

**TOWN OF GOFFSTOWN DELIBERATIVE SESSION  
FEBRUARY 4, 2025**

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**CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Moderator Rodney Stark called the meeting to order. He asked Select Board Peter Georgantas to lead the session in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Moderator Stark introduced the following officials:

- Head Table: Town Clerk Cathy Ball and Assistant Town Moderator Barbara Griffin
- Select Board: Chairman Peter Georgantas, Vice Chairwoman Kelly Boyer, and Selectman Jim Craig present.
- Town Staff: Town Administrator Derek Horne and Assistant Town Administrator Danielle Basora

He also introduced department heads:

- Police Chief Eric Serino, Public Works Director Adam Jacobs, Fire Chief Sean Murray, Library Director Diane Hathaway, and Parks & Rec Director Rick Wilhelmi

He introduced the members of the Budget Committee that may be in attendance:

Joe Alexander Jr., Chairman; Frank Hobbs, Vice Chairman; Israel Carey; Allison DeCesere; Elizabeth Dubrulle; Peter Grigorakakis; Samantha Kearns; ; Richard Manzo; Brian Mazur; Doug Pounds; Laura Stevens; Olivia Welch-Erdahl; Mark Renaud – Goffstown Village Water Precinct Rep.; Jared Talbot – School Board Rep.; and Kelly Boyer – Select Board Rep.

He also introduced elected officials that may be attendance: Senator Keith Murphy; State Representatives Joe Alexander, Jr.; Henry Giasson, Sherri Reinfurt, Sheila Seidel, Ross Berry, and Lisa Mazur.

**MODERATOR'S OPENING STATEMENT & RULES OF PROCEDURE**

Moderator Stark explained that Goffstown has operated under the SB2 form of town meeting since 1996. He clarified that no voting would occur at this meeting to pass or defeat warrant articles. Instead, the purpose was to deliberate on the articles and how they will appear on the official ballot in March.

He outlined key rules of procedure, including:

- No smoking on school grounds
- Speakers must use microphones and show voting cards
- Comments must be germane to the warrant article being discussed
- All comments must be addressed through the moderator
- No derogatory comments allowed

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Moderator Stark noted that printed rules were available in the handout, including directions on how to file amendments or request secret ballots.

*A motion was made and passed to dispense with the reading of the full warrant.*

**ARTICLE 9 OPERATING BUDGET**

*Vice Chairwoman Boyer moved Article 9 to the floor. It was seconded by Selectman Craig.*

Vice Chairwoman Boyer presented the proposed town operating budget of \$29,976,883, noting it is an increase of \$441,784 (1.7%) over the 2024 appropriation. This article only covers the general fund, as the sewer fund was broken out into its own separate article this year. Vice Chairwoman Boyer provided an in-depth explanation of the proposed operating budget as:

Vice Chairwoman Boyer elaborated that the proposed town budget went through a rigorous process of three months of intense scrutiny by the town's Budget Committee. The budget committee prioritized immediate operating expenses while balancing the needs for town services against the impact on property taxes. Wages and benefits played a significant role, following a 2023 compensation study that showed Goffstown employees were paid below the average of their peers. The study's results led to the adjustment of non-union employee wages in 2024 to address pay inequities, and last year's proposed budget successfully brought non-union employees closer to comparability with other communities. Most of the budget cuts were made to medium and long-range capital expenditures, such as smaller vehicles and road infrastructure projects. The budget committee made minor reductions to department budgets but left non-union wage increases intact. Other cost drivers for the proposed budget include increases in IT costs, solid waste disposal fees, and town-wide insurance.

Importantly, the 1.7% increase is below the reported 3% inflation rate, reflecting the town's commitment to fiscal responsibility. The estimated tax impact for the proposed budget is approximately \$0.15 per \$1,000 assessed value, translating to an estimated increase of \$62.16 for a median single-family home in Goffstown. On the other hand, she noted that the default budget, which was computed based on prior appropriation mandates, would include contractual wage increases approved by voters last year for union CBAs for police officers, dispatchers, and DPW employees, but would result in a slight reduction in the town's tax rate by \$0.01, equating to a reduction on the tax bill of approximately \$2.75 for a median single-family residence.

Sierra Hubbard, Holly Street, asked about items like health insurance should the default budget pass. Vice Chairwoman Boyer explained that should the default budget become necessary, the Select Board would face the task of making budget transfers to cover any shortfalls in appropriations. This might necessitate adjustments and reallocations to essential funds to ensure that all critical services and obligations are met. Christine Templeton, Kennedy Hill Road, inquired about any potential unassigned funds that could be utilized, and Town Administrator Derek Horne responded, clarifying that as of October 2024, there was approximately \$7.6 million in unassigned fund balance. However, he noted that some of these funds were already

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proposed to be used in other warrant articles, such as Article 12, which sought to deposit \$350,000 into the Fire Apparatus Capital Reserve Fund.

*Vice Chairwoman Boyer moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 9. It was seconded by Selectman Craig. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ARTICLE 10 SEWER ENTERPRISE FUND BUDGET**

*Selectman Jim Craig moved Article 10 to the floor. It was seconded by Chairman Georgantas.*

Selectman Craig presented the Sewer Enterprise Fund budget, explaining it was separated from the main budget this year. Key points included:

- The fund is supported by fees from 2,169 sewer accounts
- It is managed by 3 elected commissioners and 3 full-time employees
- The 2025 budget includes replacing a 2015 pickup truck

The Budget Committee and Sewer Commission both unanimously recommended the proposed budget

Sierra Hubbard, Holly Street, asked if passing the proposed budget versus the default would impact customer fees. Assistant Town Administrator Danielle Basora explained fees are set by the commissioners based on 10-year projections and would not be directly impacted by which budget passes.

*Selectman Craig moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 10. It was seconded by Chairman Georgantas. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ARTICLE 11 FIREFIGHTERS CBA**

*Chairman Peter Georgantas moved Article 11 to the floor. It was seconded by Vice Chairwoman Boyer.*

Chairman Georgantas presented the collective bargaining agreement for firefighters, emphasizing the critical issues addressed in the agreement. Retention of personnel emerged as a significant focus due to high turnover within the department over the past six years. During that period, 19 full-time firefighters left Goffstown to work at other New Hampshire fire departments, in addition to two retirements and eight career changes. The competitive job market for New Hampshire firefighters exacerbates these challenges, with approximately 34 out of 40 towns with full-time fire departments currently looking to hire firefighters. Chairman Georgantas highlighted that both Manchester and Nashua are planning to hire ten firefighters each in the early part of the year, underscoring the competitive nature of firefighter recruitment.

To remain competitive, the agreement proposes an increase in the wage matrix by 10% in the first year, with 3% increases in the subsequent second and third years, aligning Goffstown's wages with the average rates of comparable departments. Additionally, the CBA introduces a 3-year training agreement aimed at retaining firefighters post-training. New recruits must commit

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to the department for at least 36 months post-training, or reimburse a prorated amount for training costs if they leave for another department within that period, similar to the agreement with police officers.

The estimated tax impact is \$0.05 per \$1,000 assessed value, translating to an approximate increase of \$20.72 for a median single-family home in Goffstown. Chairman Georgantas noted that the article holds unanimous support from both the Select Board and the Budget Committee.

***Chairman Georgantas moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 11. It was seconded by Vice Chairwoman Boyer. Voice Vote: Motion passed.***

**ARTICLE 12 FIRE APPARATUS CAPITAL RESERVE FUND**

***Vice Chairwoman Kelly Boyer moved Article 12 to the floor. It was seconded by Selectman Craig. Voice Vote: Motion passed.***

Vice Chairwoman Kelly Boyer presented the article seeking to appropriate \$350,000 from the unassigned fund balance to the Fire Apparatus Capital Reserve Fund. She detailed the importance of the fund in helping to spread costs over multiple years, which avoids sudden spikes in the tax rate. According to Vice Chairwoman Boyer, this fund was originally established in 2008 to manage the expense of replacing modern fire apparatus that over time have significant costs. By contributing to this reserve annually, the fund mitigates unpredictable taxation increases while allowing the town to maintain its fire apparatus on a 20-year replacement matrix that is updated based on the condition of the apparatus.

Vice Chairwoman Boyer emphasized that the ongoing increases in costs and build times for fire engines make the reserve fund crucial for fiscal planning. For instance, the fire engine replacement approved in 2022 was only delivered in March 2024, following a prolonged construction timeline of almost two years. Vice Chairwoman Boyer also noted that current industry trends suggest the timeframe for constructing fire apparatus has extended to three to four years. The fund further serves a strategic purpose by providing the town with leverage when applying for grants. She recalled a 2010 instance when the fire department utilized a FEMA grant for a new aerial ladder truck, with 70% of the million-dollar cost covered by the grant and the remaining 30% funded through the capital reserve. The current balance of the fund stands at \$768,330, which is utilized to ensure ongoing fire safety investments.

The article was endorsed by both the Select Board and the Budget Committee owing to its strategic importance in ensuring the financial planning and preparedness of Goffstown's firefighting capabilities. Vice Chairwoman Boyer's explanation underscored the importance of these funds not just for immediate apparatus purchases, but for the long-term resilience and efficacy of the town's emergency services.

***Vice Chairwoman Boyer moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 12. It was seconded by Selectman Craig. Voice Vote: Motion passed.***

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**ARTICLE 13: GOFFSTOWN ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

*Chairman Georgantas moved Article 13 to the floor, seconded by Selectman Craig.*

The article proposed an appropriation of \$450,000 for road improvements to counteract earlier cuts by the Budget Committee. Chairman Georgantas detailed that the Budget Committee had removed this funding from the operating budget; thus, the Select Board placed it as a separate warrant article for voter consideration. This step aimed to sustain the funding levels for road maintenance consistent with previous years, despite the substantial increase in road repair costs.

Chairman Georgantas noted that before the 2008 recession, the town allocated \$2,500,000 for road plans. However, from 2008 to 2012, due to economic constraints, this funding was reduced by over 50%. Even as the economy improved, cost escalation in highway construction, notably across the past three years, has strained annual roadwork efforts, emphasizing maintaining adequate funding to prevent future financial pressures and infrastructural decline.

During public comment, Enid Mackenzie, Tipping Rock Road, urged preserving Goffstown's distinctive character, expressing concerns over certain roads turning into wide thoroughfares. Sierra Hubbard, Holly Street, thanked the town for recent road improvements, which enhanced drainage and infrastructure. Timothy Searles, Tirrell Hill Road, inquired about current road repair needs, emphasizing clarity on forthcoming overlay or reclamation requirements. Chairman Georgantas responded that specific road decisions hinge on finalized budget allocations. Additionally, officials highlighted a significant rise in highway construction costs over the past two decades, intensifying fiscal considerations for yearly road maintenance plans.

*Timothy Searles proposed an amendment reducing the allocation from \$450,000 to \$117,000, focusing on cost control and tax impact.*

The ensuing discussion revealed differing opinions: some stakeholders favored a cautious fiscal approach, fearing tax rate increments and economic strain, while others championed proactive investment to sidestep more extensive future expenditures. Brian Templeton, Kennedy Hill Road, acknowledged the Budget Committee's efforts in balancing urgent infrastructure needs against long-term economic constraints. Samantha Kearns, Washington Street, queried detailed tax impacts at various funding levels. Participants universally noted inflation and construction cost surges affect purchasing power for road upkeep and maintenance.

*The amendment proposing a reduced appropriation underwent a standing vote, resulting in a defeat (50 in favor, 119 opposed).*

Henry Giasson, Amoskeag Drive, further deliberated potential implications, contemplating whether the proposal could enforce permanent funding increments in future default budgets. Despite his proposal for an amendment to eliminate automatic future appropriations, the amendment was not supported.

In closing discussions, Brian Templeton highlighted the Budget Committee's complexity, underscoring balancing the immediacy of infrastructure requirements against planning for

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financial sustainability. He noted that maintaining the 2020 road budget would potentially foster long-term savings and continual infrastructure quality.

*Chairman Georgantas made a motion to restrict reconsideration of Article 13. Selectman Craig seconded the motion. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ARTICLE 14 CABLE ACCESS REVOLVING FUND**

*Chairman Peter Georgantas moved Article 14 to the floor. It was seconded by Selectman Craig.*

Chairman Georgantas explained this article would modify the existing Cable Access Revolving Fund established in 2013, directing 100% of Comcast franchise fees to Goffstown TV, the town's PEG (Public, Education, Government) access channel. Previously, 30% of these fees went to the general fund, with the remaining 70% allocated to the revolving fund. This change now aims to allocate the entire franchise fee to support the channel, ensuring fiscal sustainability amid declining franchise revenues and rising equipment costs as consumer preferences shift toward streaming services and broadband.

Chairman Georgantas emphasized the importance of the fund in keeping public access television self-sustaining. The costs for GTV equipment continue to escalate as it transitions to include streaming over public access channels and various social media platforms. This adjustment is important for maintaining Goffstown's local programming and increasing the channel's resilience against future fiscal challenges.

The Select Board unanimously recommended this article, recognizing the necessity for a secure revenue stream for GTV. There was no discussion on this article following Chairman Georgantas's presentation.

*Selectman Craig moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 14. It was seconded by Chairman Georgantas. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ARTICLE 15 SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM TAX EXEMPTION**

*Selectman Craig moved Article 15 to the floor. It was seconded by Vice Chairwoman Boyer.*

Selectman Craig detailed the proposal to amend the solar energy system tax exemption, increasing it from 10 kilowatts to 20 kilowatts. Presently, 158 properties utilize the exemption, with 45 exceeding the 10-kilowatt capacity. The adjustment would lead to an increase in exempt property value by approximately \$163,000, which constitutes 0.0059% of the town's total property value, thereby exerting no impact on the tax rate.

Scott Markinson, Hooksett Road, expressed opposition, asserting that taxpayers should not subsidize others' solar systems via reduced tax revenue and highlighted the inequity of receiving tax breaks for solar systems while other personal properties, such as a small deck, are taxed.

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Robert Jones, East Dunbarton Road, a solar panel owner, argued that increasing the exemption supports solar system adoption, as the current limit is arbitrary and does not meet modern energy demands.

Christine Templeton, Kennedy Hill Road, opposed further tax breaks, noting that solar owners already enjoy savings through lower electric bills.

Liz Dolan, Worthley Hill Road, voiced support for solar energy for its environmental benefits, arguing it serves the public's interest due to improved air quality.

*Selectman Craig moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 15. It was seconded by Vice Chairwoman Boyer. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ARTICLE 16 - PETITION ARTICLE ON EFFICIENCY STUDY**

*Brian Mazur moved Article 16 to the floor. The motion was seconded.*

Brian Mazur, Shirley Park Road, introduced Article 16, which proposed an operational efficiency study for all Goffstown town departments. He emphasized that the study's overarching goal was to enhance transparency and foster greater public confidence in town governance. By assessing current expenditures and identifying areas for potential cost savings and efficiency improvements, Mr. Mazur highlighted that the proposed study aimed to bring a fresh perspective to the management of town resources. He insisted that adopting best practices from similar towns could offer substantial financial and operational rewards for Goffstown, potentially leading to long-term fiscal savings that might outweigh any initial cost of the study.

*During the presentation, Mr. Mazur proposed an amendment to the article, seeking to allocate \$0 for the study.*

This amendment effectively permitted but did not mandate the Select Board to initiate the study should alternative funding become available. He outlined that this decision was informed by concerns raised during the Budget Committee public hearing, where questions about the necessity and sourcing of funding for such a study were discussed. Mr. Mazur stressed that in his view, the study would reinforce transparency and accountability in town governance, building greater public trust.

Residents expressed a variety of opinions on the proposal. Jessica Peutin, Lesnyk Road, supported the idea, arguing that it resembles common efficiency audits in other sectors, which could unveil gaps and identify opportunities for improvement. She contended that such audits could enhance the efficient use of town resources and pinpoint critical areas where modifications could yield cost savings and improved services. Kristin Rehm, of Reed Street, raised significant concerns regarding potential costs and cybersecurity risks associated with an external study, worrying that it might inadvertently expose sensitive information or heighten job security concerns for town employees. Ms. Rehm argued for internal evaluations conducted by staff familiar with daily operations as potentially more effective with less risk.

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Town Administrator Derek Horne clarified some logistical aspects surrounding the article, noting that unassigned funds could not be used for this purpose. Any necessary funding would need to come from budget reallocations or external sources, such as grants. He mentioned that the Select Board would have the authority to accept funds from donations, but there were stipulations that would need to be addressed in their acceptance process. He also addressed concerns related to donations or alternative funding options, as some residents expressed skepticism about the transparency and accountability of such funding avenues.

*The session took a voice vote in favor of the motion to amend the appropriation amount of the article to \$0. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

*Members of the session made a motion and seconded to restrict reconsideration of Article 16. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ARTICLE 17 PETITION ARTICLE CHECK REGISTER**

*Brian Templeton moved Article 17 to the floor. The motion was seconded.*

Brian Templeton, Kennedy Hill Road, presented a petition article to direct the town to post a check register on the town website, arguing it would provide easier access to information already available through right-to-know requests and increase transparency. Templeton noted that such access would save time and effort for both the public and town staff by reducing the number of right-to-know requests that required processing, thus enhancing governmental transparency.

Brian Templeton acknowledged a typographical error in the text of the original article, noting the phrase "this will mail many" should read "this will make many." Officials assured the rectification of this typo before it appeared on the ballot. Town officials clarified this information is not currently requested frequently. Town Administrator Horne emphasized that while this task would constitute new work, costs from staff hours are not expected to be significant, although no specific staff hours are set aside for this purpose.

Samantha Kearns, Washington Street, raised a query regarding the frequency of right-to-know requests, and it was noted that the town hadn't previously received specific requests for this type of financial information. Sierra Hubbard, Holly Street, posed questions about existing costs related to right-to-know requests, which are covered by requester-paid fees for paper copies, though electronic copies are provided free. Consistent with legal requirements, requests for staff time cannot be billed.

Sierra Hubbard, Holly Street, echoed concerns similar to those raised at a recent school board meeting, specifically addressing issues surrounding cybersecurity and privacy. She asked whether financial transaction details, if posted online, would inadvertently expose sensitive information or increase risk, pointing out that careful management would be necessary to protect against potential threats. Town Administrator Horne, acknowledged these concerns, explaining that significant steps would need to be taken to ensure financial data security. He highlighted the critical need for collaboration with the town's bank to manage the check register's format

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properly, thereby preventing the exposure of personally identifiable information. He further addressed how the town maintains stringent processes to avoid incidents such as check washing, which involves altering checks to perpetrate fraud.

In light of these considerations, the Select Board unanimously recommended the article, emphasizing the broader goal of reinforcing transparency in local government affairs.

*Members of the session moved to restrict reconsideration of Article 17. The motion was seconded. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

Assistant Moderator Barbara Griffin thanked those in attendance and recognized outgoing Select Board members Collis Adams and Kelly Boyer for their service.

*Joe Alexander made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded. Voice Vote: Motion passed.*

The motion to adjourn passed, and Moderator Stark closed the meeting at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Derek M Horne, Town Administrator (prepared with assistance of AI, ClerkMinutes.com)