



Special Joint meeting of the Town Council and Finance Committee of the Town Council

July 2, 2020, 2:30 pm

Virtual meeting

Minutes

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this meeting of the Finance Committee was conducted via remote participation.

1. Call to Order

Members Participating Remotely: Pat De Angelis, Lynn Griesemer, Dorothy Pam, Cathy Schoen, Andy Steinberg, non-voting members Robert Hegner, Marylou Theilman, and Sharon Povinelli

Councilors Participating Remotely: Mandi Jo Hanneke and George Ryan

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Police Chief Scott Livingstone, Finance Director Sean Mangano, Comptroller Sonia Aldrich, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, Assistant Fire Chief Lindsey Stromgren, and Clerk of the Council Athena O'Keefe

After confirming all participants could hear and be heard, Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 2:31 pm and announced audio and video recording.

President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the meeting of the Town Council to order at 2:33 p.m.

2. FY21 budget: Public Safety Budget

Chief Livingstone briefly reviewed the Police facilities budget.

Schoen asked about the roof, energy efficiency, and about the space needed to become a regional communication center.

Livingstone responded that money has been appropriated for a roof replacement for FY21. Solar will be discussed in FY22. The department continues to seek partners to become a regional dispatch center on the third floor. If a new Fire facility is built in the future, it could accommodate a larger communication center.

Hanneke asked how regionalization of communications would impact the facility and funding, and noted electricity use has gone up significantly over the past 5 years.

Livingstone responded that a new boiler and boiler systems could bring usage back down, the department can accommodate two more dispatch centers with the current configuration. If we take on partners, we could accommodate added call volume without additional construction. There would be an agreement with the towns and would be a savings for all towns in the agreement. The department would take on one full time employee for Belchertown & Hadley that would be paid for by the towns and Amherst would receive additional state funding for its role as a regional center.

Steinberg stated that becoming a regional dispatch center has been a goal for years.

Livingstone reviewed the Police budget, objectives, and strategies.

Steinberg was disconnected at 2:57 pm, Schoen took over as chair.

Povinelli asked about a decrease in motor vehicle crashes and fatalities, and about community outreach officer.

Livingstone responded that Amherst has not seen an increase in collisions and fatalities after legalization of marijuana as other communities have, and spoke about the outreach officer.

Schoen asked about special training for officers responding to domestic violence or mental health calls.

Livingstone spoke about a civilian advocate who works in the department who responds to calls and works with victims and officers to respond to those situations. The department is looking to expand that to mental health calls as well, with crisis intervention team members and collaboration with CSO Northampton.

De Angelis asked about the department's adherence to President Obama's guidelines on 21st Century Policing.

Livingstone responded that racial profiling data is collected on traffic stops, trying to add data collection to other stops and call volumes, noting that some data is harder to collect.

Hanneke asked about the long-range objective of additional traffic officers, and suggested alternatives such as expanding parking enforcement, reassigning calls to non-police officers, or look at technology solutions like red light cameras that do not require new hires specific to traffic enforcement. Hanneke asked about the size of the department in relationship to the size of the community.

Livingstone responded that red light cameras are against the law in the state, and in terms of department size there is a national recommendation based on population and call volume, against those standards the department is smaller than it should be.

Hegner asked about trends in call volume in recent years.

Livingstone responded that arrest numbers are down and can be attributed to efforts by the community outreach officer.

Theilman asked about calls related to the seasonal shelter.

Livingstone stated the call volume regarding homelessness is consistent, liaison officers have a good rapport with the shelter.

Schoen asked about overtime during COVID-19, staff morale and turnover, and asked if it is difficult to train or retain people.

Livingstone responded that there will be a savings in overtime this year because there was no spring break, and that it is unclear at this point what will be needed for staffing levels this year. There has been significant turnover, attributed to the stressful nature of the job, and that it is a lengthy process to rehire; 6-9 months to interview and train new officers.

Pam asked if an increase in salary would help with turnover.

Livingstone stated that salaries are competitive, and spoke about the role of the animal welfare officer and about the regional animal shelter.

Hanneke asked about leash laws, and who responds to wild animal or farm animal calls.

Livingstone responded that the animal control officer responds to all animal-related calls.

Sharon Povinelli left the meeting.

Fire Department

Chief Nelson spoke about accomplishments and challenges and the fire department budget, and about potential grant funds.

De Angelis asked about small equipment and building maintenance needs.

Nelson responded that buildings are cold in the winter and hot in the summer, spoke about day-to-day maintenance, and energy inefficiencies in the 90 year old central fire building and 45 year old north fire building.

Assistant Chief Stromgren spoke about the state of the buildings, roofs, and heating.

De Angelis asked about preparation for ongoing repairs.

Finance Director Mangano responded that the Capital Improvement Program does have repair funds available.

Hanneke asked about the value of repairing the stations versus new buildings, and asked about dispatch for fire and police.

Chief Nelson responded that fire and police share dispatch, spoke about ambulance calls for falls and lift assists, and the emergency management and public safety team.

Schoen asked about legislation regarding community paramedics, billing for lift assists, and licensing.

Fire Captain Olmstead responded that the Town does not bill for lift assists. Minnesota covers community para-medicine, and could consider that model.

Members discussed calls and procedures regarding lifts and falls.

Nelson spoke about training for multi casualty events for fire and police.

3. Budget review and recommendation process

Steinberg spoke about development of the Finance Committee report.

4. General public comment – None

5. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance - None

Steinberg and Griesemer declared the meeting of the Town Council and Finance Committee adjourned at 4:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keeffe
Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

2020-07-02 Finance Committee agenda