

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
SELECTBOARD AND FINANCE COMMITTEE
JOINT MEETING MINUTES
FIRE STATION, 37 STATE ROAD
March 8, 2016**

PRESENT:

SELECTBOARD

SEAN STANTON
STEPHEN C. BANNON
DANIEL BAILLY
ED ABRAHAMS
WILLIAM COOKE

FINANCE COMMITTEE

MICHAEL WISE
LEIGH DAVIS
WALTER F. ATWOOD III
THOMAS BLAUVELT
EUGENE CURLETTI

TOWN MANAGER JENNIFER TABAKIN
TOWN ACCOUNTANT LAUREN SARTORI HOBGOOD
POLICE CHIEF WILLIAM WALSH
OFFICER JONATHAN FINNERTY
FIRE CHIEF CHARLES BURGER
BUILDING INSPECTOR ED MAY

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Stanton called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW — BUILDING INSPECTOR

Ms. Tabakin said there is little change in the Building Department budget. A busy year is anticipated. The online building permit system is working well. Mr. May noted the removal of derelict Betros and Ely buildings. Ms. Tabakin said Mr. May and the electrical and plumbing inspectors coordinate their efforts. Mr. May said the part-time building inspector has relieved some of his workload and allowed him to deal with other business.

3. DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW — POLICE

Ms. Tabakin noted the Police Department budget has a slight reduction, reflecting changes in equipment purchases, overtime, training, longevity, scheduling and other changes. Chief Walsh said he expects to appoint staff replacements including a sergeant this spring. One part-time officer has moved up to full time. The budget reflects funds for a parking enforcement officer, a position empty since Sharon Nourse retired. The chief said there is a final effort underway to complete department accreditation, the paperwork to be submitted by September. Ms. Tabakin said there is a greater effort to get information out to the public. The chief said a regular shift is two officers in cruisers, one at the desk. A fourth officer, when available, may do investigative work.

On the issue of staff diversity, Chief Walsh said it is difficult with Civil Service, as the town must hire from a list. While local preference lists are asked for, there are not always choices available. The Town has not had great success with hiring individuals from out of the area and sponsoring their training. They don't stay long. The department has no female officer, sometimes they are needed for domestic matters. It would also be helpful, Ms. Tabakin said, to have an officer fluent in Spanish.

The department has scheduled a cruiser replacement (\$45,600). Hybrids are not yet available with a police package, the chief said, though some departments elsewhere in the state use such vehicles for administrative or parking enforcement functions. Chief Walsh said he would like to purchase a \$19,200 license plate reader, borrowing what amount is not covered by a fund of drug forfeiture money (about \$7,000, according to Ms. Sartori). The chief explained how the equipment would be used and said it would be faster than hand-entering license plate information.

Discussion of replacing 16-year-old telephone (\$24,000) equipment and radio and dispatch console furniture (\$216,000) and computers (\$70,000) as all are out of date or, in the case of the backup console, prone to breaking down. A \$32,000 grant may be available. Ms. Tabakin suggested it would take a year to research alternatives, such as joining the Berkshire County Sheriff's Department dispatch center or persuading a neighboring town to join Great Barrington, and thus make the town eligible for higher-value grants). Mr. Wise suggested making a decision on the equipment locked the town in to continuing its dispatch. Chief Walsh said having new equipment gave the town a leg up in becoming a regional dispatch again, and in recruiting new officers. Chief Walsh said the department now provides a lockup to four towns, charging \$100 a prisoner.

Officer Finnerty explained there are logistic issues involving cell towers that narrow the field of viable towns to bring into the dispatch center. Sheffield is most likely. Monterey would work, according to Fire Chief Burger. Officer Finnerty said the town has been given Lee's equipment, as that town joined a larger dispatch, but there are issues of fiber optics vs. copper to be dealt with. He said if the town can connect with a radio tower on Lenox Mountain, it can serve as backup to the Sheriff's Department in a stronger capacity.

Chief Walsh finally impressed on the board that the radio and other equipment is needed regardless of where dispatch is located. Mr. Stanton said this was a valuable conversation and the town should work to persuade Sheffield to join dispatch.

4. DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW — FIRE

Chief Burger asked for two full-time firefighters to fill daytime shifts, respond to calls, and perform maintenance, administrative, inspection, fire prevention and preparedness work. Responses are up, membership is down, he said. There are 36 members with varying abilities to respond to calls. He'd be more comfortable, he said, with 45. He said this is not a plan for a full-time department, but a way to keep up with responsibilities. He said, as an example, he is obliged to review many building plans, but there is no mechanism for the department to receive a fee. He would be able to devote more time to recruitment. He said Housatonic has eight volunteers who answer calls at night, most daytime calls are answered by Great Barrington. Asked by Mr. Stanton why one full-time firefighter wouldn't be enough, the chief said it would help but it would not solve the problem. Volunteers can no longer be expected to do a lot of the work at the stations. Trucks last longer, he gave as an example, if they are thoroughly washed in winter to remove road salt. The \$110,000 sought is just for salaries, he said. He said he does 800 to 1,000 inspections a year. He said police dispatch determines who to send to a call, EMS or FD and/or PD.

In capital improvements, the chief said he would like a \$600,000 truck for Housatonic and retire 32-year-old No. 6 (which is getting old) and 20-year-old No. 4 (which is mechanically needy). He said the department can respond as well to village demand with a single truck. It needs to be a custom truck, he said, to meet safety requirements, short truck length to fit the station's short bay, and other features preferred by the department so that any volunteer can find equipment on any vehicle. He said the department receives no fees for responding to EMS calls, for example to help with vehicle extractions or carrying heavy patients from homes. He said the department answers 100 to 120 EMS calls a year. In answer to a question, he said a refurbished vehicle, while less expensive, would not have the expected 30-

year longevity of a new truck, and would come with its own problems. He said volunteers receive a \$15 stipend per call if they respond.

Chief Burger said, regarding mutual aid, Great Barrington actually makes calls for assistance from other towns more often than the reverse. Asked by Mr. Bailly who determines which truck to send on a call, the chief said he or another officer is first on the scene and makes that determination. Only about 1 percent of the calls are structure fires. In the case of an easy call or a false alarm, volunteers will sometimes take the opportunity to do a building walk-through, so they will be familiar with the structure should there be a future call.

Chief Burger said the Housatonic station has the street in front, the railroad track in the rear, and cannot be enlarged. He said it would take considerable effort to identify and purchase another piece of land and put up a \$200,000-or-so building just to fit an off-the-shelf fire truck, besides such truck would likely not meet the department's needs.

This truck would be the last requested for the next 10 years, he said. Ms. Sartori suggested Town Meeting be asked to fund the full \$600,000 for a truck, to be reduced should the department receive a grant. She suggested the same for air packs.

Chief Burger said the department needs to replace its 10-year-old SCBA (air pack) equipment (\$200,000) as it is out of date and the manufacturer is out of business. In another matter, Mr. Bannon suggested the town would support a line item for FD training.

5. DEPARTMENT BUDGET REVIEW — PARKING CLERK, WEIGHTS/MEASURES, ANIMAL CONTROL

The board reviewed these items, decided some had been dealt with, others evidenced no change.

6. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m. on a motion by Mr. Bannon, seconded by Mr. Bailly and voted favorably by all.

Submitted by



Bernard A. Drew
Recording Secretary