is already there  
307 for stormwater and sidewalk budget.

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#### 310 7. Charitable Appropriations

311 Arneson showed a table that demonstrated line items that are in the budget that  
312 need to be voted on or that are already budgeted. Furr added that it depends what  
313 the voters vote on and want to pay for.

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#### 316 8. Revenue to present to the board once their study is completed.

317 Arneson demonstrated that budgeted use of unassigned and restricted funds has  
318 been increasing since 2019, with a dip in 2021 to \$25,000 and an increase to  
319 \$919,930 in 2023 due to flooding events and \$500,000 in 2024 to keep the tax  
320 rate low. He further explained that interest rates are going down and the Town  
321 will have less money on hand for buying CDs. If we look at the tax rate as  
322 presented, it's a 22.41% increase. But if we added \$433,000 in unassigned funds,  
323 it would drop to 11.42% which still is not great, but it's about an 11-point drop. If  
324 we removed the three additional staffing requests for police, admin, and library  
325 the increase would be 17.66%. Then if we remove that and added in an equal  
326 amount of unassigned fund usage, we're getting down to 6.67%. If we remove the  
327 three additional staff requests and the \$80,000 for the police cruiser, we're  
328 dropping to about 15%, and if we then add in the \$433,000, we're at 4.64%.  
329 Arneson continued if everything was flat and we had nothing to use unassigned  
330 reserve funds on, if we added the conservation and the appropriations back in  
331 we're back up to 10.99%, which is the number of points basically that the  
332 \$433,000 buys us on the tax rate increase, meaning that unassigned fund really  
333 make a dramatic difference. Furr stated that because of the flooding everyone's  
334 budgets will be a mess this year. Hill suggested that we need to have a  
335 conversation about what departments "want" to have versus what they "need" to  
336 have. If we cannot use unassigned funds, the taxes will go up. We have artificially  
337 been keeping the tax rate down. The money from 2023 flooding from FEMA is  
338 still coming in. Hopefully, the process will move quicker with regards to FEMA  
339 funds from the 2024 flood.

340

#### 341 **Adjourn**

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343 *Hill moved to adjourn. Furr seconded.*

344 *Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Miller, Sander, Wood in favor. Motion approved.*

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347 **Meeting adjourned at: 9:19 pm**

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350 **Chat file from Zoom:**

351

352 Jay Furr

353 34:29

354 <https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news->

355 [release/consumerpriceindex\\_northeast.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/consumerpriceindex_northeast.htm)

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357 Angelike Contis (MMCTV)

358 01:57:53

359 Thanks all, have a good night! Signing off.

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