

Belmont spending for the new year unchallenged

By THOMAS P. CALDWELL, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — A half-dozen people — most of them town employees — attended Tuesday night's hearing on a proposed \$7,593,919 operating budget that is 14 percent less than the 2017 appropriation.

With the additional special warrant articles, the budget would become \$10,434,533, but anticipated revenues would reduce the amount to be raised by taxation to \$5,530,635.

Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin said the overall budget is down 1.53 percent from last year, with a reduction in health insurance costs being the biggest reason.

The budget committee made no changes to the selectmen's recommendation, and there were no questions from the audience, so the committee adopted those figures to go before voters at the Feb. 3 deliberative session and a final vote on March 13.

If voters reject the budget article, the default operating budget that would take effect would be \$7,776,458.

Warrant articles seeking appropriations include Article 13, asking for \$950,000 for a new quint fire truck, providing the town gets a \$700,000 grant toward the purchase. The remaining \$250,000 would come out of the Fire/Ambulance Equipment and Apparatus Special Revenue Fund. Fire Chief Ken Erickson said the town will not know if the grant comes through until February, and if it fails to win the grant, the article would not be funded.

Deputy Chief Mike Newhall said "quint" refers to the five functions of the truck: a pumper, water tanker, hose-carrier, aerial and ground ladders rescue truck. Should the grant come through, the truck would replace an out-of-service rescue vehicle that is 20 years old and a 95-foot aerial truck that is 30 years old, he said.

Article 14 calls for the third-year payment on the lease-purchase of a pumper truck for the fire department. A number of articles would place money into capital reserve and expendable trust funds. The largest appropriation would be \$750,000 to be added to the Highway Reconstruction Capital Reserve Fund. Beaudin said the fund currently has about \$280,000 after being drawn down to cover the completion of the Ladd Hill road project last year.

Other articles on the warrant include one to adopt the provisions of RSA 72:81, which encourages new construction by discounting 50 percent of the additional property valuation attributable to the improvements from town and school taxation for a period of up to six years.

Another article would discontinue the town's ownership of a portion of Pond Road, allowing it to revert to the Sunray Shores Improvement Association, which would become responsible for the road's maintenance. A similar article would discontinue a portion of Hackett Road, allowing it to become attached to land owned by Clive and Alison Roberts.

Another article asks voters to rescind the bonding authority for projects completed at a lower price than anticipated. Beaudin said the purpose is to clear the books from carrying the borrowing authority for those projects, which include \$40,982 for the Pleasant Valley Roadway; \$179,196 for sewer pump station replacement; \$76,679 for Belmont Village water line replacement; and \$14,939 for Belmont Village Phase II water line replacement.

Voters will be asked to authorize the spending of \$65,000 from the Municipal Facilities Capital Reserve Fund for a space needs and feasibility study for the town. Donna Hepp, who has been leading the effort to improve town facilities, said the Town Building Strategy Committee has found it needs to hire a contractor to assess space needs and safety issues and determine what work is feasible to address the concerns.