

TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
JOINT MEETING - BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND ADVISORY BOARD
WEDNESDAY – FEBRUARY 29, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.
LOWER LEVEL MEETING ROOM AT TOWN HALL

PRESENT: - BOARD OF SELECTMEN - Ed Vitone, Chair; Ron Reed, Member; Greg Fagan, Clerk. ADVISORY BOARD – Bill Johnson, Chair; Meredith Fagan, Duncan Phye, James Piedrafite, Joseph Oliveira, and Gail Dumont, Secretary. Also present: Doug Briggs, Town Administrator, Leo Janssens II, and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

Vitone called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. and stated that the purpose of this meeting was to review the proposed FY13 Budget. He then asked Doug Briggs to present his proposed budget.

Briggs began by reviewing the revenues. He stated that it does include the PILOT for the solar projects. He also noted that he earmarked a line for his services in Ashby but did not fill in the dollars. Briggs also stated that revenue amounts were not inserted for the Regional Dispatch. Vitone added that we may not see any revenue this year from the regionalization if it does go forward.

Briggs stated that the Police budget may be expanded as Cushing Academy has offered 100% funding for an additional officer with a three-year commitment. He stated that it was listed in the Revenue with an estimated \$85,000 and it would include a percentage of everything ie. overtime, retirement, etc. Ron Reed inquired how the Town would get this payment and Briggs stated that he would follow up.

Briggs then went over the individual budgets, stating that because of the great oil prices the Town was able to negotiate this year with Gardner, we did not require the extra \$25,000 for oil in the Reserve Fund. He stated that he took this \$25,000 out of the Reserve Fund for FY13. He also noted that the Town Accountant's budget went down due to less hours and eliminating the assistant's position. Vitone stated that he was contemplating a placeholder using the Accountant's expertise for any big projects that may come up if things work out with sharing the Town Administrator's services with Ashby. He stated that she would be paid for any extra hours she would work on these projects. Briggs commented that we needed her to use the Munis software to its full capacity. Bill Johnson stated that he felt the best course was not to commit to this but to set aside the funds for now maybe in the Reserve Fund. Vitone noted that it could be put under the Town Administrator's budget as a line item, "project management".

Johnson noted that he did not want the extra \$25,000 taken out of the Reserve Fund as any extra could go to free cash.

Briggs stated that he has been working with the IT Advisory Board on the IT Expenses. He also noted that he had joined Brad Warren from Guardian for a tour of the Server Room at the Public Safety Building and that they were working to combine all emails under one account.

Greg Fagan questioned the increases in Munis, Guardian and IMC. Briggs explained each line under the IT Expenses and how the IT Advisory Board was appointed and under what charge. Vitone stated that the IMC increase was for the Fire Department which will generate greater productivity. He stated that they should ask the Fire Chief for justification of this software.

Briggs stated that under Town Buildings there was a decrease due to the Library building costs being taken from this account and placed back in their budget account in order to keep their total budget for certification purposes and the 19% allocated for books/media.

Fagan asked about the dog pound and Briggs stated that there were no dogs there now and they would probably close the facility. He stated that they needed an Animal Inspector and was working with Westminster on this. He added that once we get an inspector we would take the funds out for the dog pound but there would be no savings as the funds would then go toward sharing the van costs with Westminster.

Briggs reviewed the Police salary line stating that there were a lot of unknowns such as the Quinn bill. He stated that if it does pass and we have to pay this, we do have the funds to cover it with articles as well as some funds already in the budget. He also discussed the new officer position and the Lieutenant position which would be non-union. Ron Reed stated he was emphatically against the Lieutenant position and both Leo Janssens and Meredith Fagan agreed. Vitone asked Briggs to get a report from Chief Barrett showing the shift coverage and the justification on adding the Lieutenant position. Briggs also noted that Cushing was planning on funding the new officer very soon.

Joe Oliveira inquired about the supplies account and why it increased by \$1,000. Briggs stated that he would get a breakdown.

Ron Reed inquired about the Police overtime account and Briggs stated that it increased by the proposed new officer from Cushing funds.

Briggs went on to the Fire Department budget and Bill Johnson inquired about the Fire Chief's salary and how it compared to other communities. Vitone stated that per data, it was in line with the same size communities and he is in-line for years of service and experience.

Briggs stated that he cut the overtime, on-call, and professional development and travel. He noted that on the revenue side they were looking at Medicaid billing to increase. Vitone stated that he would like to understand who pays the differential and how and asked Briggs to look into this.

Briggs noted that under Emergency Dispatch it was a contract year.

Briggs went on to the Inspectors budget stating that they were underpaid and paid by the hour. He stated that with the Briggs Project costs, the fees will be collected this year but we would be paying the inspectors for the next 3 years during this process and may have to fall on reserve fund transfers to cover any shortfalls. He also noted that they came up with \$30.00 an hour for the inspectors' wages. He added that Dick Reynolds, our Building Commissioner, was doing a terrific job for the Town.

He brought up the Dog Officer budget noting that these costs were split with the Town of Westminster. Greg Fagan noted that the salary line showed a significant increase from last year and that he did not support this. He also noted that Westminster doesn't give us any support. Briggs stated that the plan was to keep the contractor as Westminster is paying half so we are only paying \$21,000 of this budget. Fagan stated that he opposes using a private contractor and we should shop around. He also questioned why the supplies account increased. Vitone noted that this should probably be a one-line account where we didn't really need the detail. He also

added that this is a service that we have to provide. He stated that we need a written agreement of the scope and supplies and we could advertise for scope of services.

Briggs noted that the Monty Tech budget would be increasing and that Supt. Sharek would be coming to a Board of Selectmen meeting in the next few weeks to go over the numbers.

He also noted that the AWRSB budget shows a \$40,000 to \$50,000 increase but it really wasn't and he explained the formula and how it included the new growth. Vitone explained that line 4 in the budget already shows new growth, line 5 is the same as prior year FY12 and line 7 would be the sum of lines 5 and 7 and together would hold constant. Meredith Fagan questioned if anything over the \$6.2 million would be an override? Briggs agreed stating that the voters would decide.

Briggs noted that under the DPW budget the \$43,000 for the Transfer Station may increase to \$45,000 and that the revenues would also go up. He also noted that the Snow & Ice account would be kept at \$180,000 as this is one of the few accounts that can go in the negative.

Briggs then reviewed the Board of Health budget. A discussion followed on maybe going out to see about an alternative to Nashoba Board of Health. Bill Johnson agreed that they should suggest that our Board of Health look at this. Briggs stated that he may reach out to them.

Briggs stated that he added \$15,000 to the ConCom budget to cover the Briggs Project inspection fees.

Greg Fagan questioned the Professional Development & Travel funds in all the budgets and whether this could be centralized. Vitone stated that the Assessors, Treasurer and Collector training classes and seminars were state required and benefited the Town. Fagan asked if this really gets utilized, can we centralize and if they learn anything by attending. Bill Johnson questioned if anyone asked for permission to attend these seminars/classes. Vitone stated that we do get our monies worth and Briggs also noted that important connections are made at these meetings/seminars.

Briggs stated that under the Council on Aging budget he added funds for a new COA Director as Maggie Whitney had resigned as the Interim Director. He stated that Whitney did a great job and he had a new person who was highly recommended and would be starting in two weeks.

Briggs also briefly touched on the Veterans Services and Agricultural Commission budgets.

He then explained why the Library budget increased. He stated that the building expenses were put back because their allotted book percentage was based on their total budget including these expenses and also their certification. He noted that the Historical Commission had asked for an increase in their budget to \$2,000 to purchase signs depicting historical sites in Town.

There was a short discussion on the Debt Service budget. The Town's health insurance costs increase was discussed briefly and Bill Johnson inquired if GIC might be an option. Briggs stated that after looking into this, we really wouldn't save any money, not even for the schools. He also noted that there wasn't too much of an increase in the Worcester County Retirement line.

Briggs noted that the Water and Sewer Department budgets would be the same except for the 3% increase in salaries and wages for the non-union employees.

Jamie Piedrafite inquired if there would be any revenue increase with the new water tank and Briggs stated that there would not be an increase but that more people would tie in. He also noted that the new tank was not on-line yet as one valve on the old tank is seeping so they are working on this now. Johnson asked what would happen to the old tank once it's empty and Briggs responded that it won't be emptied until the spring and then they would implode.

Briggs brought the discussion to the proposed 3% COLA increase for the non-union employees. He noted that last year there was no increase. Meredith Fagan inquired what the total of this increase would be and Briggs stated it was \$27,000. She noted that she was not in favor of the increase and did not support it. Briggs stated that he was looking at consistency and fairness as these employees do a great job for us. Reed stated that he thought it was fair and Vitone agreed adding that the data would show that the non-union employees were shorted through the years. Greg Fagan stated that people can't afford it, everything is going up and he feels this would be a hard sell. Joe Oliveira stated that the amount was really not that high and we can't take it out on our non-union employees. Vitone stated that revenue will be coming in to the Town that will more than cover this, such as \$100,000 for the solar, \$100,000 for the dispatch regionalization and \$60,000 for sharing Doug's services with Ashby. He added it would pay for this and more. Jamie Piedrafite made the point that this is all funded within the budget and is not over the levy limit.

Vitone stated that once Doug Briggs does the homework on the open items the Board of Selectmen will send the budget to the Advisory Board.

Gail Dumont asked about the Parks & Recreation Committee budget request and Briggs stated that he requested more detail.

At 9:38 p.m. Reed motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Vitone. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator