

North Hampton Budget Committee
MINUTES
November 4, 2004

Chairman Robbie Robinson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Present: Mary Pat Dolan, Paul Fitzgibbons, Don Gould, Henry Marsh,
Larry Miller, Robbie Robinson, Peter Simmons, Sue Spencer

Absent: Terry Conklin

1. Review minutes 10-14-04

Motion by Don Gould to accept the minutes as written, seconded by Mary Pat Dolan. Passed 8-0.

2. Review proposed Fire Dept. budget for FY 2005-06

Fire Chief Tom Lambert presented the proposed Fire/Rescue Dept. budget with explanations of each account; Town Administrator Mike Pardue and Administrative Assistant Jan Facella were also present.

The dept. has 14 full-time personnel and 10 pay-per-call fire fighter positions, though currently there are only 5 callmen. Callmen are paid \$10 per hour and do not receive benefits. Salaries are in the third year of a five-year contract negotiated between the selectmen and the union and approved in town meeting.

The new ambulance approved last year will be in service in a week, Chief Lambert said.

Three of the 4 fire fighter positions authorized last year through a citizen-petitioned warrant article have been filled, with the fourth position scheduled for an interview. Salary line item increase of 6.5% rather than scheduled 5% from this FY to next fiscal year, can be attributed to new personnel, said Don Gould, selectmen rep to the committee. Chief Lambert said the shift from 12-month probation to the "first step" in salary for 4 fire fighters accounts for that.

For the record, Peter Simmons said he would ask questions but not vote on the Fire Dept. budget because of a family connection to Chief Lambert.

The budget committee would like FD salary comparisons with surrounding towns of comparable size, staffing and "calls" to help justify costs to voters. Chief Lambert said no other town of North Hampton's population has the size Fire Dept. we do, but he said that level of service was expected here. Staff is determined by tracking day-to-day calls for service, which have steadily increased.

Mike Pardue said comparisons would be more meaningful knowing what year of the contract other towns are in; he also noted that contractual agreements are not negotiable line items.

The overtime account pays time-and-a-half for the 14 salaried personnel with the goal of never less than 3 on duty and sometimes as high as 5. There was question as to why the proposed overtime budget increased, even with 4 new fire fighters. It was noted that the call men budget was reduced, and costs and services have increased.

(Contracted) health care costs are not yet finalized, but a 15% increase is projected. Costs are a 90/10 split with employees. New Hampshire Municipal is the carrier, with dental by Northeast Delta.

The holiday account line item includes 10 paid holidays for 12 non-contractual personnel. Telephone account is down as the town changed plans and gained hours. The utilities account remains the same; the town has locked in at \$1.379 per gallon with Lamprey Bros. for 7,000 gallons of fuel oil. Costs for employee physicals are down in the proposed budget because more costly entry level physicals for new fire fighters will be complete. The town pays for these physicals and retains copies of records for 30 years after employment ends.

Several accounts, like 430- Equipment Maintenance, appear underexpended for the current year only because items are paid out semiannually rather than quarterly. Acct. 432 was formerly called Fire Alarm but because that system will shut down shortly it has been designated Info Tech and pays for computers, etc. Acct. 740 is up to pay for new equipment, a command center in the back of the Explorer.

Billing for ambulance use is handled by Comstar, which keeps 7% of fees. The collection policy is "soft" and hardship applications are never denied. Cost per ride is generally around \$600. The collection rate is around 70%. If the rides were free, the Chief estimated the town would lose revenue of \$120,000-\$150,000 per year. The ambulance is part of the Fire Dept. rather than privately contracted for quality of service, cross-staffing, and quicker response time.

Larry Miller said he felt the FD budget was realistic and asked Chief Lambert if someone challenged the budget at the deliberative session, would he say, "This is what I need to run my department?" The Chief agreed.

After the budget review, Don Gould noted that selectmen are discussing placing a warrant article on the March ballot asking for a return to "Open town meeting" rather than the SB2 format that has been in place for approximately 7 years. The committee discussed the pros and cons without a definitive recommendation for or against the change.

Motion to adjourn by Paul Fitzgibbons, seconded by Larry Miller.
Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Kane
Recording Secretary

(Minutes were approved by the budget committee 11/10/04.)