

**Minutes of the Special Budget Meeting of the Board of Finance (BOF)
Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room, March 13, 2023**

Members Present: Chris Childs, Michael Haines, Eric Harrington, Dr. Ann Huntington, Brian Kost, Mark Sinopoli **Members Absent:** None **Alternates Present:** Mark Englander, Arthur Christian II, Tom Frenaye **Alternates Absent:** None.

Also Present: First Selectman Colin Moll, Finance Director Eric Remington, Treasurer Kacy Colston

Chair Harrington called the meeting to order at 7:03pm and conducted the pledge of allegiance.

Citizen Comment/Correspondence: None

Police Department – Chief Canon

- The animal control officer budget has a 19% increase primarily per contract terms. The kennel contract with River Valley was renewed which also resulted in some additional charges.
- The operating budget has an approximately 8% increase. The primary driver is contractual salary and benefits owed to all staff (excluding the Chief and Captain) for the prior two years during which negotiations were in process, as well as for this 2023/24 budget. Another significant increase was a fuel adjustment using the Town's proposed rate and their historical usage, so budget better reflects actual costs. There was also an increase for the emergency medical dispatch (EMD) which they outsource as needed. They need to address audit and statutory non-compliance issues with this service that also affects the Suffield Volunteer Ambulance Association (SVAA). There were minor increases in continuing education, vendor fees.
- Overtime (OT) at \$370k is tracking to be 1,000 hours less than last year and the lowest in six years, due to filling vacancies. There was significant discussion regarding OT causes, rules, various rates, the off-duty fund, the rates we charge when we lend out officers, etc. Crime information is available in their annual report but in general most types are at the same level with the exception of scam larceny, which has increased and involves many more investigation hours and additional costs. Chair Harrington will assume a 40% relationship between vacancy and OT and asked to be notified if there is significant deviation from that.

Capital items - Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures (ACCE) list:

Radio tower communication system – This system covers all emergency communication for the Town. The Board noted that this was not on the ACCE 10-year plan so it is a very large, unexpected expense.

- The last upgrade was about ten years ago. The software and equipment end-of-life was around 2007-2008 so the vendor must search for used equipment to continue maintenance.
- They are researching the costs and pros/cons of having our own system or utilizing the State's system. Either option will likely require us to add two more towers. The estimate to build our own is \$6M, not including additional costs for tower site work. Based on other towns' findings, the State option could be about \$800k less. If we use the State system, they set minimum standards and we must update on their schedule.
- Either solution should include a commitment to a maintenance program to avoid a huge expense like this in the future. We can bond for this although the 10-15 year lifespan would limit the bond duration.
- The two towers that are used by Police and Fire are not structurally sound enough to support additional equipment so must be replaced as well.
- ACCE has approved \$200k for a study, which the Board felt was high in comparison to the recent police operations study. They are contacting vendors to get a better estimate and will try to have that in

the next couple weeks. They are researching grants and talking to towns that are on the state system and will share their findings.

Police vehicles – These are very hard to find with limited lot inventory and manufacturers canceling orders. They have budgeted for two at \$80k each, although they may not be able to obtain them. Two of the three vehicles they got last year are on the road, with the last one being outfitted now.

Taser contract– This request is to get refreshed tasers on a 5-year plan for an annual cost that includes training. Liability insurance through the vendor is about \$10M for 5 years and they currently have 3-4 outside this range.

Suffield Volunteer Ambulance Association (SVAA)/ Emergency Management – Chief Spencer

The budget is generally the same as it has been since the contractual increase a few years ago. There are some increases for a contract adjustment for Chief Spencer's salary, the part time paramedic program, supplies for the police and other Town projects they support. Insurance reimbursement only covers 20-25% of their resident transports. This year they anticipate a \$50-\$60k loss. Volunteers have decreased so they've increase paramedics, calls are up so they've increased coverage and expenses are exceptionally high. The budget is all contractual with the next renewal in 2027.

Public Works - Chris Matejek

The budget has a 4.5% increase.

- Salary - His salary increased with the absorption of Mark Cervione's responsibilities. There are step ups for 2 new highway men and he is currently down .5 staff for budget purposes. The standing \$50k OT budget has never been sufficient but was offset by vacancies. Since 2019 OT has ranged from \$130k to \$163k, so he included an additional \$75k for OT. Mr. Kost said if we are putting the OT increase in this budget, we should remove that amount from the Contingency fund.
- Expenses – Higher prices resulting from inflation is the main driver, affecting gas, diesel, and electricity. There is about \$8k savings for less EPA testing at the library. Grounds maintenance is up 6.9% driven by fuel costs. Vehicles have issues but he kept the budget flat. Salt has increased \$30/ton. There is an offset from state aid, but they will use more than that.
- Revenues – Main change is in cardboard as we expected \$11k but early in season were told there was no value, now we will be getting some payment. Opportunities to increase revenue at the land fill were discussed and should be pursued further.

Public Utilities - Eric Remington

- Burn fees – This is a contracted expense covering anything related to trash hauling, curbside pickup, fees to dispose of items at land fill. Tonnage has not changed dramatically but the tipping fee has gone up.
- Single stream recycling rate (blue bins) is being increased based on contracts and vendor fees. It was \$53/ton in July but went up to \$106 in November. There are 6 years remaining on the 8-year contract with USA Hauling & Recycling. Mr. Kost requested the line item be relabeled trash instead of burn fee.
- Water – Cost has increased significantly. This includes fire hydrants.
- Electricity – We remain under a fixed price contract, so we are set for this budget. The Board would like to have a CBA follow-up for the street light purchase to determine if we are obtaining the expected savings. Mr. Matejek thought they may be able to compile invoices to get this, once budgeting is complete.
- Revenue – We are forecasting a 4% interest rate for STIF fund and 1.5% for all other cash holdings. Revenue outside of STIF fund earnings is flat. Mr. Remington will find out what the Tuition Only line item is and the amount/accounting line item for the Suffield Academy payment in lieu of taxes. Prior year taxes (uncollected) are running higher than budgeted. Although real-estate transaction volumes have decreased, fee rates are increasing, and we have been collecting more than we budgeted so he increased that budget item. Supplemental vehicles remain flat.

Adjournment

Mr. Haines made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Huntington seconded. All were in favor; the meeting adjourned at 8:48pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kris Kelliher

These minutes are not official until accepted at a subsequent meeting