

**Unofficial
As of 2/13/09**

**BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes
Legends Drive
Thursday, February 12, 2009**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm

Attendance: Chairman Pieroni, K. Hughes, D. Argo, J. Danforth, JR Ouellette, S. Doyon, D. Dickson, N. Comai, M. Miville

J. Pieroni distributed a comparative report of town expenditures for legal counsel.

Chief Agrafiotis: We cannot control what legal issues will arise. Based on the last financial report, we were 75% expended with two (2) bills received today. We will exceed the budget. With Officer Beauchemin fighting the personnel decision, there will be greater expenditure of legal money. There is no control over the employees' rights to fight action.

J. Pieroni: How do other departments and towns do it for less?

Chief and commission have no idea.

Chief Agrafiotis: If you have a large city with an in house legal staff, that may help with some of these issues.

J. Pieroni: Our legal expenditures seem disproportionate to other towns.

The figures distributed for other town cost are budget figures for this year, not actual expenditures.

J. Pieroni: Is there any training or pro-active situations that could reduce the legal cost. It is odd to see other towns manage with much less in legal costs.

Chief Agrafiotis: There is nothing that can be done. It is a very few number of employees which cause most of these legal costs.

JR Ouellette: Can we get information on how many employees are involved?

M. Miville: Couldn't we get statistical information regarding the number of suspensions and investigations, which would not compromise confidentiality?

D. Gagnon: The number will not tell you anything. There could be two (2) or twenty. That won't tell you anything about the line.

J. Pieroni: We are trying to figure out if Hooksett is being raked over the coals with these legal expenditures and is money being spent wisely.

D. Gagnon: I think money is being spent wisely but some people need to go, and that means legal costs. We need to make sure everything is done correctly. We can't use general attorneys any longer. We now need to use specialized attorneys.

JR Ouellette: Has this been two (2) officers or 20 officers?

Chief Agrafiotis: There are possibly less than five (5) out of 45 employees involved.

M. Miville: The citizens should then be assured that \$85,000 does not represent a rash of rogue employees suing the Town.

JR Ouellette: I'd like to go on record that these questions and comments are in no way directed towards any police officer or police staff. I fully support the officers and staff. My only concerns are with management and I can't speak for everyone but I am not looking to eliminate any of the current filled positions. It's the current vacant positions that I have concerns with. I spent a few days reviewing older budgets and I have a concern with older items, such as issues with the wage pool. You are \$300,000 unexpended in the wage pool, which is getting dispersed to other areas.

D. Gagnon: You may have concerned because it is your first year. Each year, those over expenditures were explained to this committee. It could have been used for the Impalas, which we bought two (2) because it was less. Every year, every piece of equipment is purchased for these officers safety and that was explained. Pull the record from 2006 and it will be explained in the budget minutes.

J. Pieroni: If there was a need, why wasn't it put in the budget?

D. Gagnon: We have never hidden the over expenditures. What we purchased was explained at the time. If you want the answer from 2006, we can dig out the records.

J. Pieroni: It appears that every year there is a request for police officers and they are not filled and the money is used for something else.

D. Gagnon: You can't fill them that easily. The ads are in the paper. It takes three (3) months for them to get in the door.

Chief Agrafiotis: If the perception is that we are purposely not hiring an officer; that is not true.

M. Miville: What does it cost to hire a new officer?

Chief Agrafiotis: I don't know.

JR Ouellette: Legal was \$87,000 over expended.

D. Gagnon: It was a \$15,000 budget and \$86,000 was spent in legal. That is why we adjust the budget to \$85,000.

M. Miville: At a most recent Town Council meeting, Councilor Longfellow raised the issue that every year you give back to the Town or you spend money that isn't in a line. He asked the question, why are you always under? You are usually 10% below your spending budget and where does that 20% go at the end of the year. Where is the 10% going to be spent that isn't an appropriated line.

J. Pieroni: Are you planning on spending any of the unexpended money or will it be all returned to the Town. Is there then room to reduce this budget and not have the residual amount?

D. Gagnon: You can adjust the staff but then we won't be at full staff. That is the only place to cut.

J. Pieroni: There was funding for 28 officers in the default. You have been at 29 at some point this year and are now at 26. You have three (3) vacant and one (1) was not drawing salary for a long time.

D. Gagnon: We have 82 miles of road to patrol in Town. The west side is still not patrolled as it should.

Chief Agrafiotis: At full staff, we would have three (3) officers and a sergeant with 29. 28 gives us a shortage on midnights. The plan with the 29 officers was that all shifts would have four (4) patrol officers and a patrol sergeant. Detectives cover 16 hours a day.

D. Gagnon: That is minimum not counting someone calling in sick or vacation time. Then you use overtime.

C. Soucie calculated \$85,000 for the cost of an officer including wage and benefits.

JR Ouellette: In Dispatch, you have seven (7) authorized positions. You have one person on except for two (2) in the day with a supervisor.

Chief Agrafiotis: You need five (5) bodies including covering sick and vacation.

JR Ouellette: The overtime is for holidays and sick. I understand that you pay someone overtime so you don't need seven (7).

Chief Agrafiotis: You need seven (7) because of the training and the monitoring. This is a single person dispatching. We have six (6) out of the seven (7) position filled. That is down from nine when the fire shifted to Concord. The Fire had to go to another dispatch facility or we would have had to hire more dispatchers to cover the calls.

M. Miville: On the miscellaneous line, the chairman asked to move things from that line, was that done?

Chief Agrafiotis: No, we will do that next year.

M. Miville: What is a contingency? It is a miscellaneous within a miscellaneous.

J. Pieroni: You have storage space, what is that for?

Chief Agrafiotis: Filters for the gas masks, suits, etc.

J. Pieroni: Is there an area at the town hall that can store that?

C. Granfield: There is space now, but we don't know how long that will be available depending on the future plans.

D. Gagnon: We talked about building a structure but we have no land.

J. Pieroni: You need to consider moving stuff to the town hall if space is available. There was 3% wage increase for union and non-union. What was last year?

Chief Agrafiotis: We put in 3% for all officers and the sergeants got 1%.

JR Ouellette: Overtime, I have attended a number of Police Commission meetings where 4-6 officers were in attendance. Is that overtime?

Chief Agrafiotis: Salary officers do not count. There were times when the former SRO was present to give input to the discussion or the Commission.

JR Ouellette: If these officers attend a meeting, is there a minimum number of hours?

Chief Agrafiotis: There is a four-hour minimum if they are not working.

JR Ouellette: At the last School Board meeting, there were 3 officers...

D. Gagnon: Two (2) were salary and one (1) was a detective who had a concern about what was being handled.

M. Miville: Clarify the number of vehicles, which was reported incorrectly.

7 unmarked impala

11 marked cars (2 of which are K9)

3 specialty (2 vans and 1 pick up)

3 cars that will go on the road for this year's budget, which will replace 3 of the 11, marked cars.

J. Pieroni: And there is one vehicle in this budget?

Chief Agrafiotis: We could cut that car and with our maintenance program, we extend our cars to 120,000 to 140,000 miles. We could afford to skip a year. Next year, you will have cars with many miles and possibly maintenance issues.

J. Pieroni: I recommend not taking it out because then it would be out of the default budget.

M. Miville: If I was an officer or an administration staff, do I have access to Human Resource or must I go to the Commission to express those grievances. Do you condone a safe zone?

Chief Agrafiotis: They can talk to their supervisors or they can call LGC. If they want to go to LGC, they can, but most go through the chain of command.

Library

Wording change in the Warrant Article for the Children's librarian.

M. Farwell: There was a concern when we last met regarding the understanding for subsequent years. Christine Soucie and I worked with DRA to change the wording. We will go to Council next week for approval of the changes. We will then see you on the 18th of February at the Library and we want to make sure before we go to Council that there aren't any concerns.

J. Pieroni: This is a full time position that will cost \$31,000 the first year but will cost considerably more in the subsequent year.

N. Comai: Wouldn't it be easier to put the number in?

M. Farwell: We don't know how much this will cost because we don't know what the person will select for benefits. We have to assume a family plan. It won't be double. It seemed most clear to state it this way.

The consensus of the Budget Committee was that they are comfortable with the new wording in the warrant article.

Administration

C. Granfield: This department had personnel changes with the floater position funds shifting to a full time maintenance person with a net savings of \$5000.

There were modifications made by Council to reduce the volunteer appreciation night and Economic Development. This includes changes in the insurances and the health insurance, which went down. We addressed the retirement and the spiking costs. We had the company, which is currently contracted to maintain the computers, do an inventory of the equipment so that we can develop a replacement plan with proper licensing.

N. Comai asked for a copy of the inventory.

JR Ouellette: On the benefits, there was a department request from \$14,000 to \$73,000.

C. Soucie: The \$13,000 was the balance remaining after all the lines were appropriated to each department. That line should have been zero but it wasn't. There was \$13,000 left. All the benefits were moved from that line to all the departments. The request of \$73,000 was NH retirement had the 125-spiking plan. They were requiring the town to pick up addition retirement cost if the employee paid 125% of their wages. When we did that, we had 2-3 police officers and a couple fire employees that could retire and there was potential cost to the town if that happened. All towns started to calculate and for many communities it was going to be a large number. Those towns lobbied and they will revisit and they will not issue bills based on that law so we reduced it down to the \$20,000. We could be hit but it isn't likely.

Assessing

No significant changes. There are two (2) staff and a contract assessor. Education increase was for the real estate appraiser who is going through certification.

Budget Committee

Building

Cost was added for the purchase of code books. Contracted services were for the fill in position for vacant positions when MRI came in.

Capital Leases

These are already leases that have payments.

Capital Purchases

The two (2) items were moved from the CIP plan and they were recommended and the Council decided rather than a warrant, they would be put it in the operating budget.

Cemetery

Slight reduction made by Council. They are coming to Council next week. The Cemetery Commission is a new group.

D. Dickson: The Cemetery Commissioners are coming to present to Council next week and we will be interested in their action plan. They need to develop a priority list and the citizens are concerned that they are in need of maintenance.

Conservation Committee

Is down slightly.

Debt Service

The Safety Center is until 2011-12 (3 payments)
Exit 10 is 4 more payments.

Emergency Management

That budget is down.

Family Services

There was discussion based on what we are seeing with the economy. Town Welfare is budgeted for \$150,000, but if it is overspent, we are obligated to pay. Funds were increased because the department asked to go full time, which was not approved, but the Council put the funds back in the budget but they didn't recommend making the position full time with benefits. The department can work if funds or time is required.

The first six (6) months expenditures are 78% spent as of January 1st for welfare. The whole department is at 65%.

\$107,000 spent as of January 1st.

Finance

There was an increase in insurance costs due to a status change.

Tax Collector

No significant increase

Town Buildings

This is where we transferred money from the floater to the maintenance position.

The Council approved \$130,000 for a warrant article for all buildings.

J. Pieroni asked if the \$130,000 was sufficient?

C. Granfield: We may need additional funds.

C. Soucie: There is \$87,250 in the maintenance fund and we will add 130,000 of surplus fund plus the \$75,000.

Warrant Article

The Library Warrant Article for a Children's Librarian and the Fire Union Warrant Article will be going to Council next week.

The Non Union wages

\$64,972, which is a 2.5% merit pool.

D. Dickson: This gives the supervisor flexibility to give the appropriate percentage based on merit.

Computer \$10,000 capital reserve.

There is now \$15,000 in the fund after spending \$6000. which was spent on the Fire Department.

Chief Williams is looking to buy one next year.

C. Granfield: We are looking to see what is needed in all departments so we can have a plan.

J. Pieroni: Can you live without the \$10,000 for the computers or the air packs for the fire?

C. Soucie: The Council has already voted to have the warrants but the Budget Committee can chose Not to Recommend.

N. Comai: The CIP discussed the \$10,000 and we tried to reduce the \$20,000 for the air packs but the Planning Board and Council put them back.

J. Pieroni: It is the public perception of what was presented and how tight the budget is.

Assessing warrant

This is for the town's reassessment. There are very little funds in the account.

The last assessment cost \$160,000. We need to do this every five (5) years, which means you need to put a minimum of \$40,000 aside each year.

D. Argo asked for the cost of a dispatcher like the cost that was provided for the officer.

Default Budget

The difference between the default and the Council budget is \$176,000 or 1.22% increase.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lee Ann Moynihan