

Wednesday, February 26, 2020 – 6:30 PM

Meeting Minutes

Water Department Meeting Room

438 Granby Road

South Hadley, MA 01075

In Attendance: PC Chair Bruce Perron, PC Clerk Kevin Taugher, PC member John Wojciechowski, Interim Clerk/Treasurer Ira Brezinsky, Chief Robert Authier, Captain Kurt Schenker, Assistant Treasurer Kari Scytkowski, Terie Fleury

CALL TO ORDER

Perron called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the minutes of January 23, 2020. Motion carried 3-0.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the minutes of February 6, 2020. Motion carried 3-0.

PROPOSED AMMENDMENT OF FY20 ADMINISTRATIVE PAYROLL

As a result of the upcoming election of a new Clerk/Treasurer, it will be necessary to increase the Administrative Payroll budget (account #001-122-5100). The Interim Clerk/Treasurer (ICT) has a contract that runs until May 1, however the newly elected Clerk/Treasurer will start her term prior to that date. The exact start date is still to be determined, and could be anywhere from mid-March to mid-April. In addition, the contract of the ICT may or may not be extended depending on how much transition time is necessary to get the new CT acclimated to the position. The ITC recommended increasing the current budget of \$73,500 to \$95,000. The total amount needed is likely to be below that amount.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to place an article on the upcoming District Meeting recommending an increase in the Administrative Payroll budget to \$95,000 from the current \$73,500 and that said increase be funded from Free Cash. Motion carried 3-0.

MEMO FROM DISTICT COUNSEL RE: STARTING DATE FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES IN UPCOMING ELECTION

District Counsel Mark Beauregard has advised the PC that the successful candidates in the upcoming election will be eligible to serve immediately, upon being sworn in, with the exception of the Clerk, where there is a minimum of a 7-day waiting period. Because the District does not have a bylaw which states otherwise, Chapter 41 of the Mass General Laws applies. The new CT will also need to be bonded before beginning her Treasurer responsibilities. As part of recommended changes to the current bylaws, the Bylaw Committee will include the same language adopted by the Town at last Novembers Special Town Meeting. This language states:

The term of office of an elected Town officer shall commence following his or her election immediately upon administration by the Town Clerk of the oath of office except where the election is held before the second Tuesday in April, in which case the Term shall commence on the day after the second Tuesday in April. Where the election is held after the second

Tuesday in April, the Term shall commence the day after the election and any Term office in existence shall continue to the day following the election. The oath of office will be administered by the Town Clerk for all elected and/or appointed officials prior to their participation on a board or committee; and, furthermore, the Clerk may make additional requests prescribed by Massachusetts General Laws or these General Bylaws before the appointee may participate as a member of a board or commission.

CONTINUING FY21 BUDGET DISCUSSION

The PC began by reviewing a “level services” budget. This budget does not include any increase in personnel or any potential changes as a result of upcoming collective bargaining negotiations. Taugher would like to know why fire department wages have increased by approximately 5%. This is primarily a result of increases in ambulance stipends and step increases. Authier and Schenker will provide more detail.

The PC reviewed the remainder of the budget before returning to continued discussion regarding the request for additional staffing. Taugher requested that the Reserve Fund remain at \$20,000 and that the Building Improvement account remain at \$35,000. Other PC members agreed. The question was asked if the Vehicle Stabilization was adequately funded. Authier commented that a new pumper truck will be needed in 5-7 years at an estimated cost of \$600,000 to \$700,000. He stated that the disrepair of some of the roads in town are contributing to additional wear and tear on vehicles.

The topic of adequate funding of Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) was discussed. Taugher reiterated the importance of funding OPEB accounts as aggressively as possible. The more that can be added to OPEB now, the more it will be able to grow in order to fund retiree benefits in the future. Further, he would like to see a target increase in the FY21 tax levy of 2.5% over the FY20 tax levy.

Discussion returned to the Chief’s request for 4 new FTE’s as a result of increased need for emergency service in Town. Perron stated that his first priority is to provide adequate coverage, but that he is hesitant to ask the District Meeting for 4 new employees. Taugher asked what the alternatives are to fully funding the Chief’s request. Chief Authier responded that one alternative would be to utilize more overtime with current staffing, but that he is already having difficulty getting staff to consistently return. He also stated that solely utilizing overtime does not solve the problem when 3 vehicles are out and the station is empty while additional staff is called in. Another possible solution might be to add 2 FTE’s that would work on impact shifts 5 days per week approximately 12 hours per day. Daytime hours are typically busier and use of impact shifts would help to mitigate the situation. This proposal would require discussion with the union.

Taugher would still like to see a more detailed analysis of the type of calls the department is responding to, including false alarms, ambulance calls that don’t result in transport, and calls to other communities or District 2. Authier responded that District 2 is included in District 1’s service zone and District 1 is bound by law to respond to District 2 for all ALS calls. Taugher commented that District 1 receives \$325 for each intercept call and he questioned if that revenue is adequate to cover the total cost for these calls. Perron stated that a deficit in service has been identified by the Chief and that it is the responsibility of the PC to find a way fund the need for increased service. Taugher reiterated that, if the increased service need is primarily a result of calls to other communities or District 2, the burden of that

increased need should not be shouldered by District 1 taxpayers. Chief Authier did not believe that to be the case. Perron asked if there is a problem with repeated alarms/calls to the same locations. Authier believed this is not an issue. He commented that, with new building regulations, more monitored smoke alarms are being installed. This will result in increased false alarms when systems malfunction.

Wojciechowski stated that he doesn't believe increased use of overtime is a solution to the problem. Taugher did not disagree, but he is not satisfied that he has all the information in writing that he needs to make a decision.

The question was asked as to when the District increased to its current staffing. In 2010 the District used a Safer grant to pay for the increase from 4 per shift to the current 5 per shift (including 1 officer). Funding from the Safer grant expired several years ago with the local funding taking over. Wojciechowski and Taugher agreed that the increase in activity in the past 2-4 years has been marginal. Perron pointed out that activity prior to that period was greater, and that perhaps the cumulative effect has been to put the District "over the edge based on the number of calls going out." He further pointed out that there was a moratorium on hiring approximately 5 years ago. Wojciechowski asked how the District determines the true need. Authier responded that looking at comparative statistics from other local communities, along with State numbers, is the correct way to make that determination. He cautioned that different departments use different criteria for reporting numbers, sometimes making it more difficult to make comparisons accurately.

Perron requested that each PC member do whatever additional homework they believe is necessary in preparation for the next meeting. Taugher handed out a chart that showed total compensation, including benefits, for each employee of the department, and asked that it be included in the Annual Report. The chart is more detailed than in the past. Brezinsky asked that the PC approve the exact information to be included in the report. Kari Scytkowski commented that some of this information should not be included in the chart. Perron stated that this would be discussed at the next meeting. Schenker mentioned that the union has notified the PC that it is ready to begin negotiations on a successor contract and is waiting for proposed dates from the PC.

NEW BUSINESS UNFORESEEN

There was no unforeseen new business.

NEXT MEETING

The next meetings are planned for March 12 and 26 at 6:30 PM in the Fire Station meeting room.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to adjourn at 8:29 PM. Motion carried 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

A true copy, attest:

Ira Brezinsky
District #1, Interim Clerk Treasurer

Kevin Taugher, Prudential Committee Clerk