



OFFICE OF THE
Advisory Board
TOWN HALL
511 MAIN STREET
DUNSTABLE, MA 01827-1313
(978) 649-4514 x222 FAX (978) 649-4371
finance@dunstable-ma.gov

February 27, 2012 Meeting Minutes

Attending: Ron Mikol, Joe Dean, Harold Simmons, Christine Muir, Dan St Jean
Absent: Dana Metzler

Meeting opened at 7:03 p.m.

Prior Meeting Minutes

The minutes for February 13 and 21 meetings were unanimously approved.

Transfer Requests

Dan spoke with Danice last week to confirm the recent insurance bill that requires a transfer of \$1043.35 from the Reserve Account to the Bldg/Property/Liability insurance line item. The two claims for the new highway truck are separate liability and property insurance costs, and the other claim is indeed for the police trailer. The transfer of \$1043.35 was unanimously approved by all five members.

Highway Department FY2013 Budget Request

Harold asked about the increase in the Salaries and Wages line item. The road commissioners put in a 3.5% increase, matching the increase given to Social Security this year. Joe put a 1% increase in the Recommended column, as that is the percentage that the Board of Selectmen has asked us to include in every department for now.

Dan inquired about the increase in the Highway Machinery Fund. Tom Dumont replied that there are several maintenance items needed this year, including new tires for one truck and a sandblasting/repainting job for the backhoe. Joe asked if this number included any additional machinery and it does not.

The other significant number in the highway budget is \$150,000 for Paving. The Highway Department told us that it costs \$161,000 to pave River and Westford Streets this year, most of which was paid from Chapter 90 money. The current balance in the Chapter 90 money is \$97,188. Last year, the department received \$133,000 from the state for Chapter 90. Joe asked if that doesn't cover the paving costs; Tom replied that it does, but it doesn't allow the Highway Dept to get ahead in paving, or to have funding if Chapter 90 money was ever significantly lower than usual. The only records of paving history are in the Chapter 90 spending records.

Harold recalled a time when every road in Dunstable was repaved over the course of three years. David Crandall said that was when asphalt was at its lowest cost, \$3/ton, compared to the current cost of approximately \$50/ton and rising. Dan noted that the easiest number to cut in order to balance our overall budget is the paving number, so he asked if there was any compromise or mid-range number that could work. Tom replied that \$60,000 would be better than \$15,000, so Joe put that in our spreadsheet for now.

Then we discussed the Snow budget. Joe asked why there was no request for snow removal wages and Tom replied that they determined the need for more money in Salt was a higher priority right now, particularly with the current winter weather conditions.

Approximately \$53,000 is still outstanding for bills (for rented equipment and labor costs) related to Halloween storm clean-up. We anticipate a 75% reimbursement from FEMA but have not been able to get final answers about what can be included in the claims. Terry has put in another call to FEMA to see if she can get those answers in time for the March 15 deadline to submit claims.

Joe asked if the Salt number can be reduced, which led to a discussion of a new salt shed at the same location as the current shed. A temporary shelter has been erected but it is not fully waterproof. The highway department has put in an Article request for \$250,000 for a new building, but Ron asked if that wasn't premature given that no feasibility study on the property has been conducted, nor have any engineering estimates been requested. Tom agreed to have some cost estimates on the design and environmental studies for the Advisory Board by March 31. Joe zeroed out the Recommendation on the Salt Building article, and added a line item for the Feasibility and Design costs instead. He suggested that this year's article be for the planning costs, and that next year, we include an article for the costs of the actual building.

Tom then mentioned that the Highway Department is billed by the Police Department for any details needed during paving projects. It seems odd to the Advisory Board that the town is billing itself for something like this, so Dan asked Tom to have Terry pull out the numbers on what has been paid for the past few years. The board agreed that Highway should be added to next month's agenda to discuss these costs.

Fire Department FY2013 Budget Request

Harold excused himself from the room while we discussed the Fire Department's budget request, as he is under consideration for the new Fire Chief position.

Chief Rich, Brian Rich, Ken Leva, and Danny Devlin joined the board for this discussion.

Fire Dept. Salary and Wages line item is up by \$5300 based on actual expenses this year. Chief Rich anticipates that the account will be empty at the end of this month. A large piece of this cost is because of the mandated state training for firefighters. A total of 808 hours (combined, for all twenty firefighters) at \$10/hour means that the training costs alone are over \$8000.

Another \$2400 would cover the cost of someone's time to check the trucks for equipment and function to ensure that everything works properly and is fully stocked before going out on a call.

Brian handed out a summary of costs included in the Repairs & Maintenance line item. Keeping up with these items may allow the department to lower its ISO ratings with the insurance companies, potentially saving significant costs for the town. Then Brian excused himself from the meeting as he is also under consideration for the position of Chief.

Dan asked what the BoS thought about adding a full-time Fire Chief position to the department. Ken and Danny replied that they wanted FinCom's input, but that the town has been fortunate to have someone acting as a full-time chief while receiving part-time compensation. Dan asked Chief Rich if the town could or should expect a full-time chief to be at the station forty hours a week, and the Chief answered

that it certainly possible; there is enough work to do to fill forty hours. He outlined approx. 5 hours/week to inspect the trucks for equipment and function, approx 7 hours/week for training, issuing permits, answering phones, attending meetings, plus any calls – he feels this easily totals a forty hour work week.

Joe asked how the chief arrived at the \$52,000 salary. Chief Rich based it on the hourly wages received by other town departments, which Dan said isn't necessarily the right line of thinking. Dan explained that Ashby's Fire Chief makes \$52,427 annually, and that this is a better path for estimating our salary target. Ken and Danny agreed that the \$52,000 is in the right range, compared to other towns nearby. Dan reminded everyone that this number needs to be "loaded up" too, with FICA and health insurance costs, so the real cost to the town is closer to \$70,000.

Dan asked if the BoS was also considering adding a Town Administrator, which could be a similar cost addition to the town budget. While that is a priority for the Selectmen based on the DOR financial management review, it is still under consideration by a committee and no decisions have been made yet.

Dan suggested the possibility of creating a three-year plan to bring the Fire Chief up to full-time and \$52,000. For example, the new chief could start at \$40,000/year part-time, and gradually receive salary increases over three years until he reaches the \$52,000. Charlie thought that would be reasonable and agreeable to the two internal candidates currently under consideration.

The board recommended having a complete job description composed by mid-April so that it can be presented at the public hearing and town meeting to show the town some justification for a full-time position.

New Business

Harold returned to the room and the board gave cursory examination to the overall budget and articles so far accumulated. The board has only recommended \$50,000 for the Stabilization fund, and has left all other articles at a zero recommendation.

Ron suggested that the Police Chief look for a grant to cover the \$5000 surveillance cameras for the station.

Charlie Rich remembered that the Fire Department wanted to submit an article for upgrading the cutter used with the jaws of life rescue tool, at a cost of about \$7000.

There may be another Fire Dept article of \$49,000 for an exhaust system at the fire station, as recommended by the insurance company at their last site visit.

Harold asked when the warrant closes, but no one was sure of the date.

Dan asked the BoS if they had considered creating a committee to study the possibility of a Public Safety complex, something that has been under casual discussion for years with no movement yet. He noted that this is the time to begin thinking about that, and studying site and design opportunities, as the town's debt is on a downward trend. In a few years, there may be an opportunity to borrow for something like this.

Meeting adjourned 9:00 pm.

