

Bowdoinham's 2023 – 2034 Budget

It probably won't surprise many residents that the fiscal budget for the coming year will show an increase over this year's. This is because the town is faced with the same pressures and needs that every family faces, only on a bigger scale. We are obligated to provide certain services such as fire protection, passable roads, town administration, solid waste disposal and recycling, and recreational opportunities which make for a pleasant and livable town.

Our town is growing every year with each new house that is built and each new family that moves in. As the town grows, our cost to meet those obligations grow with it.

The budget you will be considering on June 14th at our annual Town Meeting will ask you for \$3,976,005 which is an increase of 48.7% making this the biggest increase in years. Let's look at some of the changes that make this necessary.

One of the biggest shocks to our finances is the enormous increase in cost for ambulance service. North East Ambulance informed us in January that they could no longer provide coverage at their contracted rate. Additionally, Topsham indicated that they would no longer be our primary back up. We have been scrambling since then to put a plan together to protect our neighbors who need emergency medical care. Although the cost of continuing with North East is high (\$250,000) the alternative of building our own ambulance service is many times higher and would take too long to accomplish to even consider at this point. We are working toward a plan that will have a qualified Community Paramedic (CP) stationed in Bowdoinham 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. The CP and ambulance would be provided by North East with assistance from Bowdoinham EMS staff. During the remaining unstaffed hours, the ambulance would remain in Bowdoinham, so it could be staffed by volunteers with the required credentials for those 14 hours.

This additional workload for the Fire Department / EMS will require a full-time Fire Chief to handle the increased complexity of keeping the EMS staffed, trained, and certified. Also, the Fire Department is always in need of volunteers for call-outs, and recruitment will become a bigger part of the job.

Other positions that are to become full time are an Assistant Clerk in the Town Office, the Recreation Director, and a third Driver / Laborer in Public Works.

The Town Office is understaffed to the extent that it is closed to the public when there is an employee out sick or there is a training session scheduled. Staff have even deferred vacation time because of the high workload.

The Recreation Director has expanded his role with the Age Friendly Committee to better serve our senior population as well as working to give our youth a sense that the town cares for them too.

Another Driver / Laborer will allow the town to take over the plowing of the smaller roads and parking areas without using independent contractors. During the rest of the year, there is enough work to be done on roads, ditches, building maintenance, etc. to keep another worker productively busy. Public Works is in the same bind for vacation time as the Town Office and this position will also relieve some of that pressure. And in the future, the state of Maine would like to contract with Bowdoinham to plow and sand the Post Road for a payment to us of \$72,000.

Our town infrastructure has been deteriorating for several years as can be seen by the cracked, pot-holed and crumbling edges of our roads. It can also be seen by the sad appearance of our beloved Town Hall and the cramped office spaces in the Coombs building. This budget calls for beginning a planned improvement cycle of road paving with the goal of getting all the town roads to the level of "maintenance only" until the natural life expectancy is met without having to do frequent and costly repairs that stop short of "doing it right".

This budget calls for \$650,000 to be put into the Capital Reserve Fund so that we can stop paying for major projects with long-term bonds thus keeping more of our revenue for town expenses rather than paying interest to the banks.

These are the biggest drivers of the increase in the budget. There are, of course, smaller amounts that do add-up, but none of the others are as eye-watering as these. Make sure that you understand the direction that this budget is trying to set for Bowdoinham. We are moving into a future where more and more is being asked of our town, and we must begin to invest in the infrastructure and services that make Bowdoinham such a desirable place to live.

Tom Walling

April 10, 2023