

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of December 4, 2014

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Ross McLeod, Selectmen Al Letizio, Bruce Breton, Joel Desilets and Roger Hohenberger were present, as was Town Administrator David Sullivan and several department heads. Mr. McLeod called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm, and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

BUDGET WORKSHOP:

Fire/EM –

Chief McPherson reviewed the proposed budget and noted areas in which the budget increased. He noted there were no staffing changes, and explained that they do continue to carry five firefighters per shift, but that the department is experiencing a continued increase in call volume. The department would like to discuss staffing levels for the future because the “Call” firefighter force is down to 2-3 firefighters, and they are limited in what they can do. The department currently has two personnel out of work on long-term disability, and additional overtime is sometimes required because the coverage for these firefighters is covered strictly by full-time firefighters. The Chief also noted a small increase in Property Maintenance to purchase new mattresses for the Station.

Mr. Hohenberger asked about the Incentives paid to the firefighters and how these incentives are achieved. Chief McPherson noted that the % of base salary that is paid for these specialty trainings, is earned based on specific certifications that each firefighter maintains, and is all governed by the Fire Union contract. It was explained that the Town pays for the firefighter to achieve the initial certification, and the firefighters that maintain these certifications, beyond the basic Firefighter-EMT requirements, receive incentive pay, as a percentage of their base pay, for each level of certification. The Chief indicated that the benefit of these additional certifications and trainings, turns around to directly benefit the Town and services provided to the residents.

Mr. Letizio asked about the number of calls and how they have grown throughout the past several years, and discussion turned to how this compares to 2008, which is the last time any new firefighter positions were added to the department. The Chief noted that we have maintained the same levels of staffing as 2008, and he has had increasing difficulty maintaining five firefighters per shift because of long-term absences and budgetary constraints. The Chief noted that as a result of the previous Boards’ not supporting additional funds for overtime coverage, this means that for earned time and long term absences, some of those shifts remain unfilled and the shift runs with four versus five. This is currently being managed through the Chief’s operational processes. Board members asked what the cost would be to maintain five per shift at all times, and it was stated that the overtime budget would need to increase significantly.

Mr. Letizio appreciated the department's awareness of the budget but expressed his concern about taking chances with public safety and that the staffing discussion should be a top priority. Further discussion ensued about past discussions of the overtime budget and initiatives by the Town that were taken in the past to enhance public safety. Mr. Desilets asked if future discussions regarding staffing could include a plan as to how the Call force fits into the future and commended the department for "doing more with less". Further discussion ensued regarding the consideration of safe levels of firefighter staffing and how calls are managed, as well as the potential for utilizing private ambulance services. Consensus of the Board was the feeling that anything can happen on emergency calls, but it is of the utmost importance to have the appropriate levels of funds to manage the risk of safety being compromised, either to the residents or the firefighters themselves. Discussion turned to the \$31,000 that is budgeted for covering long-term disabilities, which has historically been removed from the budget as a credit, due to the fact that there is a corresponding budgetary savings in the regular salaries account when an employee is receiving payment directly from our disability insurance carrier. After additional discussion as to the amount of funds required to consistently maintain the five person shift, the Chief indicated that putting the \$31,000 back into the overtime budget would go a long way to helping with this. Further discussion ensued as to whether efficiencies or other budget savings could be found in this or other areas of the Town budget, to offset this increase, and it was noted that this would be discussed further, throughout the budget process. Mr. Letizio motioned and Mr. Breton seconded to increase the overtime budget by \$31,000 to a total of \$302,500. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Sullivan noted there was a formula error in the Holiday Salary line item which, once corrected, requires a \$2,900 increase in this line item. Mr. Breton asked about health insurance changes as a result of the most recent contract, and whether there could be any proposed decreases to this budget. Mr. Sullivan noted that we will know shortly, once open enrollment closes, as to how many employees switch to the lower cost plan, but that a conservative estimate would equate to a \$22,000 decrease in the health budget. Consensus was to make this change.

Discussion turned to the request for a replacement SUV for the Assistant Chief, based on the previously discussed Vehicle/Equipment "VEIP" replacement plan. It was noted that this 2008 vehicle, which is heavily used, is due for replacement and that delaying this replacement will affect the scheduled replacement of future vehicles.

Discussion ensued regarding equipment replacements, new equipment, and the overall amount of budgetary requests coming from the Fire department (including CIP items) this year. Mr. Sullivan reminded the Board that these were pre-planned collectively within the VEIP plan, which spreads out vehicle and equipment replacement needs across all departments. This coming year, several of the projects are from the Fire department, but in other years it may be more from other departments.

Discussion turned to radio and equipment maintenance and cistern maintenance. Mr. Breton suggested considering an increase to the fee charged for cistern inspection to \$500, and to put the money into a revolving fund for future upkeep and/or replacement of cisterns on public roads. It was noted that many of the cisterns are increasing in age and there is currently no mechanism to fund replacement of cisterns. Consensus was to have Administration do further research and potentially draft a warrant article for this purpose. No other changes to the Fire budget were made.

The Board briefly discussed the Emergency Management budget which is down from \$33,000 to \$6,000 due to a one-time grant appropriation that was included in the 2014 EM budget and the project has been completed. No changes to the EM budget were made.

CIP Items – Chief McPherson explained the two Fire related CIP articles, one of which is a \$75,000 project to install an exhaust system in the Fire Station bays. Chief McPherson noted that he is working on applying for a grant which would potentially fund a large portion of this project. The second project is the \$500,000 Fire Engine which is scheduled to replace our 1996 tanker/engine. Discussion ensued regarding water supply and the effect on homeowners' insurance.

Solid Waste – Mr. Poulson discussed a projected budget overview for his department over the next several years, and noted that he reviewed this information with the CIP Committee, because a large investment in asset replacements as well new waste removal contracts will be required in a few years, if current operations are to be sustained. He indicated that we have until 2017 to consider any changes in the station operations.

Mr. Poulson noted that his department has a recent vacancy in the Truck Driver position and has been utilizing the part time laborer to assist with truck driving operations until such time as it is determined if the full time driver position needs to be filled in its current capacity. Mr. Sullivan noted that the Solid Waste, Highway and Maintenance departments are sharing staff under the current Union contract provisions and within the overall plan to operate the three departments on a shared resource basis. Mr. Sullivan noted that he is now working with the Union to continue this concept and potentially supplement some of the needs in the three departments with contracted personnel. Mr. Sullivan noted that the draft budget contains funds for the full-time replacement driver position, but within the next few weeks there will be further discussions with the Union and a better number for a budget reduction will be presented to the Board.

Mr. Poulson asked the Board to revisit the Holiday pay funds for the Friday after Thanksgiving. Currently the Station is closed that day because it is a Town holiday, but because the Station is normally also closed on Tuesdays, the issue of being closed two additional weekdays has generated concern among residents. Mr. Sullivan noted that he had

received multiple calls this year and for the approximate \$1,200 cost for holiday pay for 3 employees, it would be worth the additional service to residents. Discussion ensued and Mr. Hohenberger motioned to add the funds as proposed to open the Station on the Friday after Thanksgiving and Mr. Letizio seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Hohenberger asked about the increase proposed in the Vehicle Maintenance line item and Mr. Poulson noted that costs of maintaining the fleet have increased significantly, evidenced by the fact that this line item has been overexpended in 2014 by more than double. Further discussion ensued regarding the overall cost of MSW disposal and the amount of bulky waste we accept, versus the amount that is recycled, and whether recycling rates could be improved, thus saving tipping fees. A brief discussion ensued regarding potential changes to the Commercial & Demolition program, which could provide further cost savings. No other changes to the budget were made.

Highways – Mr. McCartney discussed the budget for road maintenance and discussion turned to the general statistics of miles of roads maintained per year and whether he feels that we are keeping up. Mr. McCartney noted that he believes we are keeping up, by paving or reclaiming 2-2.5 miles of road, on average, per year. He noted that many of the Town's roads are newly constructed and based on approximately 50 miles of older roads (out of the total 102 miles of roads), the annual funding for paving has been sufficient, but may need to be revisited in the future. No changes to the budget were made.

General Government/Maintenance – Mr. Sullivan noted there were two main areas of the budget which increased, groundskeeping and vehicle equipment. Mr. Sullivan noted that the Vehicle/Equipment Replacement plan included a new handicap accessible van, funding for which is contained in this budget, through a lease/purchase program. Discussion ensued regarding the need for a new van to replace the 1998 van, the former usage of the CART program and the intention to expand usage of the Town's van services. Discussion then turned to the groundskeeping budget, noting that the increase was mainly for additional funds needed for irrigation repairs and maintenance of the Rte 111 bypass, both of which have required funding in excess of what has been budgeted over the past few years.

Further discussion ensued regarding building maintenance, the scheduled hours of the custodial staff, the area of the buildings being maintained and the possibility of contracting out certain services. Mr. Sullivan reminded the Board of the contractual restrictions in a Union environment but acknowledged that, mainly through attrition, the Town could make certain staffing changes in this and other departments, and that he will report back to the Board prior to the wrap-up of the budget process. No changes to the budget were made.

Administration Budgets: Mr. Sullivan noted there were no significant changes in this budget. Mr. Breton asked about the need for the

stormwater (committee) funds of \$21,000 and it was noted that this same amount has lapsed as unspent the past two years due to the fact that we continue to await a permit from the EPA, but that we anticipate needing the funds to complete the work in 2015. Mr. Breton motioned to reduce the Administration budget by \$21,000 and Mr. Hohenberger seconded. Motion failed 2-3 with Mr. Desilets, Mr. Letizio and Mr. McLeod opposed. No changes to the budget were made.

Health & Human Services – It was noted that the proposed budget includes agency funding requests at level funding from the prior year, and no changes to the budget were made.

Town Officer Salaries – Mr. Hohenberger motioned and Mr. Breton seconded to reduce the Selectmen salaries to \$0, similar to previous years. Mr. Desilets would like to leave the Selectmen's pay in the budget and made the following motion: "An opportunity to have an even greater impact than simply giving the funds back, would be to establish a Scholarship which can have a meaningful impact on our future - young adults in our community.

I propose that if a few or all of us elect to leave our pay in the budget, we personally and voluntarily accept payment of these funds, then commit to combine these funds to personally establish a "Selectmen's Civic Engagement Scholarship", which we would manage similarly to or through those entrusted with the Windham Endowment for Community Advancement.

This would be awarded to a single student who has demonstrated active civic engagement, collaboration with others to build a more just society, and the expressed intent to pursue a degree including a concentration in civic engagement, whether this be alongside the arts, environmental justice, social entrepreneurship, community health, public policy or administration." There was no second, however, discussion ensued in support of the idea but not as part of a taxpayer funded budget. Motion to reduce to \$0 passed 5-0.

Mr. Breton motioned to change the annual stipend for the Treasurer from \$2,500 to \$2,000, and the Deputy Treasurer from \$150 to \$500, in an effort to better reflect the workload for the two positions. Mr. Hohenberger seconded the motion and it passed 5-0.

Mr. Breton motioned and Mr. Hohenberger seconded to adjourn. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Call
Asst Town Administrator-Finance

NOTE: These minutes are prepared in draft form and have not been submitted to the Board for approval.