

FINANCE & SELECTBOARD COMMITTEE MINUTES – Feb 24, 2021 06:30pm

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

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

1. Called to order at 6:31pm by Steve
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. Tom asked if we could hold the Chief salary on the lower end until the salary survey concludes. Mark responded that the position was advertised at up to \$105,000 but are holding it at a bit more as the negotiations ensue. Tom also asked about the Administrative Assistant \$6,000 increase. Mark responded that the Administrative Assistant increase is because she is taking on significant additional responsibilities. Tom also inquired about the Parking Control Officer (how much ticket revenue?). Sue responded that the trend is around \$20,000 (\$4,000 over the salary).
 2. Kate inquired about the training budget increase. The Chief responded that the increase in standards require additional ammunition and instructors. Kate 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. Kate asked what would happen—the Chief replied that the Town would be absorbed into the state police.
 3. Leigh 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. Sue added that it is actually a \$100,000 increase, but the rest [tenure increases] is over/above the 4% staff increase. Sue will prepare a follow-up at the next Budget Meeting.
 4. Kate asked about the staffing levels. The Chief responded that they are down 2 full-time positions. Leigh 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. Anne 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. Kate 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. Anne asked about why the Town set such low salaries to begin with. The Chief responded that the Town just set them out very low. Anne 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. Mark highlighted the changes:
 - i. Level funded; no changes
- e. Community Services. Mark highlighted the changes:
 - i. Slight increase (\$5,000). Right in the middle of Historicals. Increase due to increased need.
- f. Veterans' Affairs. Sue 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. Michelle 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. Steve asked if this amount is enough. Andy 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: Bill 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. Leigh 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. Michelle feels comfortable with the ask due to the excellent, thorough study.
- iv. Police Cruiser: Sue 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: Sue explained that she is proposing an increase in stabilization funds due to an increase in free cash.
- vii. Capital Stabilization Fund: Sue 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.