

1 **Town of Richmond**
2 **Special Selectboard Meeting**
3 **Minutes of December 17, 2024**
4

5 **Members Present:** Bard Hill, David Sander, Jay Furr, Lisa Miller, Adam Wood (remote)
6

7 **Absent:** None
8

9 **Staff Present:** Town Manager Josh Arneson; Assistant to the Town Manager Duncan
10 Wardwell; Planning Department Keith Osborne, Town Clerk Linda Parent, Finance
11 Director Connie Bona, Library Directory Laurie Dana, Fire Department Chief Dennis
12 Gile, Assistant Fire Chief Gerald Levesque, Highway Department Chief Pete Gosselin,
13 Chief of Police Anthony Cambridge
14

15 **Others Present:** MMCTV Erin Wagg, Kevin Kittinger, Jeff Forward, Mary Ann
16 Kittinger, Connie Van Eeghan, Caitlin Filkins, Patty Brushett, Dorian, TM
17

18 **MMCTV Video:** Recorded by MMCTV by Erin Wagg
19 <https://youtu.be/n0S4pNfsQIM?si=pfIvOpKi3CYgjt7>
20

21 **Call to Order:** 7:00 pm
22

23 **Welcome by:** Sander
24

25 **Public Comment:**
26

27 Hill suggested that we start having quarterly meetings with the Selectboard in Hinesburg
28 to check in and keep our conversation with them open.
29

30 **Additions or Deletions to Agenda:** None
31

32 **Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**
33

34 **Review of draft FY26 Budget, including all departments and revenue**
35

36 Timestamp: 0:03
37

38 https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/12/3a1_FY26_Budget_DRAFT_12-17-24_-_Flat_Staffing_Base.pdf
39

40 https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.richmondvt.gov%2Ffileadmin%2Ffiles%2FSelectboard%2FMeetings%2F2024%2F12%2F3a2_FY26_Budget_DRAFT_12-17-24_-_Flat_Staffing_Base.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK
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44 https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.richmondvt.gov%2Ffileadmin%2Ffiles%2FSelectboard%2FMeetings%2F2024%2F12%2F3a3_FY26_CAPITAL_PLAN_DRAFT_12-09-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK
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48

49 People who participated in discussion: Sander, Arneson, Bona, Hill, Miller, Dana, Furr,
50 KittingerK, KittingerM, Forward, Filkins, Wood, Brushett, Chief Cambridge

51

52 Arneson projected the spreadsheet available online and explained: He and Bona have
53 adjusted the budget for Admin and Police to reflect what was calculated for the FY25
54 budget, essentially flatlining the budget, which was one Assistant to the Town Manager
55 at 30 hrs. per week and 4 police officers with one 20 hour per week Admin. He explained
56 that every year there is a unique challenge in the budget and this time it was the July 2024
57 flooding that created nearly \$2 million in damages and the lack of funds coming back
58 from FEMA in a timely manner. Hill interleaved that we've had to liquidate the money
59 that's available to cover the \$2 million, including things like vacancy savings that in other
60 previous years would have been used to offset tax increases, we don't have that advantage
61 this year.

62

63 Arneson explained that the Library Director had noticed a discrepancy in their hourly
64 budgeting for a substitute and suggested that be reduced from 5 to 3 hours per week.
65 Miller queried about that position, is that an existing staff member or is that paying for
66 somebody to come in when they normally wouldn't, or is this a distinct person? Dana
67 explained that rather than constantly using substitutes for times when they needed extra
68 help, they created a 12 hour per week position, and that person was hired to avoid having
69 to use substitutes. Hill stated that Dana would have to show that the money to pay for
70 substitutes was more than the 12 hour per week employee, because adding another
71 position raises the base budget. Bona added that they were struggling to find substitutes
72 which is why they hired someone. Furr wondered if the substitute they initially had was
73 unreliable, which Dana concurred with.

74

75 Arneson continued that another warrant from the Hillview Road flooding for \$65,000
76 came in last week and needed to be added to the total for the FY25 budget.
77 Approximately 90% of the total FEMA Highway 2024 Flooding Expenses (now totaled
78 at \$1.86 million) will be reimbursed by FEMA, but it affects what we can use for
79 Unassigned funds. He is still expecting another \$25,000 in bills to come from Hillview
80 expenses. Arneson reiterated that sidewalk repairs, Kenyon Road repairs and other road
81 repairs were budgeted for in 2025 and not completed, so that's a savings. All told this
82 brings the tax increase to 7.95%.

83

84 Hill pondered if there would be any cost associated with the Southview Stormwater issue.
85 KittingerK concurred and wondered how the Town would budget for a cost associated to
86 Stormwater compliance on Town roads in the Southview neighborhood. Gosselin didn't
87 think any construction would happen in FY26. Arneson described how costs are
88 incorporated to calculate out 5 years in order to keep the Capital Reserve in the green, at
89 this time the Capital Reserve will be negative in FY29. Hill pointed out that the
90 Southview Drive expenses is not an amount we can plan for.

91

92 KittingerM asked if the Town had done projections regarding the increase in tax rate
93 using “what if” scenarios? What does 3% mean versus 8% so people can understand?
94 Arneson explained the big driver here is the use of unassigned funds, which is surplus
95 money that we come out of one fiscal year with, not haven't spent, as an example in FY24
96 we put \$500,000 into the budget to reduce the tax increase and in FY25 we put \$433,000
97 in. At the end of this year, if we hadn't had the flood, we would have nearly \$1.5 million
98 now.

99

100 Forward queried why the Community Outreach line item increased since it's unclear to
101 him what services we've received from the Howard Center. Arneson replied that the cost
102 for those services has increased, and others have wondered the same thing regarding what
103 services we receive from them, particularly for residents in Richmond. He has asked for
104 more timely reporting from them and better data. Forward supports the Capital Plan and
105 how they are planning for future budgets.

106

107 Filkins does not think the Fire Department needs a designated rescue truck, because it's a
108 huge expense for a Town who only takes 250 calls per year, she thinks using a Fire
109 engine should be sufficient. Levesque explained why the new Fire Truck needed to have
110 an expanded tank of 500 gallons, because that's the truck they will be taking to Interstate
111 calls, and it holds more water and can take 4 people at once. The current trucks do not
112 have room for stabilizing equipment, hydraulic tools, and personnel, presently they are
113 forced to take 3 to 4 trucks on interstate calls. He pointed out that there are no fire
114 hydrants on the interstate. Filkins asked why the Fire Dept doesn't rely on Williston and
115 Bolton Fire Departments on interstate calls, to which Levesque responded that those
116 Depts aren't always able to respond. Wood explained that the trend in Fire Departments
117 is to reduce equipment so this truck would give the Fire Dept an opportunity to reduce the
118 number of trucks needed to respond to calls. Arneson thought a good question for the Fire
119 Dept was to determine the minimum amount of equipment needed to respond to calls.

120

121 Sander brought the conversation back to the Police and Admin departments. Wood asked
122 if the Chief's salary was included in the line item for 4 Police Officers, which Arneson
123 said no, it's budgeted separately because we share the Chief with Hinesburg. Brushett
124 asked what would happen if the amount given to employees was a flat fee when they opt
125 out of health insurance, could that flat fee be increased for those employees. Hill stated
126 that those are not savings those are avoided costs. Half of the current Town employees
127 opt out of Health Insurance. Arneson added that when they budget for new employees a
128 2-person health insurance is assumed. He added that the Police Admin position has not
129 yet been posted, because it was uncertain if that person was going to be shared with
130 Hinesburg. Brushett wants to know if 4 Officers were budgeted for next year, and if the
131 Admin position was to be shared with Hinesburg was that person budgeted for 20 hours a
132 week? Yes, that is correct. Hill wanted to know how plausible it is that 4 full-time
133 Officers would be hired for next year. Chief Cambridge said it's important to keep the
134 department the same size as Hinesburg, which is 4 Officers, based on the current climate

135 of increased crime in both Towns, he is confident he can hire 4 Officers in the next year,
136 he should have 2 more Officers by February 2025. Furr emphasized that budgeting for 4
137 Police Officers is imperative, because if we budget for 3 we won't be able to "find money
138 in the budget" for a fourth Officer.

139

140 Arneson explained that another 10 hours per week is needed for the Deputy Town
141 Manager, Duncan's position. There has been an increase in work particularly related to
142 flooding, building support for committees, commissions, volunteer organization
143 recruitment, financial assistance, grant management, request for proposals for
144 installations in the park, and more. Furr commented on the need for both a Deputy Town
145 Manager and an Admin person, because there are a lot of regulations that we have to
146 follow, a lot of forms we have to fill out. Miller pointed out that Duncan is amazing and
147 what he can do in 30 hours per week is outstanding, so he would benefit from having 10
148 more hours per week. Hill asked if Admin work that was performed related to FEMA
149 claims was reimbursed, which Arneson said yes. Hill said that if the revenue supporting
150 the workload is reimbursed then it isn't an increase in taxes. Miller concurred and added
151 that Duncan's position is hard to define and some of his duties should probably be
152 charged out to recreation uses and become part of the project cost for Volunteers Green
153 or other organizations. Hill wondered how many hours he spends every week on FEMA,
154 which Arneson emphasized that a refund from FEMA regarding administrative money is
155 the last thing that gets repaid. Gosselin pointed out that workload is doubled for everyone
156 in Town whenever there is a major event, like flooding. He said that Duncan's position is
157 critical because of all the work he has done in the past two years related to flooding, and
158 for all the work he has taken off other people's plates. Sander mentioned how quickly the
159 in-house work post-flooding has been completed in Richmond.

160

161 Arneson queried if the Fire Department needed to be discussed again based on questions
162 from the Selectboard last night. Filkins thinks an overall needs assessment should be
163 done regarding the Fire Dept. Hill recommends someone to be hired to consult on and
164 look at what is needed for the Fire Dept to effectively do their work. Bona pointed out
165 that a consultant would add to expenses and not help the reduction in tax increases.
166 Arneson wondered if getting a quote for consulting work would make it easier to plan the
167 item for the budget, since \$30,000 was thrown out as an estimation. Forward said
168 Hinesburg recently had a study done for Police and Fire Dept needs, but it cost
169 significantly more than \$30,000.

170

171 **Adjourn**

172

173 *Furr moved to adjourn. Hill seconded.*

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

175

176

177 **Meeting adjourned at: 9:25 pm**

178

179 **Chat file from Zoom:**

180

181 00:50:03 Patty Brushett:Great quote

182 01:02:08 Jay Furr: <https://www.richmondvt.gov/departments/police>

183 01:02:22 Jay Furr: the stats from the Howard Center regarding community
184 outreach are down toward the bottom

185 01:09:02 Patty Brushett:Richmond needs to pay for a truck for the interstate?

186 01:09:57 Caitlin Filkins: This line item can amount up to \$800,000 and is
187 completely unnecessary

188 01:25:26 Jeff Forward (He/Him): In looking over the stats from the Howard
189 Center, it looks like Richmond has somewhere about 50 contacts per year. It appears that
190 these contacts are primarily phone contacts There is no data on what kind of service was
191 provided. Were these people who were having some kind of emergency mental health
192 issue? Help with finding emergency housing? Were these calls from the police
193 department? How many calls were from the community? If it is indeed true that we have
194 about 50 calls per year, that comes out to about \$200/call. Seems like a lot, but hard to
195 know without more detail.

196 01:52:49 Jeff Forward (He/Him): Does this mean we get pie at some point?

197 01:53:09 Jeff Forward (He/Him): I want him to fax it to me

198 01:53:31 Jay Furr: Catapult

199 02:12:16 Patty Brushett:Great suggestion

200 02:17:53 Caitlin Filkins: Again - \$800,000 fire truck. Eliminating that could
201 lower taxes on its own.

202 02:19:13 Jeff Forward (He/Him): Hinesburg did a public safety study recently.
203 Maybe we should look at theirs?

204 02:22:10 Patty Brushett:Caitlin and Jeff - Good suggestions

205 02:29:39 Caitlin Filkins: Thank you all for the healthy discussion and your
206 time