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**Town of Henniker
Board of Selectmen Meeting
Tuesday, February 2, 2021
Zoom**

Members Present: Chairman, Kris Blomback; Vice Chair Tia Hooper; Selectman Peter Flynn; Selectman Scott Osgood; Selectman Leon Parker

Town Administrator: Joe R. Devine Jr.

Recording Secretary: Kelly McCutcheon

Virtual Zoom Guests: Deb Kreutzer, Bill Marko, Heidi Aucoin, Patti Osgood, Cordell Johnston, Lynn Piotrowicz, Russ Roy, Angelica Ladd, Lori Marko, Marc McMurphy, Kirk Spaffer, Susan Adams

Item 1: Letter from White Birch

CONSENT AGENDA

Item 2: Abatement – Katherine and David Crete (Map/Lot 1-355-X2)

Item 3: Refund – Jeannine Aucoin (Map/Lot 1-318-PW190)

Vice Chair Hooper moved to approve as presented. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Osgood had audio issues)

Public Comment #1:

Deb Kreutzer, Trustee of the Tucker Library, had two statements regarding the misinformation at the last Selectmen hearing. She clarified that Town tax dollars are not rolled over into library funds, and are the first dollars spent. Trust fund money if not spent does roll back into the trust funds. She stated Vice Chair Hooper never attended any library meetings until December 2020, did not ask any questions at the meetings she did attend, and did not speak to any library employees or trustees.

Deb Kreutzer stated how the library trustees strongly object to cutting the budget since the library presented as flat budget as the Selectmen requested from all departments. She stated that the cut being made without the Board or Budget Advisory Committee speaking with the Trustees or library staff and the impact the cut will have on the library. Deb Kreutzer stated Vice Chair Hooper was wrong in information, process, conclusion, presentation, recommendation of the cut thus not representing the tax payers of Henniker.

Chair Blomback asked to hold until the budget discussion and clarified any budget issues will be addressed in the public forming coming up.

Bill Marko asked try to go back to the format where all participants on zoom can see who else is there and see another. Know zoom bombing is a problem, but should be able to see who is

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there. All adults when zoom bomb happens deal with it, more important to be able in in person meeting see who is there and who is talking and would like to get back to the format. Chair Blomback agrees with Bill and will work on it.

Heidi Aucoin attended the library meeting to hear about building project and didn't ask questions, but there was not very much clarification given that they were trust funds being rolled over.

Patti Osgood spoke about Town Meeting being indoors in March that it is wrong to disenfranchise people who want to participate in Town Meeting and if one person doesn't feel safe to be there and have their vote kinds goes against what country founded on. Recommend waiting until can have partly outside so everyone can participate.

Joe Devine, Town Administrator, stated the Board voted to move forward but Cordell Johnston, Town Moderator, can speak more. Cordell Johnston stated a decision does not need to be made tonight and can wait until March 13th to postpone if the Board wishes.

PUBLIC HEARING

Item 4: Pursuant to RSA 32:5 the Henniker Board of Selectmen hereby announces to the citizens of Henniker the convening of a Public Hearing to take input on the proposed FY21 Town Operating Budget, bonds, and proposed warrant articles.

Board discussion: Joe Devine addressed the draft warrant was sent to attorney, then was sent to DRA who returned the following recommend changes:

1st in reference to Warrant Article 3; the ballot vote was changed from 2/3 ballot vote to 3/5 *ballot vote*.

2nd in reference to the Highway Block Grant, DRA strongly recommend only \$60,000 because that is guaranteed, and if more than \$60,000 is on the warrant and the State is not able to fund it, the difference would need to be raised through taxation.

3rd in reference to Warrant Article 10, the funds requested is \$25,000 short as it did not account for the radio, lettering, and other options the Highway Department is adding. the number on the truck in art 10 should be 225k total as opposed to 200k. it doesn't include the radio, lettering, or other options he is adding.

Selectman Flynn moved to fund the \$25,000 from the fund balance rather than through taxation. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Chair Blomback opened public comment:

Patti Osgood spoke regarding the library budget and how the library presented a flat budget as the Board directed, but not without direct impact on the library. She stated an addition \$10,000 was needed for cleaning supplies due to COVID and not being able to operate normal hours, but did bring their energy cost down since converting to LED lighting and the reduced building hours to maintain a flat budget as directed by the Selectmen. She stated the merit raise bump was an unexpected increase to their budget yet the library still presented a flat budget despite going from being open 45 hours a week down to 27 hours a week. The library hopes to open back up to 42 hours a week after Town Meeting but will not be able to do so when there is

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another disaster with a \$14,000 cut. Patti Osgood stated for the .31 cents a month the library cost her in tax dollars she does not believe the cut is worth it and asked Vice Chair Hooper and the Budget Advisory Committee to tell the library where the \$14,000 cut is going to come from.

Lynn Piotrowicz, Director of the Tucker Library, shared her screen with the library budget and explained that town appropriated tax dollars are the first expended and that the trust fund monies are what carries and pays the library bills until Town Meeting, when town appropriated tax dollars are received. Lynn stated the library has operated this way since before she was director. Chair Blomback asked for clarification that town money is spent first and the trust fund monies act as a back stop. Lynn confirmed and stated that bills had to go out in January that could not be postponed.

RSA give the library authority to roll over trust fund monies, the question some people are asking is if town tax money is being rolled over. Chair Blomback stated he was unaware the library utilizes town tax dollars first then trust fund monies.

Heidi Aucoin stated that at any public hearing the Board of Directors know what they are talking about and what they are doing, but it would have been helpful to clarify for those in attendance. She also asked how much of the trust fund is being rolled over and why the library's cleaning expenses increased while the open town buildings cleaning budgets did not.

Patti Osgood stated the cleaning increased because library materials go into people's homes and many people read when they are sick in addition to the square footage of spaces open in the library. Patti apologized it was not clear at the regular library board meeting, not a budget meeting. She asked in the future that attendees ask questions especially if it is a meeting they do not regularly attend.

Vice Chair Hooper responded the motion made at the meeting was to roll over operating funds from 2020 to pay for 2021 in case of budget cuts on December 29, 2020 meeting. Vice Chair Hooper asked Financial Director Russ Roy about a \$300,000 library account listed as an unreserved fund balance, since there is to be no comingling of trust fund monies.

Russ Roy stated the \$300,000 is a majority trust left by a resident that does not comeingle with other funds. The account is treated as a trust, but in reality is an unserved fund balance and cannot be considered a trust and is maintained by Charter. Chair Blomback asked about other trust. Russ stated TDBank maintains a trust with an unknown amount and that the town can not utilize.

Heidi Aucoin asked for clarification on the TDBank trust being the trust to supplement the budget at \$30,000 with an interest only draw against the account. Chair Blomback confirmed that was his understanding. Heidi Aucoin asked if money can be drawn from the \$300,000 Charter account when needed. Vice Chair Hooper stated that was her understanding the Charter account can be used as library sees fit.

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Lynn Piotrowicz stated when money is withdrawn from the Charter account, first the library writes a Warrant Article asking the voters to approve and give authority at Town Meeting for the funds to be withdrawn from the account. The library does not have the authority to pull from the \$300,000 Charter account any time they see fit; all withdraws are approved by the voters at Town Meeting.

Angelica Ladd stated some of the library funds are marked for certain projects and have donor intentness behind them that cannot be used for operation cost. Lynn Piotrowicz confirmed every trust is supported by an intent and certain amount of money can only be spent on books or technology. The library cannot change the intents placed on the trusts. Chair Blomback asked for clarification on how much from each trust contributed to the \$30,000 allotted in the operating budget and the rolled over amount from December. Lynn Piotrowicz quickly went through the breakdown of the trust money provided in 2020 and stated that \$8,449 of trust money was approved to carry over to 2021.

Heidi Aucoin asked about the unused interest available in the TDBank (Cogswell Fund in some reports). Lynn Piotrowicz stated the information is in the Town Report and that the last withdraw was \$18,000 from TDBank and \$10,000 from the town trust fund. Lynn stated that TDBank withdraws the interest and mails the library a check. Lynn also stated the library has already expended \$8,000 in bills in January alone.

Bill Marko asked about Warrant Article 6, the Road Maintenance expendable trust, and how CIP had recommended funding at \$750,000 opposed to the \$600,000 the Selectmen approved. Bill mentioned the new executive policies under the new administrations which will drive the cost petroleum and petroleum related products up, and strongly encouraged getting as much road work completed as possible before the rate slam.

Chair Blomback agreed with Bill Marko but consented that there is a finite amount of tax money, and if the Board increases funding back to \$750,000 that the difference will need to come from somewhere else in the budget. Selectman Parker stated the Board has tried to cut funds the last two years, but the people always vote and support funding the roads.

Chair Blomback stated he is well aware that the roads need more money, that police and fire also need money but there was a 21% tax increase last year and as the budget stands now the town is looking at a 17% tax increase without knowing what the schools are proposing. *The tax base is finite and Henniker does not have the economic development it needs.* Chair Blomback praised the Planning Board and Economic Development Committee for their valiant efforts, but the reality is that residents on a fixed income cannot afford another tax increase on top of the recent revaluations.

Bill Marko stated there is a difference between wasting money by not using it this year and that smart fiscal policy would maintain the \$750,000 CIP recommendation in order to take advantage of rates now before the new national policies are implemented. Bill stated it will help the towns people everyday by saving them money tires, suspensions, and ruts. Chair Blomback stated with the trillions of dollars in national debt being approved that inflation will

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be coming and he agrees with Bill that money needs to be spent wisely and the town should get the most for their dollar.

Lori Marko asked about Warrant Article 7 and the sum of \$20,000 towards the full revaluation in 2025 as required by law. The 2020 quote was \$95,000 thus \$20,000 funding for the next 5 years is recommended. Lori Marko suggested possibly taking a few thousand from Warrant 7 and other line items in order to funds the roads at \$750,000 this year.

Warrant Article 8: sum of \$70,000

Vice Chair Hooper asked for clarification and if the numbers needed to be switch in regards to Henniker's contribution. Russ Roy confirmed the numbers are correct as printed and briefly went over the history of how it was established and that in addition to Bradford paying for service, Henniker also can bill clients in Bradford when the ambulance is called.

Warrant Article 9: sum of \$150,000

No Board or public comment.

Warrant Article 10: sum of \$225,000

Warrant Article 10, the funds requested is \$25,000 short as it did not account for the radio, lettering, and other options the Highway Department is adding.

the number on the truck in art 10 should be 225k total as opposed to 200k. it doesn't include the radio, lettering, or other options he is adding.

Selectman Flynn moved to fund the \$25,000 from the fund balance rather than through taxation. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

No further Board or public comment.

Warrant Article 11: sum of \$42,000

Selectman Parker pointed out the article is Selectmen recommended.

Warrant Article 12: sum of \$60,000

DRA strongly recommend only \$60,000 because that is guaranteed, and if more than \$60,000 is on the warrant and the State is not able to fund it, the difference would need to be raised through taxation.

Vice Chair Hooper stated it was known this was coming as the State has been struggling to fund their road projects. Russ Roy stated the State has also reduced the room and meals tax distributed to towns.

Warrant Article 13: sum of \$20,000

Vice Chair Hooper stated last week the town boiler failed inspection and that other maintenance has been delayed due to lack of funding.

Warrant Article 14: sum of

Vice Chair Hooper stated the upcoming bridge work is needed.

Warrant Article 15: sum of \$50,000

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Bill Marko stated this is a classic short sightedness and because the capital reserves had stopped being funded it is why the town is in this situation and that it needs to be brought back to the \$100,000 funding.

Selectman Flynn stated his confusion since he was under the impression this warrant maintained the current police building, not future funding for a new building. Vice Chair Hooper stated that it is for the construction of a new facility. Ross Roy confirmed funds have been expended from the account to work on the current building. Selectman Flynn suggested a separate warrant article for new police building. Vice Chair Hooper stated when it was established it was intended for a new building but the wording was not able to be changed on the floor at Town Meeting.

Chair Blomback asked about the land acquired through tax deed next to the current station if that could be used. Selectman Flynn stated it was mostly for parking and that the current building is in the flood plain and not ideal.

Warrant Article 16: sum of \$125,000

Vice Chair Hooper stated the potential cost savings once the tech upgrade is started and that several quotes have been gathered and packages are being reviewed. Lori Marko asked if this was a one-time funding. Vice Chair Hooper stated it will decrease from \$125,000 and eventually be absorbed into the operating budget. Heidi Aucoin agreed it is an investment and that the town infrastructure lacks the technology to pay all the bills online.

Kirk Spaffer asked to review Warrant Article 15 regarding the police building. He is neither for or against the article but is concerned that “building maintenance” and “maintaining” are in the warrant and suggested rewriting the warrant with different language. He thanked to Board for taking his comments.

No further comments on Warrant Article 16.

Warrant Article 17: sum of \$5,000

Vice Chair Hooper recommend \$10,000 since the department needs computers and guns. Heidi Aucoin stated she was having a hard time seeing the donation to the Red Cross and not keeping funds intown under the umbrella of service to the community.

Warrant Article 18: sum of \$100,000 (Fire)

No Board or public comment.

Warrant Article 19: (Parks)

No Board or public comment.

Warrant Article 20: (Wastewater)

No Board or public comment.

Warrant Article 21: Cogswell Springs Water Works (CSWW)

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Heidi Aucoin asked about the town handling CSWW water billing and payroll. Russ stated when the meters were installed the Selectman determined neither Wastewater or CSWW needed to contribute towards sewer&water billings as well as payroll. Heidi also asked about debts and liens. Russ explained that is part of the reason Wastewater and CSWW are not invoiced for payroll& billings, because a tax lien is stronger than a sewer or water lien, so the town handles all town liens.

Warrant Article 22: riverbank at Azalea Park

Selectman Osgood explained there is no tax impact and that the warrant is to reestablish the walkway and stop the erosion.

Susan Adams spoke regarding the serious safety issue on the trails that requires immediate attention and asking the Board to recommend to release the funds to ensure all permits can be obtained. Joe Devine clarified Susan was speaking in regards to a later agenda item.

Bill Marko asked about the last meeting and the vote regarding the \$14,000 Beautification as he thought it had been cut at the meeting yet the papers reported it remained. Vice Chair Hooper stated it was confusing how the motion was worded, but the Board can still make cuts tonight. Bill Marko requested Beautification is cut.

Heidi Aucoin agreed with Bill Marko in that she thought it had also been cut, but upon re-watching the tape saw it was correct. She also asked about White Birch and if the line item stated where the money goes and what it is spent on. Joe Devine stated that is also an agenda item for later in the meeting.

Public Comment was closed.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to table the Board discussions until the remaining agenda items have been completed. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Item 5: White Birch 2020 Invoices

Marc McMurphy stated he was surprised to hear what Vice Chair Hooper said last meeting. He stated White Birch does have a new book keeper who sent the invoices via email to town hall in the fall. Russ Roy never received the emailed invoices. Marc McMurphy requested if the invoices could be settled and expended before the books are closed. Selectman Flynn stated he has no problem with fulfilling the owed invoices. Selectman Parker asked Russ Roy to take the money from 2020.

Selectman Flynn moved to pay White Birch \$54,583.26 to complete the invoices from 2020. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Item 6: Azalea Park Riverwalk Committee

The money being requested is not tax payer money.

Susan Adams spoke of the immediate repairs needed as the reason for Warrant Article 22. Azalea Park Committee met with the Army Corps of Engineers back in March 2020 before the shutdowns, and have an estimate from StreamWorks who are known for fixing rivers and

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working with DES (Department of Environmental Services). Susan also has an estimate from Leo Aucoin as well.

Vice Chair Hooper stated she believed the engineering cost was too high. Susan Adams and Selectman Osgood explained that because they are dealing with DES, a survey and plan must be established before DES will consider granting a permit. The surveys previous done at Azalea Park was only for the entrance area and not on the trail next to the river. The work cannot be done without a permit from DES.

Chair Blomback asked Susan Adams if there was any way DES or the Army Corps of Engineers could work with Azalea Park Committee and waive or reduce the \$8,000 engineering cost when it will cost \$1,500 to fix, and that Azalea Park is not tax payer funded. Susan Adams stated she understands but would like Board approval.

Joe Devine stated he had Susan Adams come before the Board before seeing the Trustees as the Board has to authorize withdrawing the funds since there will be multiple trust discussed at Town Meeting.

Selectman Osgood moved to approve Azalea Park Committee to withdraw funding from the Trustees. Chair Blomback seconded. Motion carried 4-1 (Hooper).

Item 7: Appointment Executive Assistant/Office Manager

Vice Chair Hooper moved to Move to appoint Wendy Baker of Hillsborough as a full-time Executive Assistant/Officer Manager effective February 8, 2021 and to initially set the position as a Labor Grade 13, Step 5B on the Town of Henniker Wage Schedule. Selectman Flynn seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Item 8: Tap Grant

Vice Chair Hooper moved to authorize the Town Administrator to moved forward with the TAP grant. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Item 9: Town Administrator Report

- COVID-19 Update – As of January 27, 2021 we have 15 active cases (0.31% of population), we have had 14 new cases in the past fourteen days, a total of 153 cumulative cases (3.16% of population) and 3,611 tests have been conducted on Henniker residents.
- Craney Hill Communication Tower –The Town has submitted a grant to NH Homeland Security in the amount of \$311,000 for the construction of a tower, building, generator and fence. We hope this this competitive grant will be accepted so we will be able to move our existing police and highway antennas off there current pole and onto a new pole. This will also allow us to have a fixed generator so it will not be necessary for us to transport the portable generator every time the repeater loses power. I will update the board when I have heard the outcome.
- Town Report– Just a reminder we are in the final week of submission for Town Report. If your committee, department, or organization haven't submitted their paperwork please do as soon as possible.

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- Highway Block Grant – We have received our first distribution of the 2021 Highway Block Grant. The amount is for \$33,857.

Item 10: Selectmen Reports

Chair Blomback had no report. Vice Chair Hooper stated CIP is meeting this Thursday. Selectman Osgood and Parker had no reports. Selectman Flynn stated that the Athletics Committee will not be doing basketball this season and baseball is still be discussed.

Untable budget and warrant discussions by consensus

Vice Chair Hooper moved to cut \$14,915 from Beautification. Chair Blomback seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to cut \$1,000 from Red Cross. Chair Blomback seconded. Motion carried 3-2 (Flynn & Osgood).

Vice Chair Hooper moved to cut \$25,000 from White Birch. There was no second. Motion died.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to cut longevity pay (\$17,099). There was no second. Motion died.

Selectman Flynn asked why. Vice Chair Hooper stated it is already received in employee's performance reviews and that the Board is starting to look at a performance management plan and reiterated that longevity pay is already given to employees in their performance reviews (this is not true across all departments and employees) and that it can be cut out.

Selectman Flynn stated he does not support the cut and that the whole point was to retain employees like many other towns do based on time for service. Joe Devine stated his is also in favor of keeping the longevity pay since it has already increased moral and Police Chief French has been advertising the approved longevity pay in the police departments open positions. On the other hand, Joe Devine acknowledged since it has not been activated it cannot be missed, but maintaining longevity pay keeps Henniker competitive with other towns.

Selectman Parker asked for a line item for reference. Vice Chair Hooper stated it is spread throughout all the departments. Selectman Osgood stated it is loyalty pay from the town to the employees and it is good for the town and moral. Vice Chair Hooper stated she would rather pay out vacation time. Selectman Osgood stated it is a benefit that shows the town appreciates the employees. Selectman Parker stated the vacation, holiday pay, PTO payouts are not related to longevity pay.

Chair Blomback moved to close the operating budget and warrants for the Board.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to reduce the education reimbursement from \$15,000 to \$7,500.

Chair Blomback seconded. Motion carried 4-1 (Flynn).

Town Administrator Joe Devine found the longevity pay breakdown by departments. Selectman Parker stated that the town needs people to continue working for the town instead of leaving

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for somewhere else. Vice Chair Hooper again stated that longevity is built in with performance reviews. Joe Devine stated the current step system is not true merit.

Police Chief French stated that merit and performance-based pay needs to be earned in the police department, and that he has withheld pay raises if employees were not performing properly. Selectman Flynn stated that is how every department does it and that it is not a blanket 4% raise every performance review.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to cut longevity pay for every department with the exception of the police department. There was no second.

Joe Devine stated it is important to retain employees and that the Police department has been using longevity pay as a recruitment tool, so it is concerning that it is already been cut when it was just approved. Selectman Parker stated his concern over retaining the employees the town already has.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to cut longevity pay by 50%. Chair Blomback seconded. Motion failed 2-3 (Flynn, Parker, & Osgood).

Selectman Flynn moved to reduce longevity pay by 25% and move forward with the remaining 75% as proposed in the article. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Vice Chair Hooper moved to increase Warrant Article 6 from \$600,000 to the CIP recommended \$750,000. Selectman Parker seconded. Motion failed 2-3 (Blomback, Flynn, Osgood).

Total cuts \$27,975

Gross cut tax rate \$9.96

Chair Blomback closed the Board debate on the budget. Articles will be bundled by department and whoever has the highest total will present first at Town Meeting.

Public comment #2

No public comment

**Selectman Parker moved to adjourn. Selectman Flynn seconded. Motion carried 5-0.
Adjourn at 9:45pm.**

Upcoming meetings and dates:

February 3, 2021 – Currier & Ives Scenic Byways Council Meeting

February 4, 2021 – Capital Improvement Program Committee Meeting

February 9, 2021 – Road Management Committee

February 15, 2021 – Presidents Day – Town Offices Closed

February 16, 2021 – Board of Selectmen Meeting