

## Calais Selectboard Proposed FY2025 Budget Message 01.24.2024

The Selectboard's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2025 (July 2024-June 2025) is now available on the town website on the Town Meeting page: [https://www.calaisvermont.gov/vertical/sites/%7B226D684E-C864-4AFA-B4A5-59BE32741B77%7D/uploads/Calais\\_Proposed\\_FY2025\\_Budget.pdf](https://www.calaisvermont.gov/vertical/sites/%7B226D684E-C864-4AFA-B4A5-59BE32741B77%7D/uploads/Calais_Proposed_FY2025_Budget.pdf). Our 2023 Town Report, which includes the proposed budget and other financial reports, will be mailed to voter households the third week of February. On Monday, February 26 at 6pm, the Selectboard will hold a Public Information Session to present and answer questions about the proposed budget, as well as our request for authorization to purchase a new road grader. The proposed budget will be considered by eligible voters attending Town Meeting on Tuesday, March 5.

This year we are asking for a larger increase than usual. We know this is hard; we've done our best to keep the increase to a minimum while not limiting our town's ability to provide essential services. We note that many towns around us are facing double digit increases this year. We have worked hard to keep the increase to about 7.5% over this year's budget.

This year's budgeting process started last summer. We began by identifying our priorities for the next year:

1. Providing fair and equitable compensation for our staff. As with many towns across the State, we are investing in developing a professional staff to handle the increasingly complex and time-consuming business of running our town. In 2023 we negotiated a first contract with our highway department's new labor union, bringing our wages in line with other towns. We carefully reviewed our administrative staff salaries and compared them to other towns of similar size. To keep these costs to a minimum, we worked with staff to develop a more efficient structure and purchased software that should enable more efficient use of their time. While salary increases increased the budget, it is the increases in health care and other benefits costs that really drove this part of the budget.
2. Investing in reliable equipment for our road crew. We have an old fleet that breaks down a lot and our crew has had to spend a lot of time doing repairs, not to mention that several of our trucks have spent considerable time at the repair shop. This is not only inefficient, but also demoralizing for our crew. Over the past decade or so, our town has done a good job in improving our Town Hall and Office facilities; now we feel it is time to invest more resources in the equipment needed to maintain our road system.

Once we felt these two items were adequately funded, we regretfully trimmed many requests for other items. However, like other municipalities across the state, we have little control over many of the items driving the budget such as increases in costs of materials, services and fees.

Here are some of the larger items driving the increase:

- In addition to wage increases, medical insurance for our employees is a significant factor in the budget, up nearly \$25,000 from the current year.
- In addition to our regular financial audit, we will be required to fund a \$10,000 single audit next year due to the substantial federal FEMA reimbursements we anticipate from flood damage.

- We are asking for \$6000 to hire a professional assessor during the final quarter of Fiscal Year 2025. The job of lister is becoming increasingly complex and fewer people are willing to volunteer their time for this work. With two of our listers potentially stepping down in the next two years, we believe that we may soon need to professionalize this function if we cannot find residents willing to take it on.
- Fire and ambulance costs have increased dramatically for both Woodbury and East Montpelier Fire Departments largely due to the lack of volunteers and need to hire trained emergency response people.
- In a separate article, we are proposing to purchase a new road grader for \$335,000. Both of our current graders are from 1997 and increasingly need maintenance. If approved, we will seek a bond under the most favorable terms possible to finance the purchase.

We recognize that affordability is a pressing challenge for most Vermonters. We feel this is a responsible budget that makes the investments in staff and equipment we need to sustain well into the future. We encourage you to contact us with any questions, to attend our information session on February 26, and to vote to approve the budget on Town Meeting Day. Thank you.