



**Town of Southwest Harbor
Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday February 18, 2025

6:00-8:00 p.m.

Town Office conference room and via Zoom

DRAFT

Chair Anne Trotter called the meeting to order at 6:00.

Attending: Mark Amstutz; Priscilla Ksionzyk (via Zoom); Lydia Goetze (via Zoom), Don Lodge; Ellen Pope; Alan Rosenquist (via Zoom); Anne Trotter; Carl Wrubel; Town Manager, Karen Reddersen; and Finance Manager, Becky Gatcomb (via Zoom).

Agenda: Carl Wrubel moved that the agenda be approved as amended, seconded by Lydia Goetze, and approved unanimously.

Ann welcomed the group and entertained comments before beginning the budget review. Following the Tremont Warrant Committee's decision to not recommend their elementary school budget, Karen Reddersen will talk with Jesse Dunbar, town manager of Tremont, and to the Select Board chair.

The town manager's budget memo is still in development.

Harbor

Becky Gatcomb clarified that long-term mooring payments can be made online; short-timers pay in person at the office or by phone. Town Manager, Karen Reddersen, will continue to work with the harbor committee to ensure optimum technology and customer service.

As noted at the meeting of 2/10, revenue for moorings could change in the future.

Police

Karen said that that salaries and the cost of Family Medical Leave Plan (FML) represent the bulk of the increases. She reiterated the need for SWH to endorse salary and benefit packages that are critical to recruiting and retaining town personnel.

(2.)

The largest expense is the request for a new cruiser, which is estimated at \$90k and appears in the police CIP budget. Becky spoke to the calculations used to arrive at \$90k, including some items that are paid off.

The number of cruisers was discussed, and there was agreement that with the addition of Tremont coverage, three cruisers makes sense.

Employee health represents miscellaneous outlays for new hires, such as screenings.

At present, the committee agreed that value from the town's payment to Hancock County is appropriate for services, including sheriff, airport, online products, and more.

The committee discussed the potential for island-wide cooperation among various services, such as fire, police, ambulance, and perhaps more. There is energy to pursue these potential opportunities to save taxpayer costs and even improve services. It was noted that Acadia Senior College presented a discussion on this topic that featured the Bar Harbor police chief and the MDIHS superintendent. The committee agreed that this should be included in the committee's report to the Select Board.

Dispatch

No concerns were expressed about the dispatch budget. Karen noted that Workers' Compensation costs are spread among budgets.

Fire

Discussion included: There are technical, security, and privacy issues, and personnel should not use private devices. The budget requests a full-time position of fire fighter/EMT. The need is driven by the reality of fewer volunteer firefighters, which is attributed to demographics (aging population), loss of Coast Guard members, who now need to live off-island to afford housing and thus are no longer able to volunteer. Additionally, there a fewer year-round residents available to volunteer, as short-term rental housing removes those homes from year-round availability, while increasing demand for town services, such as fire, police, ambulance, and waste management.

Karen said that Chief Chisholm has made a solid case for this personnel increase.

It was noted that the town has huge fire risks.

(3.)

Chief Chisholm included data with the fire budget, which provided helpful information and comparisons to make decisions. It was agreed to include the most relevant data with the Select Board report. The committee would appreciate similar metric data for the police department—next year, if not this.

The committee recognized the high quality of the fire personnel and expressed appreciation.

Highway

Cost of material was discussed, and Karen noted that the town strikes a balance between sourcing for scale outside of town and the benefits of purchasing locally. The town has a value discount through some state contracts, such as the current one for salt.

Fuel oil contract is currently with Dysart. The school uses the town's contract and is invoiced for fuel usage.

It was noted that \$2k for signs has been in the budget for some years but not used. Karen intends to work with Scott to move this forward.

The budget includes the addition of a part-time laborer.

A lift is needed and included in the budget.

Buildings and grounds has been over-budget; the budget could be higher to reflect reality.

Becky reminded the committee that the estimates are based on an average of two previous budget years.

Karen spoke about the need for the town to approve a bond for the public works facility (a.k.a. garage). The bond is tied to a commitment from the federal government, which despite disruptions in approved grants, is still expected to be received. The facility is sorely needed, and it was pointed out that more than a million dollars of equipment is left to the elements.

The committee requests—and will include in its report—that the Select Board and town manager make a clear and compelling case to SWH residents and voters. Karen agreed that messaging is key to the bond's passage, and she would appreciate help with this. Some members seem ready to help with letters, opinion pieces, and other tactics when it is closer to town meeting. Good data and photos of the current facility should showcase the current risk and be part of a communications strategy. A member belongs to Friends of SWH online and will share photos and messages, when the time comes.

(4.)

Contract Services

A member spoke to eliminating the fee for membership in the Acadia Disposal District, but retaining the town's interest in its annual hazardous waste disposal day. While enthusiastic prior to last year's contract negotiations with Eastern Maine Recycling, it is felt that the town is not benefitting from ADD membership. Karen will check on this amount—thought to be about \$3k—as well as exploring why “recycling” is separate from the transfer station contract fee, as it is thought that the current system of ‘trash’ and ‘one bin’ does not include recycling, except what is already done at contract vendors such as Casella. Karen also has questions about billing, which she will follow-up on.

Boards and Committees

Karen noted that \$3k has been added to the Select Board line to cover the costs of public notices, recruitment ads, and the like.

Next Meeting

The committee meets on Thursday 2/20 at the fire station. It was agreed to cover the following budgets: Harbor, CIPs (not already discussed), reserves, and ambulance (pending Andy Cline's availability/Karen to confirm). It was suggested that the committee review material that Andy's prepared and distributed to the Select Board, and Karen will make those available.

Ellen moved to adjourn at 8:03 p.m., seconded by Lydia Goetze, and approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen Pope