

Selectboard and Finance Committee Joint Budget Meeting via Zoom
Tuesday, February 8, 2022

1. Call to Order – S, Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00pm; those present via zoom: Selectboard: Ed Abrahams, Leigh Davis, Eric Gabriel, Garfield Reed. Finance Committee: Tom Blauvelt, Michelle Loubert, Meredith O'Connor, Anne O'Dwyer, Philip Orenstein. Town Manager Mark Pruhenski, Finance Director Sue Carmel and other department heads as noted below

S. Bannon stated the process for next meeting is to vote on budget for each department, on capital and special articles. Next step is for the Finance Committee to hold a public hearing, followed by additional discussion/revisions, as needed, and then a final vote.

2. Department

- a. Police Department

Presenter Chief Paul Sorti started with Police Department highlights including the new canine comfort/patrol program; parking ticket revenue; and police reform priorities emphasizing training, accountability and transparency and associated changes in police operations. He stated FY23 budget increases are under 2%, and at the same time meet the obligations/goals for police reform. He outlined three focus areas: increased patrol staffing to add a sergeant to increase coverage and supervision/accountability; hire an additional officer due to part-time status being eliminated in 2024; and add an investigator role to handle more complex, larger cases and to reduce the burden on patrol officers allowing more time on the streets. He also outlined savings that allowed the reinvestment in new positions. A. O'Dwyer clarified the new investigator was not a new hire, just an assignment of duties. P. Orenstein asked about the new accreditation officer position - Chief Sorti stated it is a stipend for new responsibilities as the Department is up for accreditation this year and police reform has set new standards. A. O'Dwyer asked how overtime expenses were reduced - Chief Sorti replied it was because of restructuring and hiring an additional officer. E. Gabriel asked if the Department would be hiring additional officers in the future – Chief Sorti stated yes, the plan is to add three new officers. L. Davis asked about a new plan for dispatch – Chief Sorti replied it is a complicated issue and needs further discussion.

- b. Emergency Management

Chief Sorti stated there is little change in the budget from last year and noted there will be discussions on potential restructuring of the program in the future. He also requested an additional \$1,000 for equipment.

- c. Animal Control

Chief Sorti stated there is only a minor increase - essentially no change in the budget.

- d. Fire Department

Chief Charlie Burger stated the budget reflects adjustments due to increased costs for repairs, maintenance and parts. He noted the only new item is a subscription to Lexipol that provides standard operating guideline templates and policies for fire departments and GB Fire Department needs to update policies/SOGs this year. He also noted that the change in structure for inspections plan review and permit fees yielded \$70,000 in revenue. M. Loubert asked if salary increases are contractual – Chief Burger replied it is STEP Program cost of living increase and that the increase in overtime budget is due to backfill during vacations. P. Orenstein asked about hourly pay for call fire fighters and the increase in hydrant rentals which Chief Burger clarified is an estimate for Housatonic at a 10% increase.

- e. Community Services

Presenter M. Pruhenski stated this is for grants to local nonprofits. Historically it has ranged from \$20,000-35,000 annually. A. O'Dwyer clarified history on the overall budget and P. Orenstein asked how grant-giving is promoted and who are recipients - M. Pruhenski stated a press release is issued announcing the grants and he will send a list of grantees to the boards.

f. Veterans' Affairs

Presenter S. Carmel stated the budget reflects a 5% decrease over last year. She clarified that the Veterans Services line is a contribution rent subsidy for the American Legion and VFW Post for \$9,000 each which is level funding. She noted a slight increase in supplies and that veterans' benefits had decreased over the last few years, so the request has been reduced – she also stated it is 75% reimbursable from the state. Also, Veterans District is for the Town's share of the District Agent and that has increased slightly. S. Bannon asked about the low year-to-date spend for Veterans Services – S. Carmel replied it is billed quarterly so it is a timing issue.

g. Boards and Commissions

Presenter S. Carmel stated the boards had been asked to submit budget requests. The Historic District decreased its request as last year's budget included funds for monument repairs.

h. Celebrations & Events

Presenter M. Pruhenski noted the budget reflects a \$2,500 increase for the bandstand coordinator position and a \$2500 increase in the celebrations line to install/remove banners, awards/plaques and a donation to the Holiday Stroll. P. Orenstein asked if there was a plan to recognize David Grover – M. Pruhenski stated there is a committee being formed and part of the Town budget will go to those efforts. G. Reed asked if there were banners for Black History Month – M. Pruhenski stated there are W.E.B. Du Bois banners are up on Main Street through Black History Month and there are multiple events planned.

S. Bannon stated there are 14 panelists and 11 attendees at the meeting.

i. Special Articles

Presenter M. Pruhenski outlined the Special Articles: Community Impact Funding which is level at \$350,000; BHRSD Vocational Tuition and Transportation for \$70,000 for year three of the commitment; and Stabilization and Capital Stabilization Accounts at \$100,000 each. T. Blauvelt asked if the Town should start funding OPED liability this year – M. Pruhenski recommended establishing a trust this year and look for funding in FY24 – and for the Finance Committee to discuss. P. Orenstein agreed there should be additional conversation about pros/cons and benefits. A. O'Dwyer asked about allocation of Community Impact Funds and confirmed we follow Cannabis Control Commission guidelines. S. Bannon noted that we follow guidelines, but there is some flexibility in allocation amounts. M. Pruhenski also noted the extensive process/due diligence. P. Orenstein noted past allocation amounts and that the unallocated funds are in free cash. E. Abrahams stated the CCC will be reviewing host agreements to confirm how funds are spent and the Town has been especially thorough and meticulous.

3. Citizen Speak Time

4. Media Time

5. Adjournment - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 6:47pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Stacy Ostrow
Recording Clerk