

Westhampton, MA Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Town Hall
February 21, 2024

Meeting called to order at 7:03pm

Attendance: Jeremy Durrin, Steve Holt, Marilyn Witherell, Tad Weiss, Richelle Hurd, Jennifer Milikowsky, Carla Lussier, Scott Stanton (notetaker)

Also in attendance: Dave White, Jeff Fish, Todd Alexander, Wally Marek, David Antosz, Maureen Dempsey, and Doug Finn

Motion to accept 1/24/24 meeting minutes by Marilyn and seconded by Jeremy passes **7-0-0**
Motion to accept 1/31/24 meeting minutes by Marilyn and seconded by Jeremy passes **6-0-1**

COLA adjustment of 3% for COLA adjusted salaries approved by the Select Board.

Police Department budget

- No discussion of the Police Chief salary as it is a simple COLA Adjustment.
- With 2020 reform acts ending, the ability for part-time officers to become full time, this will be an issue next year to discuss what we will do for the police department staffing.
- They were able to use level funding to increase the pay rates to \$30/hr which is competitive with surrounding towns which are all moving to \$30/hr. This means that the patrol budget beyond the Sergeant is split between all patrol officers at \$28,220 total.
- Westhampton has gone from one of the highest paying towns to one of the lowest in recent years.
- There has been some talk of regionalization between Cummington, Chesterfield, and Goshen in the past but that has not gone anywhere, but then again, would it make sense to outsource outside the town after investing in the new Safety Complex?
- They received grant money in order to get a new speed trailer and purchased that.
- More grant money to get radios which can operate within metal buildings.
- Discussion within the Finance committee to recommend that the total patrol budget get increased by the COLA increase to afford more or longer shifts on the part-timers, but there is no official vote tonight.
- Mostly level funding for the expenses, just a small decrease in uniforms because the current officers are set with their current outfitting. The remaining budget is for a new officer if/when it comes on and needs outfitting. The corresponding budget line item which offsets the previous decrease is an increase for equipment replacement such as a laptop for the cruiser.

Fire Department budget

- No discussion on Fire Chief's simple COLA increase. One opinion was offered that the Fire Chief salary was very low and should be looked at.
- Two grants are in the process of being awarded, which Chief Antosz applied for and was awarded.
- Some slight increases in maintenance of equipment which is somewhat offset by sharing expenses with surrounding communities.
- The state has said that all emergency services need to transition to 800MHz radios away from the VHF radios which have historically been cheaper but will no longer be supported by the state in the near future.
- The department is doing all they can for cost savings with supplementing equipment with other services utilizing personal cell phones and reusing equipment.
- There is concern amongst the finance committee that this may be stretching an emergency service too far.
- Chief Antosz is planning on applying for a grant for replacing the aging fire engine which would allow for only spending up to 10% of the cost of a new engine. There is an idea that the town would offer more than the minimum of 5% (more likely 10%) toward the grant in order to elevate our chances of being awarded the grant. If approved the grant would allow us to purchase an engine for \$500,000-\$600,000 (brand new as required by the grant) for \$60,000 with the grant covering the rest. The current engine will be 39 years old at the time of the next grant application next year.
- Safety gear is level funded because it takes approximately \$4,500 to outfit a single person and they are hoping to recruit more volunteers in the near future.
- There are currently ~30 volunteers, but many are aging, and we will need additional recruits in the coming years.
- There are some mutual aid partnerships with surrounding towns which supplement our volunteers.

Safety Complex budget

- Slight decrease based on what Chief Antosz saw from last year's actual expenses.
- The high electrical costs come from mainly air handling since the garage is attached directly to the offices, but also compressors, lights, some A/C, and systems like block heaters for the engines that must be running all the time.
- The tank pumping line item is for the pumping of the grey water tank below the complex. When the tank is used, pumping is required yearly so it must be kept on the budget in case the tanks are used and must be emptied.

Emergency Medical Services budget

- No discussion on the salary as it was simply increased by COLA
- There have been several grants awarded to the town for two AEDs, radio base stations, and other communication equipment - and a few other small ones which have been successfully written and awarded by the Emergency Management Director.
- The town currently has 7 EMTs and a handful of first responders. There is a potential for 5 new EMTs which require certification.

- The town has gotten an extremely good deal with Easthampton Ambulance services. We are near the lowest rate in the Valley for outsourced medical services.
- Whenever Easthampton responds to a call here in Westhampton, they have to call a paid employee to cover, incurring overtime in Easthampton, this explains the high cost of what they are charging us. Goshen is looking at an increase to over \$100k, Chesterfield pays ~\$63k, Williamsburg pays ~\$130k while we will pay \$40k during the final year of our 3 year contract.

Building inspector budget

- Salary discussion because there is a proposal to remove funding for this salary and replace it with Wally and Todd splitting the external commissioner's salary between the two of them. The external commissioner's 3 year contract has run out and it has not been renewed.
- The external commissioner was able to train Wally and Todd and they feel that they can run the Inspections as co-commissioners alone.
- Last year the commission brought in \$63,000 between building, solar, plumbing, and electrical inspections.
- The Selectboard ratified a rate sheet for the commission in 2018, so it is a recent appraisal. Our fees are roughly the same as Southampton's, but lower than Hadley's.
- There is discussion about a partial revolving fund for the plumbing and electrical inspections which would pay the plumbing and electrical inspectors (who are not Todd and Wally) because those are paid on a per-performed-inspection-basis instead of a salary. This would fix a yearly issue of receiving the bills for paying those inspectors too late in the fiscal year. Because of the variation in the amount of building inspections, it would be too risky to make the entire budget revolving.
- Discussion that new Zoning Bylaws change could have an effect on budgeting in future years.

Motion to adjourn by Marilyn at 8:52pm, seconded by Jeremy, Approved **8-0-0**