

**TOWN OF ENNIS COMMISSION MEETING  
ENNIS TOWN HALL  
SEPTEMBER 7, 2021 - 6:00 P.M.**

**Open Meeting:** Mayor Leavitt opened the meeting at 6:04 PM

**Commission Present:** *Mayor* – Blake Leavitt, *Commissioners* –Schroeder, Ranson, Roberts, Hardy, Bancroft

**Budget for Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Discussion and Final Changes:**

Ranson opens meeting by sharing her position and questions. She comments with concern for the lack of discussion on how to best spend ARPA (American Rescue Plan) funds. Ranson states that she did not learn of ARPA funds being given to the police budget until the night of the meeting and feels that she did not have enough information to vote on the current budget as it is currently written. Continues by saying her own research shows that ARPA funds should not be used to pay for a new position. Believes that a mill levy may be the only route to continuing paying for a second officer when ARPA funds run out. Voices concern for the funds and time needed to train. Openly brainstorms ways to continue funding a second officer. Spoke against using ARPA funds for a police officer position when library budget was cut. Comments in favor of the work the Library Director did during the pandemic and believes ARPA funds should be spent in more than one department. States she cannot sign off of the budget the way it is but that no council member has ever said they want to defund the police. Voices concern of not having funding in future years for police funding. Comments in favor of using ARPA funds for outdoor seating at the library which is covid related.

Mayor Leavitt calls everyone to review page 24 of expenditures where he states \$174,689 is unassigned monies from ARPA.

Ginger Guinn clarifies that it is not unassigned and is posted in the budget to be used for water and sewer.

Ranson makes comment of her conversation with MMIA stating that MMIA advises against using ARPA money for new positions. Questions what the commission's role is if they do not get to decide what monies are used for or be part of the discussion.

Leavitt states he wrote the budget for review and department heads write their budget and then the commission reviews it. He states he felt strongly that the ARPA funds could be used the way it is written.

Ranson comments for other ideas to spend the money on – Lion's Park bathrooms, etc. Comments in favor of hiring part time cop.

Schroeder states he believes there should be a half time officer hired and it would be irresponsible to hire a full-time officer with temporary funds. Comments in favor of a mill levy to allow the residents of the town to speak.

Officer Moore states he is in favor of using ARPA funds for the officer position because it does not impact the tax payers at all. Continues to speak on ARPA FAQs in favor of using funds for public safety. States that the Town of Ennis had a 100% increase in murder by firearms in the last year alone. Asks the council how having another officer making contacts and building relationships in town would ever be a detriment to the community. Firmly stands that he will take responsibility to raise funding for future years through grants and the like. States the Sheriff's Department will start charging the Town of Ennis for their services if the Town does not make efforts to obtain another officer.

Discussion on the shifts of officers and coverage.

Mayor Leavitt – asks Moore how he plans on get funding in the future fiscal years.

Moore speaks on grant opportunities. States that he has been told in the past that the town currently has too much discretionary spending to get approved for grants for officers. Says he has been told if we use ARPA funds then it would bump the Town up in getting future grant funding because it shows that the Town is willing to put money into the police budget and show an effort in that area. Comments on call volume increasing and Madison County. Mentions going for a mill levy and says he has many other options and he would like the opportunity and responsibility to find the funding himself.

Moore comments on the rest of his budget staying the same and this funding would go straight towards ‘getting another body’.

Ranson asks how much Moore has looked for second officer.

Moore states he has posted it on all sites but finding a qualified applicant to work 20 hours a week is unlikely because the person needs to be already trained and certified. States he cannot send a part time officer to the Academy which is required by state law.

Ranson asks questions about police budget directed towards Officer Moore. Continues that she spoke to a lady at the DOA that suggested it was unwise to use the ARPA funds for a new position.

Moore rebuts that the treasury site has updated information.

Roberts states that her concern is the cost in perpetuity. She reads from ARPA that it is suggested to not use the funding for a position that does not have funding for subsequent years. Reads those funds can be used for payroll or benefits but should be used for positions directly working with the pandemic. Comments on being in favor of a second officer but would like to see potential to increase coverage area.

Moore states that it is clear that the Town of Ennis qualifies for hiring additional officers in the section referenced in his FAQ.

Roberts reiterates that she spoke to Kary Powells at the Dept of Administration who says it would be an unwise decision to start a position without subsequent funding for future years. Comments in favor of grants or a mill levy but against starting a position that may not have future funding. Suggests a better system with more coverage outside of city limits.

Moore states he does not wish to work outside city limits. Town of Ennis taxpayers pay his salary and that is where he wants to work.

Roberts comments on growing pains in Ennis and in favor of annexing more properties into the Town of Ennis so that more people can benefit from the Ennis Police. Places such as Skyview or Valley Gardens.

Schroeder suggests mill levy.

Mayor Leavitt comments on the Master Plan and one of the items on that agenda is annexation which can be addressed then but continues by commenting in favor of being proactive and getting a second officer before it’s too late.

Roberts and Ranson continue on not using funds for additional officer and rather securing future funds before adding an officer. Comment in favor of using funds for ‘community projects related to covid’.

Kirk Cordoso comments from the audience that suicide is up and that is directly related to covid.

Mayor Leavitt shuts down public comment.

Roberts requests more time to determine where to spend these funds.

Ranson comments that she wishes someone could have explained things to her further and she felt blindsided.

Moore comments that his door is always open for questions.

Mayor Leavitt comments in favor of moving forward with these funds and the mill levy at the same time.

Discussion of options.

Ranson, Roberts and Schroeder comment in favor of leaving the funds unassigned.

Ginger Guinn states funds need to be designated.

Mayor Leavitt comments against taking these funds from the police budget.

Roberts asks Moore for information about grants he would go after and data used to secure grants.

Moore states one in particular is a 6-year position grant. Fully funded by federal monies for the first 3 years. Continues that it is typical to receive cops grants if a need is shown. Mentions discretionary funding again.

Roberts asks how they determine discretionary funds.

Moore did not have exact information but stated that the lady he spoke to mentioned a couple items in the budget being a red flag – parklets and siding on the senior center were mentioned.

Roberts mentions that the council increased the police budget three years ago.

Discussion about funding for police budget, open positions, cost of a new officer, etc.

Schroeder comments in favor of finding other revenue sources, mentions an increase in property taxes as a suggestion.

Discussion about mill levy.

Bancroft asks what it would cost to post and hire for a second full time officer.

Moore comments about the pay being extremely low compared to surrounding areas.

Discussion and questions about timeline and pay to get a full-time officer. Training – field training and academy. Minimum of 9 months to get someone trained and patrolling.

Bancroft comments in favor of using funding for well.

Maria Marzulo comments that water and sewer have a high reserve of funding.

Commission comments that those reserves do not go far if something were to go wrong in water/sewer.

Roberts comments she is nervous to use the funding for an additional police officer, she would rather have ongoing funding in place before hiring another officer.

Hardy comments on alternative options such as a code enforcement officer which is what Three Forks uses and asks if that would be an option for Ennis.

Discussion on alternatives.

Mayor Leavitt opens up public comment.

Katherine Cope – Mentions annexing in the outside areas into Ennis. Comments in favor of annexation and giving more funds. Wonders about a law enforcement district.

Roberts offers clarification on process to annex.

Moore comments on state statute and mutual aid where he can go outside city limits when the Sheriff's department calls him to.

Maria Marzulo – comments to Ranson, thanking her for her comments and research. States the Town is behind the eight ball on many facets. Suggests taking responsibility for representing the people that voted them in, take a leap of faith. Comments in favor of more law enforcement and adding the second officer with these funds. Suggests that the two council members that are running for office should heavily consider voting for this budget if they would like to remain on the board.

Susie Felman – He was in law enforcement. He says this comes down to two options – is public safety above infrastructure or is infrastructure above public safety. Comments in favor of another officer in Town.

Nicole Fredson – Comments that Ennis is growing because people are fleeing covid from all over the country and therefore these funds should be spent on another officer... She would like to know that the town has coverage. Take safety first.

Nany Lubky – comments on school mill levies. Is in favor of a mill levy she could pay for increased local Law Enforcement. Would like to see investigation into a Law Enforcement District options.

Ranson asks if the Ennis Police Department can take donations.

Moore comments that they can accept donations but there are strict guidelines and they cannot pay for salaries.

Roberts comments in favor of what other small communities in Montana have done which is merge the police department with the county by contracting the services out which then turns the town police officers into county deputies.

Conversation about coverage in the area, Ennis census, and Ennis being close to becoming a 3<sup>rd</sup> class city.

Larry Pine asks cost of adding another officer and can budget be paired down now to look better for grants in the future.

Moore comments about \$80,000 with all benefits.

Roberts comments on additional costs that come with another officer. Suggests a town survey to get an idea of what the town people would like to see with the police department.

Further discussion about grant application process, etc.

Bancroft states the Town people voted years ago to have a town officer. Comments in favor of the police budget getting the funding it needs but keeping the well a priority as well.

Casey Fredson – student at school. Comments on growth of school and in favor of having office Moore at the school. Stop saying what if it fails, start saying what if it succeeds.

Unknown audience member comments in favor of additional officer.

Gordon Todd – asks if any council members have taken advantage of State of Montana budget school.

Council says no. Todd suggests they do so and comments in favor of doing a zero-based budget.

Maria Marzulo comments in favor of adding officer sooner rather than later.

Trevor Lockhart – comments on the unregulated growth in Big Sky since his family move in 1996. He comments on the increase in the library and the inaccuracies in the budget that he has found by combing the budget line by line. Comments in favor of police officer and says the council needs to have faith in Office Moore. Comments on his conversations with Phil Fortner of Madison County Sheriff's Department. States that low bid would be \$250-300k per year if he could find staff to cover our area. States that Phil Fortner gladly says he does not want to cover Ennis. Comments on the \$80k deficit in Sheridan because Sheridan voted against town police force and now contracts with the Sheriff's

department. Ends by saying you cannot put price on public safety. Speaks against the council cutting the town police budget.

Nichole Hass comments in favor of John Moore. Mentions 3% marijuana tax and the proposal of using that money to pay for officer if it passes.

Mayor Leavitt comments on the removal of the double taxation that was happening to the citizens of Ennis. Comments not in favor of paying the county because it is double taxation. Ennis residents already pay county taxes and the Sheriff's office is required to cover our area.

Nany Lubky comments on the growth of Ennis and in favor of another officer for Ennis Police.

Kirk Cordoso comments on living on Hwy 287 and it being a corridor for drugs and sex trafficking. Response time is everything. Comments in favor of Officer Moore spending hours at the school and adding another officer.

Dino Fanelli – comments on getting creative and not kicking stuff down the road. Comments in favor of taking action now towards another officer position.

Roberts directs question to Fanelli about the school paying for a resource officer.

Moore comments on spending his time at school because of the number of people at the school. The ratio of population at the school is significant.

Mayor Leavitt comments on the relationship Moore has with the school – comments in favor of Moore spending more time there and says he would like to see another officer added to the department. Comments on a meeting that Office Moore is having with the school to offer funding towards Moore's time spent at the school.

Mike Delaney – comments in favor of another officer. Public outcry is very clear 'Ennis wants another officer'. Comments on the tourists and those moving into the area. Common sense says we need another officer.

Mayor Leavitt closes public comment – thanks everyone for their input and states that he has enough information from the comments being made. Comments in favor of the Council asking questions. Opens comment to the Council.

Roberts comments on budget items and says it's not about what is allowable but what is a smart fiscal decision.

Mayor Leavitt states ARPA money will stay as is and the council will vote on that. Comments in favor of Officer Moore going after grants and starting mill levy process.

Schroder comments in favor of voting for mill levy before voting on budget.

Moore comments on budget deadline.

Roberts comments on consequence of late budget. Suggests that it would be okay to delay the budget approval because it is only a note on the audit. Comments on mil levy cost.

Mayor Leavitt comments that the town can get an officer started and says it would be irresponsible to delay or wait any longer.

Discussion on struggles of hiring officer, terms to their employment and probation, etc.

Schroeder states the council cannot go on a promise because there have been a lot of things slip through the cracks before. Comments in favor of getting the mil levy going.

Mayor Leavitt asks for time frame on mil levy.

Mill levy discussion, getting numbers from treasurer's office. Roberts will call Shelly Burke tomorrow.

Schroeder suggests future budget amendment – passing as is and making amendment in future if needed.

Roberts requests workshop to learn on ARPA funding and what options are. Comments in favor of further discussion on using funds. Comments in favor of clarity in job offer letter that states funding may end for the position. Suggests heating Lion's Club bathroom for year round use. Comments in favor of another set of bathrooms in downtown Ennis – long time wish list from Chamber. Comments in favor of spending funds for outside library seating.

Bancroft comments against town paying for heated bathrooms without more funding from state.

Moore confirms one year probation.

Discussion on other ways to spend the funds.

Ginger comments for Kelly that there is no estimate for new well at this time but she knows Kelly is looking to gain access to all of ARPA funds.

Leavitt mentions budget surplus of \$133,000.

Roberts asks about the hospital being paid the cash gift from the ambulance.

Ginger states hospital has not been paid. States funds are strictly sitting in ambulance funds.

Roberts comments in favor of paying hospital as soon as possible as was promised in May 2021.

Leavitt states concerns for remaining funds being used properly.

Discussion on budget items, not earmarking funds for specific department and making notations. Would like to see the budget reflect each department's insurance breakdown.

Roberts suggests new object code for remaining funds to be allocated to general, comments in favor of taking time to decide where ARPA funds are spent.

Leavitt confirms to Guinn to move \$174 ARPA funds to general.

Leavitt comments on using other funds for various projects. Comments on Public works high funds.

Schroeder asks how that move would affect the police budget.

Roberts asks if they can approve budget conditionally. Suggests portion of ARPA budget is not spent until mill levy numbers are gathered.

Moore asks why it matters to hold the budget until mill levy numbers are available.

Roberts states she will call county tomorrow to get figures on mill levy.

Discussion ensues between Roberts and Moore and Schroeder about mill levy continuation. Council members do not want to approve budget until Moore gets mill levy going.

Moore confirms he will get the mill levy moving but it should not hold up the budget.

Roberts comments in favor of knowing what the mill levy will cost tax payers. States if they can get numbers by Thursday, it should not be an issue.

Gordon Todd comments in favor of moving forward with or without mill levy numbers right away.

Ranson asks Todd if he would approve the budget the way it sits.

Todd states 'it's not like you're writing John a check, it's simply saying you are committed to going forward with another police officer.'

Comments on getting future funds.

Kirk Cordoso comments against the run around and to just pass the budget with another police officer.

Nicole Fredson comments in favor of starting process now and not risking paying county more money to replace Ennis Police.

Dino Fanelli comments in favor of the council making a decision. Take responsibility and make a decision, the future is always unknown.

Marzulo comments in favor of making decision even with some future risk.

Fredson comments that she imagines Officer Moore feels held hostage by the council.

Bancroft comments in favor of approving the budget as is and amending later if needed. Give Moore the chance.

Ranson says she requests more information than what she was given in the first meeting.

Officer Moore comments in favor of needing to move forward, states the Town needs this and it is in the best interest of the Town to hire another officer. States he will do everything in his power to find the funds.

Leavitt asks for other public comment on non-budget items.

Roberts asks Ketchu what the Friends of Library donates and fundraises each year.

Karen states average is \$30,000 per year for programming. Comments on budget item specifics. Comments on Library is ranked #2 in the nation for its size. Comments that 14.5k people visited library in June and August 2021. Further comments on attendance. States the town and county pay for salaries and facilities. Mentions increase in salary from conversion of part time employee to full time.

Roberts asks for clarification on past budgets.

Ketchu states without contributors and donors the library would only have a building and staff; no programs or other services. Comments on frequency of visitors to rationalize adding full time employee.

Roberts ask for cost estimate on outdoor seating proposal.

Karen offers clarification, comments in favor of receiving ARPA funds, explains the fitting nature.

Mayor Leavitt asks for clarification on what Library is asking for since the library budget went up \$28k from prior years.

Karen comments on the low salary of library employees. Mentions spending more on maintaining bathrooms last year than in past years.

Question from audience on how much the library costs per year.

Ketchu states the town contributed 46,311 in 2021.

Hirsch clarifies that the town also contributes roughly \$57,000 in benefits, insurance and retirement which is a separate line item in the budget.

Discussion on where those numbers are, further discussion of separating those funds into departments.

Audience member comments in favor that if the town is spending roughly \$100,000 on library, they should be willing to spend more on the police department.

Roberts comments in favor of raising the library to 49,833 budget for library.

Discussion about where to pull the extra funds from to increase library. Discussion on CARES funding and total provided to town.

Ranson asks for clarification on CARES money and total received by the Town.

Ginger Guinn confirms \$4,600 was the total CARES money received for reimbursement of covid expenses.

Roberts comments again in favor of raising the library budget to 49,833 budget for library.

Brittney Hirsch asks Karen if there is somewhere in her budget that she is short funds and if she has a specific need for raising the library's budget.

Karen comments she would like the increase to go directly toward salary.

Roberts comments that there is no other department that is funded by donations.

Discussion on where to adjust the budget, cash reserves, etc.

Mayor Leavitt asks for further comment. None.

Opens for further public comment. None.

Bancroft moves to adjourn.

Schroeder seconds. All vote yes.

**Meeting Adjourned at 8:42 PM.**

\*Live recording of all Town of Ennis Public Meetings is available for viewing on YouTube at the following link or by searching "Town of Ennis Montana Public Meetings"

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFA-L4QnVfTQqOD2QEOsWVA>

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Blake Leavitt, Mayor

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Brittney Hirsch, Deputy Clerk