

Minutes
STOW FINANCE COMMITTEE
March 15, 2011
7:00 PM
Town Building
Approved

Call to Order

Chairman Gary Bernklow called the meeting to order at 7:05pm. Present were,
Members: Ann Deluty, Richard Connelly, Peter McManus and Christopher Sarno (7:30)
Associates: Richard Rollins, Bruce Walbridge, Eric Sears and Patricia Heron (7:40)
Secretary: Elizabeth Tobey
Guests: Mike McLaughlin and William Byron

Correspondence

- Notice of Rabies Clinic on April 7, 2011
- NRSO assessment

Meeting Minutes

After a review of the minutes Ann Deluty moved to approve February 22, 2011 minutes as Amended. Peter McManus seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously (Bernklow, McManus, Deluty and Connelly)

Reserve Fund Transfer Request

None at this time

Budget Reviews

Recreation

No show

Library

No show

Fire

Mike McLaughlin gave an overview of his budget explaining that it was level funded and he had turned in a second budget with the department's needs listed.

He explained that the call firefighter rates are much lower in Stow than in other communities, Per Diem especially. Stow call firefighter rates are \$3/hour lower than surrounding towns. The surrounding towns also pay time and a half on holidays. Some communities pay the call firefighters a four-hour minimum, whereas Stow does not..

FY 08-11 has been largely flat. FY 12 is still largely flat but he is asking for some options. The budget is so tight that he thinks he will have to come back for funds.

The town has been receiving a lot of money back from the recent disasters, which go into the general fund. The ambulance revenue is up and inspections are picking up again.

Would like some sort of incentive for Per Diem and Call Fire Fighters, such as a 2 hour minimum call pay. Acton recently hired 5 of our Call Fire Fighters full time and they can no longer help Stow.

Chris asked if he saw any issues with retaining Call Fire Fighters. Mike explained that for every Full Time Fire Fighter he needs 3 call Fire Fighters. He has applied for the SAFER Grant for a full time Fire Fighter for 2 years and the town has to commit that they will not lay them off in the 3rd year. He is looking for new funding options.

Chris commented that during the 2-year period he would have a savings because he would have other Fire Fighters on call. Mike explained that the minimum staffing is 2 Fire Fighters. He has done some cost analysis and he would save in overtime and holidays. Full-time Fire Fighter gets 10 paid holidays per year. If they are scheduled to work they get the holiday off. If they work then he has 10 holidays to put on comp-time.

Peter commented on the big jump in payroll from 2010. Mike explained that the Captain had knee surgery that was not in the line of duty. He continued to explain the vacation and holiday pay.

- He now encourages them to take their vacations. All are at maximum 4wks.
- Call volume keeps going up. There are two per diem at the station and one on-call officer at the station.
- Medical calls are difficult with two people; with a third person it's a big help.
- Has to be very thorough on reports for court hearings, they need clear information.
- If a fire fighter is hurt insurance picks up the payroll cost, but the spot has to be filled while he is out.
- When emergency call volume increases the overtime pay and the call Fire Fighters time increases also.

Rick Connelly stated that with the call volume going up, if the ambulance is out he has to call in more Fire Fighters to cover and it becomes overtime. Mike explained that it is feast or famine. Full-time Fire Fighters are gone for hours to the hospital with transport. The hospital rules have changed. The full-time Fire Fighter has to get the hospital run report.

Hospital Protocol is:

- Trauma to trauma hospital
- Cardiac to Cardiac hospital

Peter asked if hiring a full-time Fire Fighter would cut the overtime. Mike explained that he could probably save \$18-20k in overtime, with two full-time Fire Fighters \$110k approximate not including benefits. He could hire a younger full-time Fire Fighter not at max pay and benefits at \$10-20k. The new folks are coming in at \$30k.

Ann asked if it would affect homeowners insurance if we had more coverage. Mike commented that the insurance rates for the town are a split class 9/10. Stow has done a lot to correct this,

- Installed cisterns
- Truck fleet is better
- New equipment
- State of the art dispatch center

He expects a \$300 savings for taxpayers in Stow when it is re-evaluated

Peter asked if the SAFER Grant is based on a three-year cycle. Mike explained that the Grant pay the first two years and the town promises to keep the Fire Fighter on for a third year. If they don't all monies have to be returned to the grant issuer.

Gary commented that all fees he collects go back into the general fund. Mike explained that they have fees for – Alarm, Still, Medical, Carbon monoxides and if the Engine goes out.

Needs:

- Call Fire Fighter – one maybe 2-4 on a busy day
- Strike Box –need as many as we can get
- If there is more than enough help the Call Fire Fighter will go home

Rick asked if a Fire Fighter leaves how long is it to replace him. Mike stated that he tries to fill from within.

Chris asked if the full time Fire Fighter salaries are competitive. Mike commented that it basically is. Gary commented that Bill Wrigley had done salary reviews several years ago.

It was asked if there were any long-term Capital projects. Mike stated he would be putting the Fire Station on the Capital budget in FY2013. He then stated that he has been very lucky with grants.

Gary asked about the water problem and Mike explained that he met with the school project manager. They are putting a tap on the water main and will run the line down to the Fire Dept.

Mike exited at 8:50pm

Liaison Reports

CPC- Peter the following:

- Stow Community Housing Corp ("SCHC") appeared at the latest CPC meeting and stated they have received some seed funding for the Plantation expansion
- They have responded to the abutters suit

- They are a year from funding for Plantation

In the ZBA approval it states they are selling one house at market rate. There is a question of whether they got approval at Town Meeting to do so. Gary stated that the bottom line is they don't think they need a new warrant article to sell the house. If they need to come back to Town Meeting they will.

ESBC – Gary explained they are largely on track and on budget, but are approximately 21 days behind. They spent an additional \$120k out of the contingency on small errors by the architect and some unforeseen site work.

They are putting in a beam signed by the students from Pompositicutt and Center school. It will be coated and placed in the building. The next meeting is April 4, 2011

Gary met with the school project manager; he is putting a tap on the water main and will run a line down to the Fire Department.

Other Business

Fire - It was discussed between members to find a way that the Fire Department could keep the money they receive to stay with the Fire Department, rather than going back to the General Fund.

Warrant Report – Gary and Chris will write the Warrant Report.

Public Hearing – Date was changed to April 7, 2011 due to time constraints for the Warrant printing.

Peter McManus moved to adjourn the meeting. Christopher Sarno seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (Bernklow, Deluty, Sarno, Connelly and McManus).

Future meetings:

March 22, 2011

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth A. Tobey,
Secretary