

FINANCE & SELECTBOARD COMMITTEE MINUTES

Feb 24, 2021 06:30pm

Selectboard Members Present: Leigh Davis, Steve Bannon, Ed Abrahams, Bill Cooke, Kate Burke
Burke (at 6:34pm)

Finance Committee Members Present: Anne O'Dwyer, Michelle Loubert, Meredith O'Connor, Will
Curletti, Tom Blauvelt

1. Called to order at 6:31pm by S. Bannon
2. Departments
 - a. Police Department. Chief Storti highlighted changes:
 - i. Reorganization of staff budget (not a value change)
 - ii. Chief salary still up for negotiation; Continuing Education reimbursement for officers; Community Outreach Program
 1. T. Blauvelt asked if we could hold the Chief salary on the lower end until the salary survey concludes. M. Pruhenski responded that the position was advertised at up to \$105,000 but are holding it at a bit more as the negotiations ensue. T. Blauvelt also asked about the Administrative Assistant \$6,000 increase. M. Pruhenski responded that the Administrative Assistant increase is because she is taking on significant additional responsibilities. T. Blauvelt also inquired about the Parking Control Officer (how much ticket revenue?). S. Carmel responded that the trend is around \$20,000 (\$4,000 over the salary).
 2. K. Burke inquired about the training budget increase. The Chief responded that the increase in standards require additional ammunition and instructors. K. Burke asked what would happen if the Town did not meet the standards, to which the Chief responded that the police department would become de-certified and disbanded. K. Burke asked what would happen—the Chief replied that the Town would be absorbed into the state police.
 3. L. Davis asked about the Sargent salaries from last year; what is the increase in personnel costs? The Chief responded that the salary increase is around \$30,000. S. Carmel added that it is actually a \$100,000 increase, but the rest [tenure increases] is over/above the 4% staff increase. S. Carmel will prepare a follow-up at the next Budget Meeting.
 4. K. Burke asked about the staffing levels. The Chief responded that they are down 2 full-time positions. L. Davis asked about our Police Department structure as opposed to other similar towns. Chief Storti responded that our Police Department is smaller than similar others.
 5. A. O'Dwyer inquired about the Community Outreach program. The Chief responded that there had been such positive feedback about this that they have expanded the program.
 - b. Fire Department. Chief Burger highlighted the changes:
 - i. Revenues slightly down
 - ii. Expenses roughly level-funded
 - iii. No structural salary changes. Increase to Firefighter salaries proposed; they are vastly underpaid.
 - iv. K. Burke asked if Chief Burger could expand on the Sheffield Fire Inspection revenues. The Chief responded that this is a \$24,000 revenue. Overall, revenues have been trending up, although they are down a bit due to COVID.
 - v. A. O'Dwyer asked about why the Town set such low salaries to begin with. The Chief responded that the Town just set them out very low. A. O'Dwyer asked why overtime is going up. The Chief responded that the full-time firefighters get overtime, but call firefighters do not.

- c. Emergency Management. Chief Storti highlighted the changes:
 - i. Level funded; no changes.
- d. Animal Control. M. Pruhenski highlighted the changes:
 - i. Level funded; no changes
- e. Community Services. M. Pruhenski highlighted the changes:
 - i. Slight increase (\$5,000). Right in the middle of Historicals. Increase due to increased need.
- f. Veterans' Affairs. S. Carmel highlighted the changes:
 - i. 4% increase: now includes VFW Post.
 - ii. Andy Moro explained that American Legion now uses the VFW Post. No income for supporting the building, grounds, heating, etc. Mike Casey chimed in that this place is meant to be inclusive for all veterans, including younger veterans.
 - iii. M. Loubert asked whether any veterans have expressed needs which are not being met (particularly housing difficulties). Mike responded that there are problems with housing. They were able to help one veteran with their utility bills. S. Bannon asked if this amount is enough. A. Moro responded that they could certainly use the money; they support the community in many ways.
- g. Boards & Committees.
 - i. An increase to the Historic District Commission budget was discussed.
- h. Celebrations & Events
 - i. An increase was discussed – in order to increase free evening concerts for all.
- i. Special Articles
 - i. \$350,000 for Community Impact Funding- Year 2. Fully funded from proceeds of cannabis sales in Great Barrington.
 - ii. Southern Berkshire Ambulance: B. Cooke Hathaway presented the financials. Board members expressed skepticism about the major increase in cost for Great Barrington. Members agreed that this is not a sustainable trend. L. Davis asked for a study into Gt Barrington providing their own EMS service. The discussion was continued to a future meeting
 - iii. School District Consolidation Feasibility Study: \$15,000 request to bring in consultants. Lucy and Peter explained this request—it is for Phase II of the study. Board members expressed positive interest in this study. M. Loubert feels comfortable with the ask due to the excellent, thorough study.
 - iv. Police Cruiser: S. Carmel explained that she would like to fund this through the tax rate as opposed to raising the debt.
 - v. Taconic High School Transportation: Transportation costs reduced significantly, thanks to Tate Coleman (decrease from \$94,000 to \$45,000).
 - vi. Stabilization Funds: S. Carmel explained that she is proposing an increase in stabilization funds due to an increase in free cash.
 - vii. Capital Stabilization Fund: S. Carmel noted that this is funded at around \$100,000 per year, but since it was not funded last year will be increased to \$200,000 this year.
- 3. Citizen Speak
 - a. None
- 4. Media Time
 - a. None
- 5. Meeting adjourned at 9:07pm

Respectfully Submitted by Tate Coleman, Recording Secretary.

Approved by Finance Committee on December 12, 2021