

1 CONWAY MUNICIPAL BUDGET COMMITTEE AGENDA
2 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER
3 KENNETT MIDDLE SCHOOL
4 CONWAY, NH
5

6 September 22, 2023, AT 6:30 PM
7
8

9 The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM. The following Budget Committee members were
10 present: Quentin Lewis, Randy Davison, Steve Angers, Ryan Shepard, Chair Peter Donohoe,
11 Stacy Sand, Dave Jensen, Bob Drinkhall, Bill Marvel.
12

13 **Absent-** Vice-Chair Frank Jost, Jim LeFebvre, Terry McCarthy, Ellin Leonard, Michael Lacey,
14 Steven Steiner.
15

16 **Pledge of Allegiance**
17

18 P. Donohoe- this meeting will be focused on discussion with the co-chair of the Charter
19 Commission S. Sand. She wanted to share thoughts back to the Charter Commission. We have a
20 new member Steve Angers, Steve joins us as the candidate who had the next nearest votes.
21 Steve was appointed by the Board of Selectmen, and I will find out more about that and how
22 that came about as we have our own rules and procedures and process for appointing.
23

24 B. Marvel- who was it that appointed him? The BOS or Town Manager?
25

26 P. Donohoe- I do not know, I will be having a conversation with John.
27

28 B. Drinkhall- was this appointment replacing someone?
29

30 P. Donohoe- yes Kit Hickey resigned back in August.
31

32 S. Sand- the charter says qualifications for office term and vacancies of members of the budget
33 committee shall be pursuant to State Statue. So, it doesn't say by Selectboard, so someone may
34 have jumped the gun.
35

36 B. Marvel- historically in the past we have appointed members.
37

38 ***B. Marvel motioned to appoint Steve Angers to the open seat on the Municipal Budget***
39 ***Committee; seconded by D. Jensen.***
40

41 ***Vote in favor 8-0-1 S. Angers abstained in a vote for himself.***
42

43 Q-Lewis- can we have him speak as to why he is interested in sitting on this Board.

44
45 S. Angers- I come from a family of educators, I feel like I had a knowledge base from that. I put
46 my name in the hat for the School Board, but the BOS decided to vote Mike Gregorie instead.
47 However, I stayed engaged as I was hoping to help move the school board forward. I just want
48 to help. The Selectmen looked back at who voted to be on the Budget Committee since I was
49 next in line, they reached out. I consider it to be an honor to be able to come in and help my
50 hometown till next April.

51
52 **Charter Commission Discussion**

53
54 P. Donohue- as I said I want to stay focused on the topic. I think this is an opportunity to have
55 an open discussion and to offer some really good points that she can bring to the Charter
56 Commission.

57
58 S. Sand- I've been asked a few times what the Budget Committee thinks, at this time the CCC
59 has until November 15th to write their recommendations to be presented to the Town. we
60 voted 2 meetings ago to pursue a Town Council form of Government with basically SB2. So, we
61 will still have the voters vote on items at the Deliberative and then vote by ballot as well. Now
62 that we are getting into the nitty gritty you have the option of no budget committee, an
63 advisory board or a budget committee as a fully functioning decision-making board like we are
64 now. So, we are looking for what you want to see in that.

65
66 B. Drinkhall- if we go to a Town Council and we have a Budget Committee in the same form as it
67 is now what is the purpose of changing? Well still have SB2 which generally people state is the
68 problem because people don't show up.

69
70 S. Sand- it would allow the Selectboard to be larger instead of a 5-person Board they could be
71 9-person. It gives the council not to have to put every single issue on the ballot. If they want to
72 vote on certain issues among themselves, they have more ability to do so.

73
74 Q. Lewis- so these Town Councilors would be voted at large?

75
76 S. Sand- yes.

77
78 P. Donohue- for discussion, if it goes to an Advisory Budget Committee, does the sitting budget
79 committee in this instance also have to operate in an advisory capacity with regards to the
80 school budget?

81
82 S. Sand- no, it would be separate that this Charter does not affect anything through the schools.

83
84 P. Drinkhall- and can you explain why you guys are leaning towards a Town Council form, are
85 they doing that because there's some consensus that the current system doesn't work?

86

87 S. Sand- the rational is that people voted they wanted change. So, they feel they status quo.
88
89 R. Davison- I believe the citizens look to the budget committee as another voice in looking at
90 the overall budget. I believe that this committee has a good cross section of the community. I
91 think this committee should continue to be heard.
92
93 Q. Lewis- I think our voice would be heard even if we were advisory, but I think it's more than
94 just being heard. I think of us more as a checks and balance. We might recognize and over
95 enthusiasm for something that they wouldn't because they're being pitched it in a different
96 way, and I think we'd lose that as an advisory.
97
98 D. Jensen- does the advisory version sign off on the budget the way we do now?
99
100 S. Sand- no
101
102 D. Jensen- we would simply be voting the way we do towards having aa vote on the ballot.
103
104 S. Sand- yes.
105
106 D. Jensen- I feel per the definition at NHMA we are an advisory committee as we are given a
107 budget that has already been gone through with the department heads and the Town Manager
108 and the Board of Selectmen.
109
110 Q. Lewis- when I was in Litchfield, besides a few technical aspects operate the same as we do
111 here. The selectmen work with the dept heads and then give us a budget. With an advisory it
112 only goes to the selectmen and it is then their budget regardless of what we say.
113
114 S. Sand- I think this committee is a lot more influential than you know. We can change that
115 budget and we do occasionally.
116
117 D. Jensen- do you think the town would not have listened to us had we been an advisory
118 board?
119
120 P. Donohue- personally I think the parking ordeal was dead on arrival and I think we were just
121 the final nail in the coffin, and we were the mechanism, but I still maintain my position that I
122 think we have more than advisory power. I think our layer is an important part in keeping
123 everything in check.
124
125 D. Jensen- I feel the budget committee can end up being a mask for the decisions of the Board
126 of Selectmen, and in other words, instead of the Board of Selectmen really facing the raise and
127 or wrath of the voters, we sort of stand in the way and cause an extra layer of decision making
128 that maybe sometimes means the voters don't necessarily know who to love or to blame.
129

130 Q. Lewis- this comment is not intended to say anything bad about department heads, but right
131 now we have dept. heads come in and justify their budgets, etc. But as an advisory committee
132 there is a lot less interest or no incentive for them to come to us with their best game. I think
133 the advisory committee is not an interesting committee to be on. We have a hard enough time
134 to get people interested, and I think an advisory would be even harder.

135
136 S. Angers- I heard the point that when budgets come to us, they have already been drawn up.
137 when I was listening to the school board the superintendent asked the school board, what
138 direction they wanted them to take. Can the budget committee say they expect to see a
139 \$800,000 cut? I would like to see the budget committee not be advisory.

140
141 R. Davison- Steve is right on that the school board does need to be informed prior to their
142 meetings. I firmly believe that this should not be an advisory committee, and the residents look
143 to us for guidance.

144
145 B. Marvel- I got the impression that the movement towards something other than what we have
146 now was based on admittedly one commission members comment that basically people
147 wanted change, so were going to give them change, I'm not sure that is the case. I think the
148 charter commission petition was circulated under misapprehensions that something could be
149 done about the school and that was incorrect. I also agree that some people were dissatisfied
150 with the Selectmen because of recent decisions.

151
152 Q. Lewis- Stacy, you said the input that the committee has gotten so far is that the people still
153 want input? Do you have any idea why people vote for this? Why did people put you in the
154 position to make a change? Why did people sign it?

155
156 S. Sand- I think Bill is right, I think people that don't like the fact that a few people come to SB2,
157 they feel like the Selectboard on complaints on when they meet, their listening ability to the
158 public. Yes, some dissatisfaction of the BOS. I hear people say that it is not a bad idea to look at
159 all alternatives. I think people when dissatisfied want a change.

160
161 R. Shepard- does It say in the charter when the BOS times should be? I don't see a whole lot of
162 turnouts at the BOS meetings, and I think we would be amendable to changing the times to
163 later. The meetings do go late but I think we would consider changing the times if it was
164 warranted. I have not seen any requests to make the meeting time later.

165
166 S. Sand- we are looking at from this committee what do you see your role as , what do you want
167 your role to be and how many members do you want to be. Currently we have 12 members, 1
168 school board rep and 1 rep from each precinct. I know Jim Lefever has talked about him liking
169 to see 9 vs 12.

170
171 P. Donohue- I do like the comment that I heard before, I think more is better and I don't see
172 where we would benefit from less.

173 B. Marvel- I think the larger the Board the more difficult for special interest to pack it.
174
175 B. Drinkhall- I think an advisory would be ridiculous. The other thing that is strange is that they
176 talk about increasing the size of the town government people and less on the budget
177 committee,
178
179 S. Sand- I think the Town Council is much different than the Budget Committee. What I would
180 like to see is a TC where there is more committee work being done and more work being done
181 vs the department heads saying, here's how we're going to do things yay or nay and it is usually
182 a nay.
183
184 R. Davison- I think it would be a disservice to the Town to do a advisory budget committee.
185
186 S. Sand- does anyone have an argument for why the committee should be smaller?
187
188 Q. Lewis- I don't think it should be smaller and the only argument I think there could be is that
189 it is much more likely to get a consensus on anything, if it is small. I'm not saying it is good.
190 More people I think brings out more debate.
191
192 S. Sand- there have been years when not enough people ran, and those spots have to been
193 filled by the Selectmen.
194
195 B. Marvel- 2 of the precincts may be leaving anyways.
196
197 D. Jensen- I would argue that we need to change our calendar so that we are involved with the
198 town's budget preparations at roughly the same time that were involved with the schools.
199
200 S. Sand- so I am hearing from you all that the committee feels it should be an official committee
201 and not an advisory committee. And it is an important voice to be heard by a well-researched
202 group of people and it gives good checks and balance, and by being official it puts a little power
203 behind what we are saying and that we'd like to see the Board size stay the same.
204
205 ***B. Drinkhall motioned that the Budget Committee remain as they are and not become an***
206 ***Advisory Committee and we don't change the number of members either; seconded by R.***
207 ***Shepard.***
208
209 ***Vote in favor 9-0***
210
211 P. Donhoe read a statement from Vice Chair F. Jost who couldn't attend. I believe that most of
212 the forms of government being considered would benefit from an independent official versus
213 advisory budget committee, particularly given the concerns about potential concentration of
214 power that have been raised during the process. However, the committee would benefit from
215 some streamlining and in particular I believe the precinct position should be eliminated. They

216 are virtually impossible to fill and provide little added benefit. This would also reduce the
217 perceived stigma attached to appointed vs elected members. I do think the Selectmens rep or
218 equivalent should be retained. I have found it to be extremely informative. We should come up
219 with a vacant position protocol since the one ensconced in our policies and procedures was
220 completely disregarded when the Selectmen selected our latest edition. If we were to cite
221 examples as to the value of the budget committee, we were instrumental in redirecting the
222 recent discussion on paid parking and have driven the debate on school funding and
223 infrastructure review.

224

225 P. Donohue- we currently have in effect a 15-member board with possibility to 17.

226

227 ***D. Jensen moved to approve the schedule as presented; seconded by B. Marvel.***

228 ***Vote in favor 9-0.***

229

230 Old Business

231

232 B. Drinkhall- do we have a rooster of all the members?

233

234 P. Donohoe- it is online, but I can hand it out as well.

235

236 New Business

237

238 S. Anger- I know you wanted to make this meeting about just the Charter Committee, but
239 would it be appropriate to as Randy to go to the school and convey a message and that we
240 would be looking for a reduction in the budget over last years budget.

241

242 ***S. Anger motioned to convey to the school Board that the Budget Committee is looking for a***
243 ***reduction in the school budget over last year's budget; seconded by B. Drinkhall.***

244

245 S. Sand- without actual figures to debate I can't say that I want a reduction from the budget he
246 presents and in terms of last years I don't know what the expenses are in terms of you know
247 the things what we have to take care of versus contractual things like health insurance and
248 such. I'm not ready to vote on that.

249

250 B. Drinkhall- I agree. I think it is a generic request not a specific figure I think that given
251 expenses are going away and some expenses being considered that I am not happy to hear
252 about, I don't think I would balk too much about saying the budget committee would expect to
253 see a reduction.

254

255 Q. Lewis- I think it be far more prudent to come up with a methodology or something like we'd
256 like to see the cost per student be the same or less or something like we'd like to see the cost
257 per student be the same or less or something like that. I mean because I don't know that I can
258 say the budget needs to go up or down with no information.

259
260 R. Davison- the bond that is going away in January is \$1,840,000. That right there is an
261 adequate amount in a reduction in taxes for next year. I like your idea of per pupil spending also
262 the state has a per pupil spending with enrollment going down.

263
264 S. Angers- I know what happened last year when the budget committee got involved too late
265 and all I'm trying to accomplish here is the budget committee communicating with the school
266 board what the expectation of the budget committee is going to be and that would be a
267 reduction.

268
269 P. Donohue- our job isn't necessarily to expect reduced budgets all of the time. Our job is to
270 review the budgets for appropriateness and either say yes or no correct. So, I'm not sure if the
271 budgets committee's position in this particular instance should be an expectation of reduction
272 necessarily.

273
274 ***S. Angers withdrew his motion. B. Drinkhall withdrew his second.***

275
276 R. Davison- I think we should see a reduction. We do have building needs; I don't think we have
277 put enough away for building maintenance.

278
279 **Public/Media Questions and Comments**

280
281 Evan- Stacy came here looking for input and I heard more about the school than I did the
282 charter commission. a Town Council elected is it also going to be in essence going to be
283 presenting a budget by the managers of the department? So, the Town Council members are
284 like junior selectmen?

285
286 S. Sand- they actually have more power than Selectmen actually.

287
288 Evan- when the Daily Sun stopped being free online, I was not in a position to go out daily and
289 get the paper. So, I have fallen out of contact, that's why I am coming back. I think Randy is a
290 little optimistic that 1.8 million will come off the budget automatically and I agree that it will be
291 made up somewhere else. The votes you actually make whether it's Randy should be an odd
292 number. I appreciate seeing how the Budget Committee is voting.

293
294 P. Donohue- in October we have meeting minutes to approve.

295
296 **Adjournment**

297
298 ***B. Drinkhall motioned to adjourn the September 20, 2023, meeting; seconded by B. Marvel.***

299
300
301 ***Vote in favor 9-0***

302

303

304 Respectfully Submitted,

305

306

307 *Alicia Jipson*

308 Recording Secretary

DRAFT