Town of Panton Chartered 1761

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Selectboard Budget Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 6, 2025

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Member Teresa Boucher, Town Clerk-Treasurer Kyle Rowe, Kathy Kennett, Charles Kennett, Terry Pelletier, Robert Moulton, Janice Moulton, Jeanne Jackson, Richard Jackson, Steve Weber, Nick Jackson, Jamie Dayton, Kevin Cooke, Sharon Ashcraft

Via Zoom: Selectboard Member Zack Weaver, M'lissa Dayton, Lorraine Kayser, Paula Moore, Mary Rudd, Mikayla (last name unknown)

1. Howard called the meeting to order at 5:41 p.m.
2. Additions/deletions to the agenda-**NONE**
3. Discussion and review of draft FY26 budget
    a. C/T began discussion of the budget by thanking Citizen's Budget Committee for their work on the budget.
        i. The C/T noted that the "State Reappraisal Payment" line was added back to correct the voted upon budget document. The account line was updated to reflect the actual NEMREC budget number.
        ii. Line 23 was added to include the $100 in state aid for the establishment and maintenance of a Cannabis Control Board
        iii. The benefit amounts were noted to have been updated, and the BlueCross BlueShield amount was updated for the 6 months of the next calendar year to accommodate a 3% increase. The SB noted we might want that amount to be higher.
        iv. The C/T noted that the trash collection expense budgeted was much higher that what we spent, so that amount was changed to reflect the amount closer to actual amounts (approximately 50% of the total)

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v. The Addison County Sheriff's Office updated their budget for the next year, and that amount was included in the budget to reflect the actual cost for the year.
vi. The Dump Truck loan service was more fully explained i.e. that the MELF loan was used to pay down the principal of the higher interest Community Bank loan, and that between the two loans, we would have 5 years of payments of approximately $45k.
vii. The C/T noted that the recommendation for the interest generated by the Reserve Accounts being given back to the funds themselves was valid, and that calculation has to be done manually, most likely once per year, but could be done quarterly if necessary.
viii. The C/T noted that the Digital Land Records Expense was corrected to reflect that it would be a yearly expense, and the expense account number was updated to be the correct one.
ix. The C/T noted that the Excavator Lease was ending in October 2025, so no "buyout" was necessary.
x. The C/T noted that the vast majority of numbers contained in the budget have been updated to be the most accurate amounts possible.
xi. Bob Moulton asked if we would own the excavator after the payments were finished, the C/T responded yes.
xii. Kevin Cooke wanted to check that the loan payments for the dump truck were correct, the C/T responded that they were, that the agreements specified the payments.
xiii. Kathy Kennett asked about status of the town bank accounts, untangling them, and working with Becky Condon to fix those errors. The C/T responded that it's going well, that 3 of the 4 banks accounts now reconciled accurately with what NEMREC shows, and we were working hard to fix the 4th. Once the C/T got a handle on that last account, the town would be a much better position to work on the FY24 audit. Howard noted that what Becky was working on wasn't an audit, but a computation, showing the state of the town accounts. The C/T agreed, and noted that we hope to be able to have an actual audit conducted before the end of the FY. Sharon Ashcraft asked if that would be acceptable, Howard stated that we will do the best we can by balancing the books, showing our due diligence, and including that computation in the town report. Howard added that many small towns have auditors elected or appointed that conduct the audit for the town.

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xiv. The C/T explained in answer to a previous question from SB member Teresa that the municipal tax rate can't be set until we have a finalized Grand List, in April. The C/T continued that the state has changed the way they are calculating education taxes in the state, adding in what is being called a Statewide Adjustment. This number, used in lieu of the CLA, actually works slightly in Panton's favor since the our CLA is above 100%. When all that is finalized, the C/T will make sure there is a great general understanding of that calculation.

xv. Kevin Cooke asked how the budget totals have been calculated. The C/T explained that when the Town warns a certain amount for the budget, it sets the municipal tax rate to pay for that amount. It wouldn't be prudent to budget for an amount that included expected grant revenue, as not receiving that revenue would leave the town short. If the town doesn't receive the grant funding, the projects expected to be funded by that revenue will not occur. Howard agreed and expanded on the point that the project wouldn't happen if the grant was not received.

xvi. Steve Weber asked why we need to spend the money for retreatment, basically that the town is being punished for having roads in too good of condition. Howard said we trust our road foreman to make those decisions, Janice Moulton added we needed to continue to improve and maintain the roads to remain competitive in the eyes of the AoT and the State for future funding. Kevin Cooke added that we need to maintain the middle ground to receive the funding, but added that we need a more substantial paving plan, with data. Howard reiterated that we hired a road foreman to make these decisions. He added that we have a paving plan in the Town Report. Teresa added that its worth having a conversation about building a paving plan, and that we have to trust our hired professionals to make these decisions. Kevin Cooke added that costs are going up, and we need to have a set plan. Steve Weber added that we need to have more than our foreman involved, and perhaps someone from the state can help answer these questions. It was generally noted that the towns member present wanted more data and information on this expense. Teresa noted that we want the best data as well, and that it's a good idea to develop a plan. Teresa Pelletier added that just as the town received help with the budget, we could get help with the road.

xvii. Teresa noted that all the interest generated by these issues is good for the town general. Sharon Ashcraft stated that the budget has

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increased every year, and town feels as though they have been "gouged".

xviii. Bob Moulton stated that Rick is a great foreman and a great resource to the town, and that he works very hard to do a good job. He noted as well that the town roads need to be maintained or we will very quickly loose the base of the roads, necessitating a much more significant expense.

xix. Kevin Cooke asked if the state has a resource to help the town judge their condition, and help develop their road repaving plan.

xx. It was generally noted that agricultural vehicles make road maintenance difficult.

xxi. Steve Weber asked how the over-expenditure would be accounted for. The C/T noted that that that expenditure would have to be covered by funds left over and reserve funds. Janice Moulton asked voter approval was required to use the reserve funds. After some discussion, the C/T verified the state law, and answered no, once the funds were created, they had to be used for the purpose they were created for, but the expenditure was at the discretion of the town.

xxii. A question was asked regarding the Digitization Fund, and expending money out of that. The C/T explained that would be used for future digitization of records, as the office had many documents that are around the office that need to be digital that are only in paper versions right now.

xxiii. Jeanne Jackson asked if the road funding being discussed only covered paved roads. Howard said yes. A general discussion regarding gravel vs paved roads commenced, where the SB noted that gravel roads were expensive to maintain.

xxiv. Steve Weber noted he would help work with the town to bring down expenses and better identify "wants vs needs". The C/T invited him to come to the office to discuss it.

xxv. Sharon Ashcraft asked who wrote the towns statement on the solar field. The C/T responded he did. She asked if the town was aware of the new state municipal code of ethics, the SB affirmed, and said the C/T would be the point person on that, and be the trainer for the town after the C/T was trained.

xxvi. A general discussion of the Viridis solar project ensued, where the town confirmed their commitment to the town, and reiterated they hired a lawyer that is working for the town, and has Panton's interest at heart.

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xxvii. The C/T noted that the Tree Warden had resigned, and the town was looking for volunteers to help in that position, and administer a grant the town received to remove ash trees.

xxviii. The C/T was asked how "final" this budget was. The C/T said this represents a very close to true statement, and that there were a few things to go over, but much of the work had been done.

xxix. A question was asked about a previous agreement with a lawyer the town entered into. Howard stated that agreement was in the meetings, but that the C/T would look into the matter.

xxx. A question was asked about the sound equipment for the town hall, and it was added that perhaps the layout could be changed. The C/T said there would be a proposal at the next regular selectboard meeting.

xxxi. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Howard, seconded by Teresa. VOTE-2 in favor, 0 opposed.

b. The meeting adjourned at 6:42 p.m.

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