

Weare Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

Present at meeting:

- Town Administrator: Naomi Bolton
- Finance Committee: Janice Mathews, Maria Fossiano, Thomas Clow, John Merva, Tom Flaherty, Elizabeth Evans, Bill Anderson, James Drury
- Guest Speakers/Presenters: Steve Roberts (Chair of Board of Fire Wards), Bob Richards (acting Fire Chief), Clay Kriese (Library Director), Chris Moore (Police Chief)

Chair Tom Clow (TC) called the meeting to order at 7:01pm.

TC indicated that the committee needed a secretary, after the departure of Leah Borla. He asked Tom Flaherty (TF) to take the role and TF agreed.

Department Heads presented their proposed budgets and discussed warrant articles.

Fire Department – Steve Roberts (SR) and acting Chief Bob Richards (BR) presented

SR explained that our prior chief resigned earlier this year and that Bob Richards is the acting chief. A search for a replacement chief is underway.

SR discussed various line items in the proposed and default budgets, which are equal this year, explaining some increases and decreases. Items were set to keep the proposed and default the same.

SR mentioned that we switched to Capital Area Dispatch this year, which caused an increase in about \$10,000, which is connected to our town property value reassessment, which went up this year.

SR mentioned that there are still some repairs for radios and batteries.

Elizabeth Evans (EE) asked about Capital Area Dispatch and Radios and maintenance of equipment. Acting Chief Richards replied that Capital Area Dispatch only maintains their equipment, but we have to maintain our radios, which includes batteries, reprogramming, and general maintenance. A recent reprogramming cost \$500, for example. Being with Capital Area Dispatch, our maintenance contract costs have gone down.

Bill Anderson (BA) asked about fuel price estimated. Naomi Bolton (NB) mentioned that fuel prices for estimating are set by the Selectmen (\$4.50 for Gas, \$7.50 for diesel).

BA also asked about the increase in Capital Area Dispatch contract increase not being in the default budget. NB said that it cannot be included there.

BA also asked about a possible shortage in the special revenue fund, due to spending from it this year and shifting the large item purchase calendar (CIP). Acting Chief Bob Richards agreed, saying that this was true. SR said that large items were shifted in the calendar to account for increased prices. BA asked if the Fire Wards considered alternate methods, to preserve the special revenue fund. SR said that the Fire Wards tries to project revenue and replacement needs, as well as anticipated price changes. BA expressed further concern about getting caught short in this fund. SR said that additional equipment

has been added to the projection calendar. SR said the Fire Wards were doing the best they can with a complex process and rising prices.

Elizabeth Evans (EE) asked, considering inflation and price increases, if the Fire Department has considered alternative energy for vehicles and other equipment. Steve Robert (SR) said that if the technology exists to provide the services at a reasonable costs, we will look at it. For example, Diesel Pumpers require a lot of horsepower, and could be needed for an entire week but wasn't sure how we would be able to recharge an electric vehicle in the field.

EE also asked about the over 100% increase in Overtime cost in the budget and whether the Fire Wards considered hiring instead of contracting. SR said that the number came from the Finance Director.

Tom Flaherty (TF) asked is we under budgeted overtime last year, causing it to raise so much. Acting Chief Richards said that it was based on earned time. Naomi Bolton added that the staffing model is new, not a lot of history (track record) to provide better estimates. TF summarized that this increase is a buffer to account for unknown conditions.

TF asked for confirmation on the stated fuel rates. Naomi Bolton confirmed.

TF also asked about the CIP request for upgrading radio pagers and how it relates to the CIP request for new radios, whether new equipment would reduce maintenance and repair costs. Acting Chief Richards explained that it would not reduce much, since it mostly entailed batteries and reprogramming costs.

John Merva (JM) said that adding employees is rarely cheaper than using overtime in his experience. New employees have many fixed costs.

Tom Clow (TC) asked about if the Fire Department per diem program was behind us and Chief Richards said it was.

TC also said that he received an email from Jack Dearborn relating to vehicle purchase calendar along with Capital Reserve Fund balances. He handed out copies.

Naomi Bolton explained that the Ambulance approved last year hasn't been purchased yet but has been deducted from the capital reserve fund balance. We should be receiving it in 2023. Chief Richards explained that the price was only estimated last April but he as told in October that the cost increased from original estimate (additional \$12k, approved by Selectmen, but we are still under budget for it). No VIN number has been provided yet.

Bill Anderson (BA) asked about the utility vehicle requested in CIP by Fire Department. Chief Richards explained that is it replacing the existing one-ton pickup with plow, a one-for-one replacement. The existing vehicle will be given to Public Works. Richard explained that the vehicle is used a lot.

Elizabeth Evans (EE) asked about the purpose of stipends in the budget. Steve Roberts (SR) explained that they go to the assistant chief, some to call officers. SR explained that it is a throwback to the volunteer days and there are plans to roll them into salaries in the future. EE asked if some officers receive both a salary plus a stipend, SR explained that some officers have additional responsibilities. Acting Chief Richards explained that some duties involve less than an hour's pay and the stipend covers miscellaneous, quick duties that add up. EE asked if the stipends overlapped with any overtime and Richards replied that they do not.

Tom Clow (TC) said that the on-call members used to use the stipend to be available but this practice has gone away with people in the station 24 hours per day.

Clay Kriese (CK) – Library

CK handed out budget materials and explained that the next Library Expansion meeting will be held on Dec 20th at 6pm.

The only changes involve payroll from last year's warrants, no increase this year, along with electricity (5% increase), building maintenance and software. Fuel costs have been reduced by changing providers.

The library is old and maintenance expenses have grown. In the past, he has asked the Selectmen for town funds along the way but is budgeting for them this year.

Naomi Bolton mentioned that the library is a single line item on the Town Budget, with no breakdown at deliberative session, and that the Library Trustees handle the details.

Chief Chris Moore (CM) - Police

CM handed out materials and displayed a graph that showed police calls over the past few years, indicating that the number of officers impacts the number of calls, through proactive policing and better call response. In 2019 there were 5 officers, and the department is currently fully staffed, causing the number of reported crimes to increase.

CM then walked through the department's budget total and tax rate and where the taxes are applied (\$0.73 to the PD). CM provided clarification to questions asked in the CIP overview of the budget. He explained that the request for a vehicle is going into the current fleet, which is down a vehicle. The plan is for 5 patrol vehicles plus 2 command vehicles, one of which is vacant.

CM also explained why the CIP request was for one vehicle vs two (CIP believe it two would not pass town vote) and that the CIP decision to ask for a patrol vehicle vs a command vehicle was not his, but he should be the one to decide based on necessity.

CM said that he does not have a vehicle for him to use, rejected twice since he came here. CM explained that he needs implement the Instant Command System (ICS), which has multiple radios, in order to communicate with the schools during an incident but cannot. He then explained the ICS, how it is implemented and how it utilizes vehicles. Essentially, he said that we are not properly managing our risk.

CM explained that he was waiting for information from town attorney relating to cost offsetting. He explained that he could properly outfit a new command vehicle with no tax impact, using funds from Clough State Park Dam patrols, with Selectman approval, but he needs the vehicle. These funds would reduce the total cost of a command vehicle by approx. \$20,000.

CM also explained that an officer quit after a recent incident on Mountain Rd, due to the inability to properly set up the scene and proper equipment (in his opinion). There are two vacancies now and it will cost more to hire and upfit a new officer.

CM then discussed his "Why Weare?" concept, and that our department is not competitive in salary and sign-on bonuses from other towns. Additionally, he commented that other towns claim to offer a more

supportive community and this department is still “catching a lot of crap” from incidents that took place in 2014, despite officers trying to build the department back up. This is compounded by fewer people now applying for Police Department jobs.

He then explained that if we lose a couple more officers, the work-life balance of the remaining staff will impact our competitiveness.

CM went into the budget details, explaining that we have a deficit in funds, adding the adjustment for inflation. Salary and Benefits include the Town’s portion to the state retirement system, and it out of his control. He detailed increases and decreases, line-by-line. Notable items were records storage space, child sexual assault victim interviews (outsourced), police prosecutor services (attorney retained), field officer training stipend, police recruitment, accreditation, building maintenance, cleaning and fuel charges.

CM explained that Police staffing follows a pendulum. After the George Floyd incident, many officers went to small towns, but larger towns increased their pay to get them back.

Elizabeth Evans asked about vacancies and how it impacts the number of reported crimes. CM explained that it impacts officer initiated activities and citizen complaints (speeding complaints, for example). He explained that a recent call on Rt 114 could not be handled by State Police, due to staffing issues.

Tom Flaherty asked if evidence storage units mentioned were on Police Department property or somewhere in town. CM responded that they are at the “Safely Store” facility.

Elizabeth Evans asked if there were any retention policies for officers receiving training. He responded that there were not. She asked if there was a way to claw back the costs of training if an officer leaves. CM said that it would be better to let an officer go than attempt to claw back.

CM explained that he would like Weare to join the Central NH Operations Unit (\$3,000/year) as a way to call for extra support, since the State Police often cannot respond when requested.

John Merva (JM) asked who staffs this program. CM explained that officers from each department are dedicated to train with the Operations Unit, providing support to other towns when a call is made. If he responds to a call while on duty, the Chief will bring in another officer to cover his shift.

EE asked if Weare pays for the time when an officer responds for the Central NH Operations Unit. CM responded that Weare pays, as it is mutual aid.

CM explained that tasers expire after a number of years (5) and are a liability if they are used beyond the expiration. He is adding this to the budget, versus asking the Selectmen for the money as needed (end of year expenses). The same is true for body cameras and their media storage and some other items that were not included in the budget.

EE asked if the expense for software has increased efficiencies. CM responded that they do and provided an example.

CM explained that more reports are being filed electronically, reducing postage costs.

CM explained that without a proposed budget approved, he cannot manage equipment lifecycles (shields, vests, trauma plates).

Chief Moore summarized that the total of all increases was about \$85k. He showed a plaque with \$4.25 in quarters, more than what is needed to balanced budget and add a vehicle for a \$400,000 house.

Bill Anderson (BA) asked how the overtime budget remains the same even though the staff is reduced. CM explained that he does not set the OT budget.

CM walked though the Animal Control Officer (ACO) budget, reduced by \$40. He explained that the current ACO vehicle should last another 10 years.

Janice Mathews asked how much officer time is spent on ACO calls. CM responded with approx. 4-5 hours/week.

BA asked about the vehicle request, who sets the vehicle allowance, and why do we need an additional vehicle, since we have been patrolling with the current fleet for a few years. CM referred back to the ICS protocol establishing the need. CM indicated that what we have today is good for normal patrols but not for supporting emergency services.

EE asked about hiring, and has the PD done an analysis of equity among other towns and between the Chief and Officers. CM responded that Weare was middle of the road and that many other town have recently adopted the State Police pay scale.

Tom Flaherty asked if we have considered tax bases of other towns when comparing salaries. CM responded that we do and that we also consider benefits when comparing. TF asked how we can compare Weare to Nashua and Merrimack. CM said they found only one town a while ago that was very comparable.

EE asked about officer time away (example, having a baby) would they have short term disability. CM responded that they do not. No short and long term disability and Dental insurance is paid fully by the employee.

[Police presentation completed]

Tom Clow (TC) handed out the capital reserve funds updated sheets from Jack Dearborn (CIP).

TC also handed out upcoming meetings session. Next meeting is 12/21/22 with SAU budgets presentations.

The January 4, 2023 date may be changed. TC explained the writeups that need to be prepared for the annual mailer in early February.

TC discussed the minutes from the previous meeting. He also said that he put together a brief set of minutes for the original meeting, which was organizational. There was no vote on any prior minutes.

TC asked BA if we wait until seeing all presentations before discussing them as a committee. BA responded that we typically make recommendations to them to reduce or refine their proposals.

BA summarized some of what was heard during the SAU budget workshop in the prior week. He also mentioned that there will be one contract to discuss, due to a one-year support services contract passed last year. He also mentioned that they attempted to use zero-based budgeting.

Motion to adjourn by Janice Mathews, seconded by Elizabeth Evans. Motion carried and meeting ended at 9:15pm.

Minutes Submitted by Tom Flaherty, Secretary 12/14/22