

Westhampton, MA Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Town Hall (and Zoom)
March 15, 2023

Meeting called to order at 7:00pm

In attendance: Jacob Antosz, Jeremy R. Durrin, Stephen Holt, Marilyn Witherell, Tad Weiss, Scott Stanton (taking notes), Barbara Pelissier (zoom). Also, in attendance via zoom – Phil Dowling (SB) and Maureen Dempsey (SB).

Motion to accept meeting notes by Scott Stanton, seconded by Stephen Holt, accepted **7-0-0**

Police Department Expense - Chief David White is here. Sergeant and Patrol Officers' salaries have been broken out into separate line items which will be discussed with the salaries next week.

- The police department has received a grant for two speed trailers in the amount of ~\$32,000. This equipment is intended for giving immediate feedback to drivers and data collection for future patrolling.
- Switched to a town-wide radio repeater recently from the state's system, saving money and providing service to other departments in town.
- Signed on with a state system for record management. This cost the same as we were paying for TriTech systems in the past.
- The three officers we have are now current with police reform requirements.
- Requesting a fourth officer after their training has been completed so that the town does not have to pay for that training. This explains the extra ~\$10,000 (Under the line item "Additional Patrol" on the Police Dept Salary sheet). The purpose of this officer would be to allow a second officer during the high school traffic times, especially given that the high school no longer has an SRO.
- Historically the town has generally had 4 officers, but we are in the process of building back up from a low of 2.

Police Reform - Chief David White

- Requesting level funding even though we still have a balance of \$4,784 for FY23, after the planned purchases for the remainder of the year, it will be down to about ~\$1,600 by the end, only considering planned expenses.
- This is the first year of being current on the reforms so we will be gathering information this year in order to make more accurate requests for money in the future.
- The current system for body cams is a subscription of \$55 per month per phone for storage and \$40 for each phone initially.

Fire Department Expense - Chief David Antosz is here.

- Requesting level budget compared to FY23.
- Broke up equipment and vehicle repairs and maintenance into Vehicle repairs, yearly equipment service, and safety gear for more specific reporting and requests.

- There are currently 34 or 35 members of the WFD. This number includes 7 dedicated EMTs which we either already have or will gain during this year.
- An ISO audit is coming up this year, focusing on testing, how long you keep equipment and what you have. This audit is paid for by the insurance company. This audit affects the ratings for our homeowners' insurance.
- Regarding the needs of the town for emergency services. There were ~118 medical emergencies in town in 2022 with approximately 100 ambulance runs during the year last year.
- We contract with Easthampton for ambulance services as well.
- Awarded \$6,900 for firefighter safety training in grants.
- They will be asking for a capital expense to replace Engine 2 which is 40 years old in a truck that has an expected lifetime of ~25 years. This is being handled by the capital planning committee.

Safety Complex Building -

- The main increases are utilities, propane and electric. Last monthly bill was \$1,300.
- Selectboard is looking into different energy suppliers to decrease costs, though that will not affect delivery costs.
- The building is set up for solar in the future which will hopefully be paid for with federal funding in the future.
- The reason for the discrepancy in the FY23 budget request was that it was intended to be a partial year, but because of delays in the construction of the complex this year's budget includes what was left over from staying at the old firehouse longer than expected.
- Regarding the Yearly Tank Pumping line item - there are two types of tanks, one is for hazardous waste, the other is for water collection both of which require pumping. The water that drips into the drains from the trucks and equipment has to be pumped away as mandated by the state.
- The Alarm Monitoring line item is for any systems such as generators, access, sprinklers, security, etc. and the cellular device that sends out alerts. This is monitored by one company for all systems. This always existed but it was broken out in this year's budget.
- The internet and cable increase is because all three services, fire, highway, and police are included in one now. Doug will be looking into this because it still seems high.

Emergency Medical Services -

- Requesting level funding.
- The only changes were moving budgets around and breaking things out into more specific categories.
- Radios and pagers moved under fire department expenses.
- We will have 7 EMTs by the end of the year, hiring 4 over the course of this year.
- Narcan can be paid for by opioid settlements but must be worked through a warrant article because it must be paid for by a separate appropriation. This will have to be broken out of the EMS Supplies/Equipment line.

Ambulance Service -

- Finishing up the previous 3-year contract which has been very successful and FY24 will start a new 3 year contract.
- \$35,000 is a firm contracted number for FY24, \$37,500 for FY25, and \$40,000 FY26.
- Easthampton is our primary ambulance service provider; Pioneer Valley has been our backup followed by several other towns as backup to the backup.
- They have been very quick and responsive for our town's needs.
- This \$35,000 number is based on ~100 runs @ \$334 per run out to our town.
- Easthampton automatically sends an ambulance for every structure fire as part of the contract.
- Other nearby towns use a private system called Highland (Chesterfield, Goshen). They pay about \$54/person/yr. [8:09pm] \$27-\$28/person/yr. Our town's fee per person per year is \$21.58.
- Our response time is ~7-10 minutes while some nearby towns have to wait 20 minutes or more because of their proximity to ambulance services.

Inspector Expenses - Todd Alexander is here.

- Basically, level funded, with a small increase because of the new \$50/month for the online payment processing system.
- Inspector is responsible for permitting buildings and structures in town and also zoning questions and requests.
- Plumbing and electrical inspections are done by specific people who are included in this budget but not under the purview of the Inspector.
- There is a new system which allows for permit requests (Installed FY21) and payments online (Installed FY23) which is shared with electrical and plumbing and building inspectors.
- Permit requests have stayed fairly steady but are always steadily increasing. 127 permits with \$72,201.88 in fees collected in 2019, 113 with \$44,362.70 collected in 2020, 131 with \$46,695.90 collected in 2021, and \$56,944.32 collected in 2022.
- Fees were structured about 4 years ago by Tom Quinlan (Building Commissioner) and approved by the Select Board which were in line with the Southampton fees structure since Tom was also Inspector there at the time.
- Tad is requesting that the SB ask Tom Quinlan to look at the fee structure to keep it in line with the surrounding towns.
- There were around 5 or 7 new house construction permits requested in 2022.

Tad brought up the topic of the HRHS budget from the March 6th meeting. There was brief discussion about this based on what some members of the committee have learned at the HRHS meetings held by the school board, but no conclusions were reached as we have still not heard from the school board directly.

Motion to adjourn at 8:44pm by Marilyn, seconded by Stephen accepted **7-0-0**