

Minutes
STOW FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 23, 2010
7:30 PM
Town Building
Approved

Charlie Kern, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Present were: David Walrath, Vice Chairman, Gary Bernklow, James Salvie, and Christopher Sarno

Police Chief Trefry and Rachel Belanger arrived at 7:33 p.m. and presented the police department budget. The police budget is a “rollover” budget from last year, incorporating a 2% raise (plus step increases) for staff. The budget includes the purchase of four more radios in the equipment purchase line item for \$1,000 each. Capital items this year are comprised of only a new cruiser this year for \$33,000. However, the chief had proposed a “non-recurring” expenditure of \$8,000 to replace the motor in the boat used to patrol Lake Boon, which is not meant for slow patrolling and “gunks up” on a regular basis. He has put this request off for a year at the Town Administrator’s request.

Chief McLaughlin arrived at 7:40 p.m.

Highway Superintendent Mike Clayton joined the meeting at 7:50 p.m. The most significant items in the Highway budget are in its capital budget. Mike proposes a total roof replacement, to correct leaking and ice dams, for \$54,000. Also, he proposes the replacement of a dump truck/sander for \$80,000. There is some possibility of using the chassis from the fire dept tanker that was replaced last year. Both items are before the capital planning committee. In terms of more long range trends, Mike noted that snow and ice removal will continue to go up due to the increased cost for materials as well as the fact that we keep accepting more public roads every year.

Chief McLaughlin reviewed the fire department budget with the Committee. The most notable change is an increase in outside services fees due to our retention of a new ALS service and billing company. The chief has taken this step as part of a consortium of area fire/emergency departments. Our ALS billing rate will increase from approximately “Medicare plus 30%” to more like “Medicare plus 200%”. Medicare ambulance reimbursement rates are very low. As always, residents who claim financial hardship will generally be granted a waiver. This will substantially increase ambulance fees to the General Fund but, since fees are determined as a percentage of billing (currently 7%), it will also increase the fees, which are carried on the fire department expense budget.

The Fire Department also has a request for a new chief’s vehicle. The chief is hoping to upgrade from a pick-up truck to something like a Ford Explorer, which will make it easier to carry the equipment he is required to carry. The Fire department is also requesting \$39,000 as Stow’s share of a federal grant for

equipment necessary to upgrade to a better emergency services frequency. This would include police equipment as well. The total of the grant would be \$390,000 and Stow would be required to contribute 10%. The department has applied for this grant as part of a regional solution, and the \$39,000 will only be spent if we receive the grant. If we do not receive the grant the department will try to accomplish the same goal over a longer period of time.

There was a general discussion about how the demographics of the town have changed and put more demand on emergency services. There are a lot more ambulance calls than there were just a few years ago. This increases staffing demands on a department that has been at the same size for a long time. There was also a discussion about how our reimbursement for call firefighters has not kept up with neighboring communities, particularly since we "guarantee" only one hour per call, as opposed to others that guarantee two or three.

More long range, the fire department has put \$6 million about five years out on the long range capital plan maintained by Capital Planning for new fire station. The chief has an architect doing a pro bono review of whether Pompositicut would be appropriate, and is hoping that grants can defer some of the projected cost.

The minutes of the meeting of February 2, 2010 were reviewed. On a motion to approve the minutes, made by Jim Salvie and seconded by Chris Sarno, the vote was unanimous.

Charlie noted that the Selectmen's joint board meeting is next Tuesday, March 2, 2010.

Having no further business, on a motion by David Walrath, seconded by Gary Bernklow, the meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

James Salvie

Minutes were reviewed for January 19
Salvie moved to accept the minutes as submitted, Walrath seconded.
Motion is approved unanimously (Walrath, Kern, Sarno, Salvie)

The Town Accountant requested that the Finance Committee approve deficit spending

Motion to approve deficit spending for Snow and Ice
Moved: Sarno, second: Walrath
Motion is approved unanimous (Walrath, Kern, Sarno, Salvie)

There is a discussion of the Fincon town report, with Chris leading the discussion.
There was some confusion about the current amount in the Stabilization Fund balance; Chris will check back with the town treasurer.

Gary Bernklow arrives 8:05

Motion to accept the report as amended, and to submit to the town
Salvie moves, Walrath seconds
Passes unanimously (Kern, Walrath, Sarno, Salvie, Bernklow)

Liason reports:

Minuteman (by Sarno)
Some (three) towns are unhappy with Minuteman.
Chris notes that Alice Deluca, Stow's Minuteman School Committee Rep, is highly respected by other committee members.
There is some question whether some towns are subsidizing other towns in some areas, such as special ed costs. Minuteman has a high percentage of special ed students (and does an excellent job bringing most up to or nearly up to grade level).

Nashoba (Jim)
Thursday will be the Nashoba budget night. The rumour is that they are aiming for level assessment, with possibly a small increase.

Fire Department (Jim)
Jim has not checked on the overtime situation recently.
The fire department has not increased in many years, but call volume goes up.

Elementary School Building Committee (Gary)
The state Historical Commission has ruled that there is no adverse effect in removing the old stone building at Center School.
They are on schedule to go to bid in April, begin construction in June after school is closed, and open in 2012.
There was some discussion about bonding issues.
Pretty much all good news.

CPC (Dave)
Nothing new

Library (Ann)

Nothing new, there is a belief that the roof repairs will be around \$50,000.

Other issues:

There was some discussion about OWL access of budgets

Ann will be re-arranging the COA room, and asked about suggestions. There was some discussion.

Jim moves to ajourn, Gary seconds.

Motion passes unanimously