

Members Present: John E. Arnold, Chair, Brigitte Casemyr, Peter Allen, Bill Linnane, Jo Lown (7:10), Ian Johnson (7:30), Ed Behn, Jim Tepper, Kathy Rosenblum Senie. Absent: None.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Arnold called the meeting to order in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

AFC Preparations for Annual Town Meeting budget and article reviews

Departmental budget discussion

Building Department

Tin Htway, Building Commissioner, appeared before the Committee to present this budget and related warrant articles. Mr. Htway became Westborough's new Building Commissioner in December 2010. His budget has an increase of \$3,200 above the Town Manager's recommendation, for a total of \$39,413. This increase is to be used for Disaster Assessment Kits (\$600), a Plan Permit & Inspection Approval Process (\$1,600), and the expansion of the Building Department Library (\$1,000). Mr. Htway explained that this would be a one-time increase to Expenses, and is part of his effort to develop a more efficient process in his department. Ms. Lown noted that one-time requests are normally handled through warrant articles. Mr. Arnold encouraged Mr. Htway to look into perhaps broadening one of the articles the Building Department is already bringing to Town Meeting to include his requests.

Related draft warrant articles (8E, 16, 17)

Article 8E. Permit Tracking Software, \$40,000.

Mr. Htway explained that this document managing system would keep track of permits, and enable the public (homeowners and builders) to apply and pay for building permits online. There is a yearly subscription in addition to the initial expense of \$40,000. Mr. Arnold asked Mr. Htway to have the annual renewal amount available for Town Meeting. Mr. Htway noted that the majority of towns around Westborough already have such a system. Mr. Htway is currently working with Town Manager Jim Malloy to find ways of generating additional revenue, such as charging fees for Site Plan Reviews (currently offered for free), which would help defray the cost of such a system.

There was some discussion as to how the department could offset the expense of this software. Mr. Arnold noted that historically the Building Department has not been required to budget according to expected revenues, being a legally required department providing a service to the town. Ms. Lown added that all fees go into the General Fund, not back to the department, so there is no direct offset.

Mr. Htway noted that this software is flexible enough to serve at least four other departments (such as Fire, Health, and Planning). Some of the software packages which could be used by other departments are included in this initial investment, while others would involve extra costs. Ms. Casemyr noted that the state is looking for software to invest in, and wondered if this request could perhaps be postponed and handled through a state initiative, especially as the initial figure does not cover all the software the department would like to have.

Article 16. Zoning Article Amendment, Sign Bylaws. Mr. Htway explained that the process for requesting commercial building signage is quite lengthy. This article would make the process more

business-friendly, allow signage which can be seen more easily, and hopefully attract more businesses to Westborough. This article applies to building signage only, not signs on the ground.

Mr. Arnold noted that the Planning Board typically holds a hearing regarding zoning changes, and added that Town Meeting cannot act prior to a hearing by the Planning Board. The Committee would like to see a map of the lots which will be affected by this change. Mr. Htway noted that this amendment brings Westborough more in line with neighboring communities.

Article 17. Zoning Bylaws Amendment. Mr. Arnold explained that the term “Building Inspector” is being amended to “Building Commissioner,” to bring the bylaw in line with the Town Charter.

Fire/Ambulance Department

Nick Perron, Fire Chief, appeared before the Committee to present this budget and related warrant articles. Chief Perron noted that this budget has an increase of \$26,401 over last year, \$21,000 of which is Wages (due to step increases for 35 staff members). Expenses are up by \$5,150, reflecting the cost of maintaining an aging facility. Chief Perron added that the department is in the process of contract negotiations which should conclude in the next few weeks, and will result in a further budget increase.

Chief Perron explained that the National Fire Protection Association’s General Operating Practices recommend 48 full-time firefighters for a town Westborough’s size—we have 35. The ideal would be 8 per shift; his department makes it work with 6. The big issue is multiple calls, of which they have 3-4,000 a year, which use up all available staff. He noted the excellent mutual aid system Westborough has with the surrounding communities of Northborough, Southborough, Shrewsbury, Grafton, and Marlborough.

There was some discussion of the free service the Fire Department provides properly installing children’s car seats. The department handles 400 of these installations per year but Chief Perron explained that this service is not a cost factor. Regarding the CSX project, Chief Perron is working with Transflo CSX and feels it is a fairly safe project. He expects that CSX will pay for the project, and added that they have been very cooperative. In answer to a question about grants, Chief Perron explained that the department had received \$150,000 in grant money to replace all its turnout gear. Federal grant money was also used to replace the Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus, an expense of \$140,000 which was on the capital plan. Chief Perron added that grant money is drying up a bit now. There is also a trust which provides money for out-of-the-ordinary expenses, which is controlled by the Fire Chief, Town Manager Jim Malloy, Town Attorney Greg Franks, and Town Accountant Leah Talbot. A state-mandated computer for the ambulance service was purchased with trust funds.

Related draft warrant articles (8A, 8B, 8C)

Article 8A. Defibrillator monitor (1). Chief Perron explained that the department has 3 of these monitors, which are used by medics to monitor patients, and also transfer data to physicians at UMass. All three need to be replaced: one last year, one this year, one next year. This is on the capital plan.

Article 8B: Thermal Imaging Cameras, \$40,000 (2). Chief Perron explained that the first-generation camera presently used by the department is outdated and unwieldy. A replacement is needed, and the new cameras are much higher in quality, and much lighter. These cameras ensure firefighter safety, locating victims in smoke-filled rooms and dangerous hot spots in burning buildings. The old units will be kept for backup.

Article 8C: 4-Wheel Drive Vehicle purchase \$40,000. Chief Perron explained that this multi-use vehicle was needed to pull the department's two trailers, a hazmat trailer weighing 10,000 lbs., and a dive trailer. The old vehicle is a 12-year-old Chevy 1500, purchased in 1999 for \$29,896.

There was some discussion of the eventual cost of replacing any of the town's fire trucks. Chief Perron explained that the cost of these trucks had gone up considerably, partly due to Federal emission standards. To replace any fire engine would cost between \$4-500,000; a ladder truck would be close to \$1 million. Chief Perron added that the department had also been impacted by increased inspection fees.

Review of budgets for which no presentation to AFC may be needed:

Moderator. Salaries/Wages (S/W) \$250, stipend. No questions.

Accountant. S/W \$139,884, Expenses \$545. No questions.

Assessors. S/W \$230,513, Expenses \$14,899. No questions.

Legal. S/W \$125,072, Expenses \$48,700. Ms. Casemyr wondered why the expenses had increased. Mr. Arnold noted he would ask for detail on the difference.

Personnel Board. S/W \$3,691, Expenses \$23,800. There was some discussion of the entry for Fire Department Personnel Educational Expenses, which also appears in the Fire Department budget. Mr. Arnold explained that tuition reimbursement is handled by the Personnel Board.

Town Clerk. S/W \$187,598, Expenses \$4,250. Mr. Arnold noted he had not received the Budget Background Information sheet. Mr. Behn to follow up. Ms. Lown noted the reduction in office supplies. Elections & Registration. S/W \$13,375, Expenses \$17,800. Mr. Arnold noted that the reduction is due to an off-cycle with fewer elections.

Planning Board. S/W \$206,881, Expenses \$5,302. Mr. Arnold noted that this department will be coming before the Committee for warrant article reviews.

Zoning Board of Appeals. S/W \$12,304, Expenses \$1,540. Mr. Arnold had not received their Budget Background Information sheet.

Veterans Services. S/W \$16,837, Expenses \$55,060. No questions.

Trustees of Soldiers Memorials. Expenses \$2,800. Ms. Lown noted the possibility of needing funds for Minuteman Park.

Recreation. S/W \$193,663, no Expenses. Mr. Arnold explained that receipts go into a revolving fund; this is a self-sustaining program.

Historical Commission. S/W \$18,581, Expenses \$5,725. Ms. Casemyr would like more information on why more services could not be handled online, and the 15 hrs/week reduced. Mr. Behn to follow up.

Country Club Operating Committee. S/W \$7,382 (for part-time administrative assistant), Expenses \$445,424. Mr. Arnold noted this is slightly lower than last year. Mr. Tepper to verify whether Mr. Blois wants to present to the Committee.

Warrant article discussions and planning for meetings with proponents

Mr. Arnold noted that a number of articles will be dealt with in one evening when Town Manager Jim Malloy meets with the Committee. The DPW liaison should see if they are ready to present their articles. Ms. Lown felt the recurring articles should be discussed. Mr. Johnson noted that Leah Talbot should be asked which revolving funds require re-authorization.

Review of upcoming meeting schedule

Discussions:

Funding sources (Free Cash, Raise/Appropriate, Borrow)

Ms. Lown reviewed the spreadsheet received from the Town Accountant, Leah Talbot, along with spreadsheets she and Mr. Behn had extrapolated from it. She noted from the spreadsheets that contingencies had built up in several budgets over the years. The extra money at the end of the year became free cash, and was used to cover a portion of the operating budgets the next year. Now that Town Manager Jim Malloy was not using free cash to cover the operating budgets, Ms. Lown felt the budgets

generating this free cash should be brought in line as well, especially in light of the increase in property taxes. Mr. Johnson added that the Town Manager's new policy is in line with the Department of Revenue's recommendation that the operating budget be supported by operating revenues, free cash used for capital expenditures, with the remainder to go into a stabilization fund. He felt it was never the town's stated intention to over-budget to generate free cash to balance the budget. Mr. Tepper noted that it did however seem to become a behavior.

There was some discussion about the contingencies built into the insurance budget. Mr. Johnson noted that the downturn in the economy a few years ago led to concerns of an influx from jobless spouses, which led to an increase in the budget request. Ms. Lown added that in 2008, the health insurance line item increased significantly. It appears the budget was over-estimated, and not fully re-adjusted. Ms. Lown stated that if the town no longer needs to use free cash for the operating budgets then the budgets that were generating that free cash can be reduced as well. Mr. Johnson noted that, using the extrapolated numbers from Mr. Behn's spreadsheet, the \$1 million excess in the budget had been brought down to \$400,000, and pointed out that the enrollment period conflict had been resolved.

Mr. Linnane would like Town Manager Jim Malloy to speak to the cost of earthquake insurance for the treatment plant. Mr. Arnold reminded the Committee to gather their questions to ask Mr. Malloy when he appears to present his articles.

Town insurance expenses

Mr. Behn reviewed his breakdown using Assistant Town Manager Kristi William's spreadsheet. He noted that the Blue Cross health insurance options run from \$16-17,000, while the Fallon options run from \$9-11,000. He felt that the town should consider offering a middle-range option, which would result in savings for the town and employees/retirees. In addition, the town plan does not offer a "spouse plus one" option, only a "family" or "single" option. The retiree who has no dependents, only a spouse, is paying more than necessary, but has no other choice. Mr. Behn felt Jim Malloy should look into this opportunity for more savings. Ms. Casemyr noted that the Committee is not responsible for plan design, and added that state rules and mandates were making it harder for municipalities to manage their expenses.

Mr. Behn thanked Kristi Williams for her work on the spreadsheet. Mr. Arnold noted that the Committee's ideas could be written up for town meeting. Ms. Lown felt the spreadsheets should be provided to Mr. Malloy and the Board of Selectmen.

Upcoming meetings

Mr. Johnson noted that the warrant does not close until April 12th. Mr. Arnold felt that Monday's meeting could be cancelled, with Thursday's meeting scheduled for article proponents and preliminary budget votes. The Committee agreed by consensus to the cancellation of the Monday, March 28, meeting.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Ms. Casemyr distributed an updated School Committee information packet. She and Ms. Rosenblum Senie had attended the recent School Committee meeting. The packet shows details for Special Ed., Transportation, and the Technology Department (which supports 4,000 users—students and staff, administrators and faculty). Ms. Casemyr noted that all state and federal funding for Special Ed., in the amount of \$405,000, is now going away, and would have to be absorbed into the budget.

Mr. Arnold noted that Westborough and Natick are hosting public officials from Pakistan who are learning about America and Town policies. The officials have been invited to come to the Committee meeting on April 14th to learn about the Advisory Finance Committee's role in Town Government.

Mr. Allen urged everyone to mark their calendars for Friday, July 1, 2011, for the town's Annual Block Party.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Mr. Johnson noted the Board of Selectmen meeting with 3 state representatives and state senator, and warned of cuts in local aid. Final numbers won't be known until June 30th. He added that legislators are in support of re-districting, which would give Westborough 1 representative rather than 3. He felt it was time for Westborough to elect its own state representative.

Adjournment

Ms. Lown moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m. Vote to adjourn was 9 in favor, with 9 being present.

Document List

"Why Do Fire Trucks Respond to Medical Calls?", distributed by Chief Perron.

Infrared information, prepared by Chief Perron.

Vehicle information, prepared by Chief Perron.

Budget Background Information sheet, Building Department.

Extended Version of Leah's Insurance Spreadsheet 2001 to 2011, prepared by Jo Lown.

Extended Version of Leah's Insurance Spreadsheet 2001 to 2011 (2), prepared by Jo Lown.

Extended Version of Leah's Insurance Spreadsheet 2001 to 2011, prepared by Jo Lown and Ed Behn.

Insurance Plan Spreadsheet, prepared by Kristi Williams.

Insurance Spreadsheet 2001 to 2011, prepared by Leah Talbot.

Snow & Ice update.

Draft Warrant of March 3, 2011.