

Budget

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principle of bonding for major equipment and repair needs. That budgeting principle seems adopted as a result of three budget work sessions, especially the March 23 workshop on capital improvements.

Town Administrator Bruce Keiser has proposed bonding for major equipment acquisition, with \$550,000 earmarked for the public works department next year. Bonded for five years, that spending would cost about \$66,000 in interest but that could be offset by as much as that amount in savings on repairs to very old vehicles.

As an extension of that principle, Keiser and the councilors justified cutting back significantly on funds for fire department apparatus, with the promise of such bonding for its needs in the 2007-08 budget year.

Keiser also introduced the concept of bonding for road repairs because the current town habit of funding less than \$100,000 a year barely provides a mile of new pavement each year. However, the plan will not be implemented next

year, when only \$70,000 is earmarked. Deputy Public Works Director Michael Gray said he and his staff need lead time to conduct an intensive three month study of all roads to accurately identify what roads would be covered by the bonded paving, to be started in 2007-08.

Keiser whittled the capital budget for next year by allocating neither the \$20,000 annual ambulance set aside nor the \$18,000 toward completion of the ambulance garage. He said emergency medical services volunteers agreed to seek donations toward those items.

The capital plan for next year will include \$100,000 as the town share, with a state matching grant, for a new salt storage structure at its existing location at the Taylor Point wastewater treatment plant.

Whittling results

The three budget workshops have led to a 10-cent cut in the expected tax rate, to \$9.48 per \$1,000 of assessment, for the fiscal year that begins July 1. The \$18.8 million budget, approved by consensus among town councilors as of Thursday, represents a 4.3 percent increase, according to Keiser's calculations.

Under state law the town has until May 5 to formally adopt a final budget for presentation to voters at the annual financial town meeting set for June 5.

Based on the workshop reviews, no substantial changes are expected. Keiser said his goal was to have a final budget plan by the April 24 council meeting.

School spending

Some councilors and school officials sparred a bit Thursday about school spending that school officials thought was settled earlier last week. School officials also worried about legality of the discussion because they had not posted their attendance at the workshop as a meeting. They limited responses to factual information that did not reflect votes or actions. The councilors were able to conclude among themselves that they would not make any changes, and thus there was no need for another rematch to be posted.

Central to Thursday's match was the low class size at the fourth grade level next year. The situation, including its reflection of special needs circumstances, was left unchanged. All officials seemed to agree that the situation and low class size was not expected to recur. Some councilors suggested they would not agree next year to a budget that included such small class sizes.

Keiser kudos

In his first budget rounds since he was appointment town administrator in January, Keiser proposed funds for several building repairs in both operating and capital accounts, as well as the new bonding approach for equipment replacement.

Councilman William Kelly praised Keiser for his budget work. "I'm impressed how quickly you've gotten a handle on this," he said, referring especially to capital budget needs.



Where in the World is the Jamestown Press?

Michele Egan took the Press to the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, when she was there in February for a sales meeting with her company, American Power Conversion.

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Numi Mitchell, 67 Howland Avenue, Jamestown or call 423-0866 (home), 835-1400 (cell).

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