

We have now come full circle!

In the late 1990's my wife, Wilma, and Bill Orr's wife, Sue, were on the Budget Committee. The Chairman of the Council's Finance Committee had just shepherded the manager's and his budget through the council proceedings. Those proceedings were much as they are now. That is, the review of the manager's budget by the Council's Finance Committee was followed by review of the full council. The Finance Committee Chair attended the Budget Committee's initial meeting supposedly to provide answers to any questions the budget committee members might have about the budget. The information he provided that evening was an arrogant announcement to the members that they could recommend anything they wanted to as a result of their review of the budget, but that he had five votes on the council and that he intended to vote down, sight-unseen, any recommendation the budget committee could come up with. You see he and the Council had all the answers and they weren't interested in anyone, even a duly elected budget committee, suggesting improvements to his budget. And that's the way it went that year.

So here we are today, with a like minded chair of the finance committee joined by others who think its passé and redundant and maybe a little messy to have the public, in the form of the budget committee, review and God forbid recommend a change to the budget that she runs through the council. She ignores the fact that over the years since 2003 the budget committee has made a number of recommendations accepted by the council. As recently as the Spring of 2011 the council approved all of the recommendations made by the budget committee for the FY 2012 budget.

Some Budget Committee recommendations have not been adopted by the Council. One in particular that has not been adopted concerns the timely bidding of the capital improvements. It has been recommended by the budget committee that the capital improvements be bid prior to the completion of the budget process so that the council would have firm figures going forward with the budget and so it could avoid bonding an amount higher than necessary. Had that recommendation been adopted by the council we could have avoided a situation we now find ourselves in. A year ago last June, the Manchester Road and Emery Road improvements were passed in the FY2012 budget for a total of \$687,796. Last Fall we received bond funds in that amount for those roads and deposited the money in our capital improvement account. These roads were just recently bid. The total of the two bids for the two roads is \$225,000, not close to the \$687,796 we bonded. We now find ourselves in a position of having well over \$450,000 of bonded money sitting in the capital improvements account, unencumbered. You might say, well we are going spend that money on needed projects anyway. We probably will, but our budgeted debt service amount on the unencumbered \$450,000 is approximately \$57,000 more this year than it should be.

Some have said that while I'm serving on the council that my wife and/or my daughter shouldn't serve on the budget committee. Well change the Charter so that is not allowed. That would not hurt my feelings. As to their qualifications, one did so well at Gray's Business College back in the sixties that upon graduation she was asked by the owner to teach classes, including accounting and corporate accounting. And she did so for a number of years. She had also served on the budget committee in another town for several years. And my daughter has her Bachelor of Science in Business from St.

Joseph and Master of Science in Business Administration from Husson University. And I'm proud of both of them.

Some say that the budget committee has become a platform for individuals who speak or overspeak their minds. That is a small price to pay for keeping an open and balanced process. You won't improve the situation by abolishing the budget committee. If you want to improve the situation, I suggest reducing the membership of the committee from 9 to 7.

Does the Finance Committee have all the answers? No! Does the Council have all the answers? No! Does the Budget Committee have all the answers? No! Do they all work hard to improve the town? Yes! So how is abolishing the Budget Committee going to improve the budget process?

I believe the budget committee is an excellent opportunity for the public to take part in the budget process. If it does nothing else, it provides the public an appreciation of the detailed workings of the town. And just as the Planning Board does, it provides experience that future prospective councilors need.

I cannot support this order.