

**Budget Workshop to Discuss 2024 Budget held October 6, 2023, at 3:00 P.M. at the
Town Hall in Schroon Lake N.Y.**

Present:

Town Supervisor: Meg Wood

Councilpersons: Richard Gero, Lynn Donaldson, Leanna Welch and Steve Miller

Deputy Town Clerk: Erica Hedden

Also Present: Albert May, Bob Hauserman, Brian Ritching, Mark Granger

Supervisor Wood called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M. with a salute to the Flag.

Paradox Lake Association

Bob Hauserman stated; I wanted to start with our herbicide permitting process and our milfoil. Here I have a map of the lake and the density of milfoil we have discovered.

In terms of our herbicide permits that we applied for, would be for the narrows and the inlet bay. The two areas of the densest growth, when the plants fragment via natural fragmentation or a boat going over it, the wind blows it to those areas. These are the two really critical areas for us. In terms of our permits we started with having the APA on the lake in August of 2022 to get our herbicide permits for 2023. Three permits are required, one from the DEC, divisions of materials and herbicides, another from the APA, that one is on hold, the other one we have to get is a work plan approved by the state. We just recently received notification from Lands and Forest that they have approved our work order, so we are still moving forward. We want to treat both the narrows and the inlet bay both, next summer. We did pay a price for all the delays and hold ups with the permitting

process this year. We have to pay another 57,000 worth of hand harvesting. We have to in order to keep on top of it. We also have to re-do the DEC permit, so there is some repeat consultant work that we have to do. We had varying lake levels this year and to some degree that mad harvesting easier, as fragments were being washed away, into areas that were easier to access. That being said, next year, anticipating a more average year, we won't be so lucky. We have seen a tremendous influx in the amount of growth this year and the speed and rate is something we can't predict, other then the fact that it will probably continue to spread.

We have been spending more each year in hand harvesting and as you can see we have a create membership. Our members continue to step up and help with funding and keep us going. We are so fortunate to have our members. In 2021 the town stepped up and increased our budget by 50%, we greatly appreciate it. A couple years ago we did a very aggressive push to try to get as many new members on board as we could. We got our membership up about 60%. From 2021 to 2022, our member donations have increased by 37%. This year the increase is 40%. Our members are caring land owners and members, we are so grateful for them. We also started a capitol campaign as well.

In regards to our expenses you will see a big spike in 2024 and 2025. That is because we will be doing hand harvesting and the herbicide treatment. Hopefully it will go down by 2025 as the areas we want to treat in 2025, is a smaller area. We are also looking for grants, but it is hard to find grant money. The DEC announced recently that they were issuing the third phase of their invasive control grant, but the due date is Nov. 1st. A very tight timeline. They mentioned that if you are Non- Profit, then you are not registered n the Grants Gateway, and odds of getting in on time are nil. The grant is also targeted at small

infestations that are new, which of course; we do not meet that requirement. We are fortunate, we have Susan Brown. She was a professional grant writer for years. She has really helped us figure all this stuff out. Susan has been working with the Lake George Regional Planning crew as well, trying to find something that would be a good fit for us, but so far we haven't found anything.

We have requested the same amount for 2024 that we did for 2023. We hope that town can find a way to meet our request.

Councilwoman Donaldson stated; I want to say thank you for all the work you have done over there, its very well organized.

Supervisor Wood stated; how is the milfoil on Eagle Lake

Bob Hauserman stated; I expected it to be really bad. I inspected it about 10 years ago and it wasn't too bad. Now, things are different, it has really exploded.

So historically the town has given us \$4,000 to put towards lake stewards. That was bumped up to \$6,000, what we are hoping is if we can get to \$15,000 during this surge. Then back down.

Schroon Lake Judge

Mark Granger stated; the court has been doing really well. Our court is very accessible, which is very helpful to our community. Arraignments are hard, they can be held at all hours of the day or night to include weekends. The Essex County Council or Public Defenders doesn't work on nights or weekends, so that has been our limiting factor. We average about one every tree weeks, but of course that is just an average.

The JCAP grant we are seeking, we are hoping it will cover security cameras and monitors. We want to make sure our building is as secure as possible. We cannot put

cameras in the court room, but we can put them around the court building and the parking lot.

As for the budget this year, I am asking for 10% increase. The court is bringing in money, every year we are seeing increases in the amount of revenue the court is making.

Burnham Benefit Advisors

Ian Coryea stated: There is a plan that a lot of towns and villages have and I want to introduce this to you. What happens this year and every year, New York State has what's called prior approval. That means the insurance carriers must submit in April what they want for the following year, it's the only tool the state has to control these increases. This year the state basically gave the health insurances what they wanted for an increase. This is how increases are determined.

So this new plan has been growing in popularity with municipalities. 10 years ago it was new and we had one town switch to it, now we are up to about 11 in this area.

Some changes we are going to be seeing, telehealth is going back to a co-pay, it was free during the COVI public health emergency. Vaccines and boosters will still be covered in full, but only in network. Over the counter COVID tests will no longer be covered by our insurance. COVID lab testing will still be covered, subject to deductible. COVID treatment will be subject to our plan and deductible. There will be a new wellness benefit called RIDE WELL, that will start January 1st. basically you will be able to go online and track what you do from a wellness stand point, and you can earn up to \$400 dollars. As we get closer I can also get you information on child health plus, that is a great program and it might help some employees be able to drop own to the single plan.

In regards to our under 65 ages. We have two plans for our active employees or our retired employees who are not yet 65 or older. We have our gold plan; it has no benefit changes for 2024. Our gold plan has an 11.2% increase. Every client we have with the gold plan is going to pay the exact same rate. The silver plan, there will be some changes n January 1st. the deductible will increase instead of \$3,000 and \$6,000 it will be \$3,350 and \$6,700. Those rates will go up 12.7%. That's if we stay with this plan. Now let's talk about what else is out there.

There is a plan out there that is growing in popularity, the bronze plan. Minerva, Chesterfield, Newcomb, Village of Canton, Village of Governor, are some towns and Moriah as well as Long Lake is looking like they will be moving to it as well. This plan is still with Excellus, it covers all the same benefits our current plans do, and it is just different in how it covers it. It has a much larger deductible and out of pocket maximum, \$8,000 and \$16,000. The only way it would make sense is if we generated enough savings to increase the amount we give to the employees as their mutual aid, the HRA accounts. The first thing this does is this plan reduces the employee contribution per paycheck. What we have to do if we are going to consider this is to change the funding. Currently our gold plan has a \$3,600 out of pocket max; \$1,800 dollars are a deductible. The town is funding for a single the first \$1,800. For the gold plan, we would have to increase our reimbursement amount. This is money we don't give to the employee; this is money that we reimburse for their medical expenses up to a certain point. If the employee doesn't use it, the town rolls that money to next years funding. The goal would be, even though the deductible goes up, the amount the employees have to pay out of pocket stays the same. The deductible goes up; the amount we reimburse to the employee goes up so the amount

they are responsible for out of pocket stays the same. The employee won't feel any changes; other than their contribution per pay roll is going to go down. So the town would have to front more into the HRA account to cover the reimbursement to the employees, but if that money is not spent, it rolls over to next year. Where the town saves is if the employees don't meet their full amount, the town gets to keep that money that was set aside into the HRA, it remains in the HRA. So when 2025 rolls around, the left over fund balance rolls into 2025 HRA. When that happens the town doesn't have to put as much in next year, and so on and so on. The upfront cost to the town is higher, but as the plan continues year to year, that HRA account starts building, the town will save money. That roll over amount stays with the town. It doesn't go to the insurance company, or the state, it stays here and will contribute to next years budget. The key is it depends on how much utilization there is of that HRA account. Currently the average amount of HRA utilization is approximately 40%. If the HRA funding is at 40% the town would save approximately \$66,109.88, and that would roll over into next years HRA fund. In that event, that it is \$66,109.88, then that's less money the town needs to put into that HRA next year. That number varies, could be 60% at \$34,109.88, 20% at 98,109.88, 80% at 2,109.88. The key to this is you want to be at least less than 80% utilization. This is a big change, but local towns have gone to this plan, and its working out very well for them. They are saving this money and keeping it in house. It's a new way to look at health care. I know it's a lot to think about.

Councilman Miller stated; what feedback have you gotten from other employees in towns that have adopted this?

Ian Coryea stated; most towns and villages that have done this were on an extremely expensive platinum plan, and switched right to the low cost bronze plan. There is definitely an education component to it. It's new; they need to learn how to use it. So far the feedback has been positive but there is a learning curve. Chances of an employee using up the WHOLE allotted HRA funded to them, is low. That being said it can, 100% happen. Things happen; illness's happen, accidents happen. So there are risks but we have more than one employee, so we are looking at an overall utilization rate, over all the employees.

Councilman Miller stated; so the employee is going to get the same plan for cheaper

Ian Coryea stated; yes.

Councilman Gero stated; the town assumes the risk

Ian Coryea stated; correct. I will mention, on the gold plan, after the burn through that \$1,800 they are covered at 80% they only pay 20%. When they get there on the bronze plan, there is no more co- insurance so they are on the line for that last \$1,800. They are still at the same CAP, just there is no co-insurance. Let's say someone is on the Gold plan and they burn through the \$1,800, and now they have more expenses, that's on their dime. If they go through the \$1,800 on the bronze plan, they still have more money in their HRA, they have more town money to use. They may never hit their cap and they use their full HRA. This plan is close, but it works out better for the employee. If they have a worse case scenario, they will be better off because the HRA covers more, and they pay less per pay period.

Chris Stone stated; so if we went totally to the bronze plan, the people on the gold would definitely see a difference, bigger then the silver.

Ian Coryea stated; correct, the gold plan members will see the greatest savings.

Councilman Gero stated; it's a gamble if we go to this plan but if we stay where we are then we are locked into losing money. We are keeping this money, we might spend it, and we might save it, and roll it over.

Ian Coryea stated; the employees really won't see a change other than, the amount the town covers is higher. We also have that new wellness program that I mentioned. It's so new I don't have any information on it yet. It is a digital program that employees can earn points by walking so many steps and going to their appointments and they can earn up to \$400. That's an online program. Preventative drugs are covered in full; other drugs are subject to the deductible, same as the current plan.

If we want to go this route, we have to sign rate sheet with Excellus, we have to update our funding with lifetime, should definitely have an employee meeting as well. The employees again, are not going to see much of a difference.

Councilwoman Welch stated; the silver plan will see as well, they are just going to have to swipe their card

Ian Coryea stated; if you're on the silver plan, they are exposed to a lot of out of pocket costs. The bronze plan would change that. Most towns average between 40% and 60% utilization. Village of Governor has never gone above 50%

Councilman Miller stated; so 50% to 60% utilization rate to us would put us at about \$25,000 to \$50,000 savings.

Ian Coryea stated; correct, and the employees are paying less out of pocket, and they are saving on their payroll deductions. Where it doesn't work is if we get up to 80%. I highly recommend having an employee meeting to really explain this to the employee. Make sure everyone understands. Everyone likes choices; we would be taking away their choices.

Thank you everyone for your time, feel free to contact me with any questions, thoughts or comments.

General Discussion

Supervisor Wood stated; Kevin Hall a surveyor sent me something about surveying the airport. He wanted to know how much detail we wanted. So we need to figure out what we want the map to show.

Councilman Gero stated; I think we should get a pretty detailed map. Once we have it, we have it. We can clearly prove our lines and boundaries. We can talk about it more.

Councilman Gero stated; did anyone check out that hole at the dump?

Supervisor Wood stated; yes it is fixed, I believed he finished it yesterday and started it Wednesday, Ethan did it. He also finished the roof over there.

Councilman Gero made a motion to adjourn at 5:10 P.M, seconded by Councilwoman Donaldson; carried.

I, Erica D. Hedden, do hereby certify the foregoing to be a true and correct transcript from the minutes now on file in my office and of the whole such original minutes.

Dated: October 26th, 2023

Deputy Town Clerk

