

**Town of Benton**  
**Budget Public Hearing**  
**January 31, 2024**

The public hearing for the Town of Benton proposed budget for 2024 was called to order by Select Board Chairman William Darcy at 6:22 PM after the conclusion of the budget hearing for the Benton Board of Education.

Those present were the Town's Treasurer, Dwight Swauger; Town Clerk and Tax Collector, Michael Stiebitz, Chairman of the Board of Education, Joseph Boutin III, Town and Board of Education Moderator, Gil Richardson, and Chair of the Trustees of the Trust Funds, Laura Richardson.

Chairman Darcy summarized the Select Board's budget proposal. On the expenditure side three accounts were the source of most of the increases from the prior year. The Elections and Town Clerk account would increase \$3,000 due to three elections this year instead of one, and a fee increase for poll workers from \$7.50/hr. to \$10/hr. The next two increases were a result of contractual fee increases. The ambulance service contract with Woodsville Ambulance increased \$2,000 and the property assessment contract with Avitar also increased \$2,000.

The combined \$7,000 increase from those accounts was offset by an approximately \$9,000 revenue increase, which was the DRA approved revenue estimate submitted last fall as an element in establishing the tax rate. The result is that the municipal budget will again have a negative effect on the tax rate, meaning local and state education costs and County costs will be reduced by the Benton municipal budget in establishing the property tax rate this year.

Chairman Darcy noted that the likely warrant articles affecting the Town's finances included \$45,000 for more road paving on Tunnel Stream Road, with the final warrant article amount to be determined after receipt of an estimate from Joe Boutin, Jr. Another warrant article will provide \$10,000 for capital improvements to the Town Hall. Both of these will be funded by the Town's unassigned fund balance. It was noted that last year the Annual Meeting approved a non-lapsing \$40,000 appropriation for the cemetery which was little used last year, so no additional appropriation will be necessary this year. The bridge maintenance and reserve fund established last year will be increased as a result of more dedicated state funding received last year.

There was a discussion of improvements needed for Town Hall, including an electric heater in the bathroom, hot water improvements for the kitchen, and insulated shades or drapes for the windows. There was a discussion of the progress of fiber internet service in town, energy saving projects for citizens that may be funded by the Granite State Power Link transmission project which will pass through Town, and solar power aggregation projects.

The public hearing was adjourned at 6:23 PM.