

Members Present: Ed Behn, Chair, Gary Wells, John E. Arnold, Lisa Blazejewski, Jim Tepper, Sharon Kaiser, Kathy Rosenblum Senie, Hank Rauch. Absent: Peter Allen.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Behn called the meeting to order in Room 23 of the Forbes Building.

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Approval of Minutes

Meeting No. 16, January 23, 2014

Mr. Behn decided to wait on a vote from the Committee until all members had a chance to review the minutes.

Review of the Recreation Department's FY'15 budget:

The Committee welcomed retiring Recreation Director, Frank Desiata, and thanked him for his many years of service. Mr. Desiata reviewed the reduction to the Salaries & Wages line item for the Recreation Department. He said that their Administrative Assistant left last October and a new admin was hired at a lower rate, which is why there is a decrease. It was noted that the only costs the Town funds for the Recreation Department are the salaries for the immediate department personnel. Expenses are covered by the fees charged for programs offered in town. Revenue and expenses go through the Recreation Department's revolving fund and Mr. Desiata said that the balance fluctuates up and down. They take in revenue up front for some of their larger programs like the basketball program, ski program, and summer activities, but then they have to pay for referees, buses, fees at Mt. Wachusett, etc. Mr. Desiata was asked what the total was that they take in from programs and he guessed about \$350,000/year. He also mentioned that expenses come close to that figure. The Committee asked if anyone had been hired yet for Mr. Desiata's position. He said he didn't think so. He just turned in his retirement papers and his Assistant Director, Karen Desiata, will be turning her papers in next week. They will be in the process of hiring new staff. The Committee thanked Mr. Desiata again for giving the Town an excellent opportunity for activities – and for employment – for many teens their first job was working for the Recreation Department. Mr. Wells made a motion that the Committee give a round of applause for Frank and Karen Desiata and wished them well with their upcoming retirement.

Review of the Fire Department's FY'15 budget:

Chief Perron introduced Brian Roberts and Patrick Cullen from the Fire Department and Lt. Robert Fryer from the Police Department. They spoke to the Committee about Article 9 C regarding the Public Safety Radio Tower for use by both the Fire and Police Departments. Mr. Roberts informed the Committee that currently there are two transmission towers in Westborough. One tower is located on Fay Mountain and the other one is located on Newton Hill. Mr. Roberts explained that most communities have two transmission towers due to dead spots. The Fay Mountain tower has better reception regionally but doesn't get a signal at the high school due to a topography issue with O'Neil Drive overshadowing it. The Fay Mountain tower also has trouble with reception in the center of town, as well as some blind spots due to a structure with cell phone equipment located next to the tower and how the steel lines up near the antennas. The Newton Hill tower provides a signal at the high school and also gets better reception in the downtown area. When the Fire Department had a study done in 2002, the firm that was hired determined that where Bay State Gas is located on Newton Hill was the best site for a tower. The Police Department uses the Newton Hill tower as their primary tower since they are more centrally located in town, but both the Police and Fire alternate back and forth using the strongest tower as a resource. If the Newton Hill tower was lost and there was an emergency at the high school, Mr. Roberts said that both the Police and Fire would be at a disadvantage. Currently, the Newton Hill antenna is attached to the top of a building that is for sale and they've been running into trouble with access. Bay State Gas used to be in the building but have since vacated. Initially the relationship with Bay State Gas worked well. The Town had a handshake agreement with Bay State since the early 80's to locate their antenna on top of their building. Now that Bay State Gas

has left the building, they removed their phone system and shut off the heat/air conditioning and that caused a problem for the Town. With the building up for sale or lease, the Town doesn't know when it will be occupied or if the new tenant or owner would even want them there. Mr. Roberts pointed out that right now the Town doesn't have a legal right to be there and they hate to be at the mercy of someone else to keep a vital piece of public safety equipment. Mr. Roberts said it is difficult to wait and see what happens to that building. If they get a 911 call, they don't control that location and it is critical infrastructure. Mr. Behn asked if the town might have some liability with the Newton Hill tower located in a structure over which the town has no control. Mr. Roberts didn't know if the Town was liable should something happen due to a loss in radio communication. There was discussion about locating the tower on the top of another building. Mr. Roberts mentioned that there are companies that do lease their building tops but none of which would be under the control of the Fire or Police Departments. Another option was to locate the tower on top of the water tank, however the Town would be limited with the number of antennas and there wouldn't be the capability of future growth, especially if the Town decided to get in to the business of renting or leasing space to generate revenue. By building the tower, there would be room for expansion as well as the ability to install additional equipment if another Town department needed it. There were also reservations due to damage to the tank. Chief Perron said he did speak with John Walden at the DPW and the Chief said Mr. Walden would prefer to see a separate tower built since they just repainted and relined the water tank two years ago. Mr. Roberts mentioned that an engineering study would need to be done and added to the projected cost for installing the antenna on the water tank. The cost for a new tower is approximately \$260,000 versus \$215,000 for installing the antenna on the water tank. Chief Perron said he would get the Committee an idea of the cost of the engineering study for comparison. Mr. Roberts explained to the Committee that they need a tower that meets the standards for public safety towers and the ice and wind loading requirements. They also need a building to protect the equipment, withstand the weather, and keep mice and snakes out. He will use the Town's purchasing power to get the best possible price and will reach out to other vendors to create a competitive bidding process. Mr. Roberts forewarned the Committee that in 10 years the broadband system may be different and the Town might need to purchase new transmitters, but will still be able to use the new tower, building, and generator. Chief Perron wanted to recognize all of the hard work Mr. Roberts and Mr. Cullen have provided on this project and mentioned that they have saved the Town a lot of money with their expertise.

Chief Perron discussed Article 10 and his capital expenditure request to replace a 2002 Ford Explorer. He explained that this vehicle currently has 125,000 miles on it. Chief Perron pointed out that this is the oldest emergency vehicle still in operation after 13 years – and unreliable. At the beginning of January, the Explorer needed to be towed in off of Route 495 when the transmission went. The Chief said that the Kelley Blue Book value is approximately \$2,300. About three years ago the Explorer had a complete body job so it looks good and has been well maintained, but still old and unreliable. Since the vehicle can't be traded in if purchasing off of the state bid, the Chief suggested giving the vehicle to the DPW for an inspector, as it would be fine in that role but not as an emergency vehicle that needed to respond to a call. The Chief had a firm bid for \$36,000, plus installing equipment for a new vehicle, bringing the total cost to around \$40,000.

The Chief reported on Article 9 D requesting \$20,000 to replace 18 self contained breathing apparatus bottles. He explained that the tanks are a firefighter's lifeline in any hazardous atmosphere. The State requires that these tanks be retired after 15 yrs. The Chief said that the next set of tanks (approximately 17) will need to be replaced in 2021. The Chief informed the Committee that the old tanks are turned in and destroyed.

Chief Perron also spoke about Article 9 E and the request for a stabilization fund for a new fire truck. He explained this was a suggestion from the Capital Planning Committee. They wanted a mechanism to put away money toward the purchase of two new trucks that need to be replaced totaling about a million dollars. They are putting away \$55,000/year toward the costs. One truck is scheduled to be replaced in FY'17 for about \$550,000 and another truck in FY'18 costing approximately \$500,000. Committee members noted that putting away \$55,000/year isn't enough when looking at an expenditure of over a million dollars within the next few years. Chief Perron also said that the ambulance is scheduled to be replaced next year but they'll have some money to offset that cost from the ambulance fund. AFC Committee members thought it would be helpful to invite Town Manager, Jim Malloy, in to explain the plan going forward for putting money away toward capital expenses. Mr. Behn said he would follow up with Mr. Malloy. Chief Perron pointed out that normally fire trucks have an expected life of around 15 years, but in Westborough a fire truck

can last 20-25 years since Westborough does a good job of maintaining their trucks and they tend to have fewer calls than larger cities such as Boston.

Chief Perron then discussed the Salaries & Wages line item for the Fire Department-Ambulance budget. Mr. Tepper mentioned he had met with Chief Perron to review the budget and the Chief said there were no wage increases but contract negotiations are going on now. Chief Perron thinks the result should be flat. The Chief mentioned that the budget is \$22,237 less than last year since four senior people retired and replacements are at a lower pay scale. The Chief also pointed out that expenses decreased by \$8,234 since they are expecting to move in to the new building and won't be spending as much money on maintenance.

Discussion then turned to EMS training and education since EMT's and Paramedics have to go through the recertification process every two years and need to get credits and hours in. Chief Perron explained that they can attend all of the training at once or spread out over the course of two years. If they attend training off duty then they get paid time and a half since the Fire Department doesn't have the availability to send someone while on duty. The Committee wondered if the training could be more staggered so there isn't a large spike in expenses. The Chief said that the EMT's and Paramedics can only go when courses are offered and these courses are not always offered on a regular basis. Chief Perron also pointed out that there is constant training going on in the Fire Department that may not count toward the recertification process. For example, they have a medical director that comes in four times a year from UMass and this training doesn't count toward the recertification process. The Chief was asked if any line items are expected to change once they get in to the new building. He said he thinks the electrical cost will decrease and fuel/gas as well since Town Manager, Jim Malloy, is looking at solar energy and the new station should be more energy efficient.

The Chief also spoke about the change in regulations regarding payment for ambulance trips. The Chief explained that when the paramedic program was implemented, the cost of each trip was covered at the accepted rate and they were paid in full. Then regulations changed with the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid. The Department had to take the accepted rate through Medicare/Medicaid, which is a much lower rate and doesn't cover the actual cost of the ambulance. Since there is a heavy elderly population in Westborough, the revenue generated isn't what it once was. The Chief said the Fire Department isn't in the business to make money but they try to recoup their expenses. As of December 31, 2013, the Chief said the department had brought in approximately \$622,286/year for ambulance trips, but it should be around \$950,000/year. The Chief said the Department's collection rate is around 79.5% for people with insurance, though they are still collecting less through Medicare and Medicaid. The Chief pointed out that the collection rate for people with no insurance was approximately 1.56%. The Chief said that the policy in Westborough has always been that they'll provide the service whether they get paid or not. Committee members were concerned that people who chose not to pay for health insurance were using the services and saying they couldn't pay versus those people with actual financial hardships. The Chief said they didn't want to put the strong arm on someone in an emergency situation. It was mentioned that there needs to be a better understanding of the numbers regarding the ambulance calls. Chief Perron said he would forward additional information to Mr. Tepper. The Chief also hopes that contract negotiations will be completed by the Town Meeting.

Review of the Warrant:

Mr. Behn informed the Committee that he had followed up with Town Planner, Jim Robbins, regarding Articles 20 and 21. There will be a public hearing on 2/18/14 at 7:00 p.m. in Room 23 at the Forbes Building. He suggested that AFC members try to attend the Planning Board public hearing where more details should be discussed. Mr. Behn said the Committee can decide at their meeting on 2/20 whether the Planning Board should come in.

Mr. Wells mentioned that he had heard back from Maria-Elaina Riggieri, Business Administrator at the DPW, regarding Article 12. Mr. Wells had inquired as to why the DPW was looking for \$120,000 for a project that in FY'13 they had asked for \$70,000 for the same reason (Article 8F). Ms. Riggieri explained that the \$70,000 had recently been encumbered with a purchase order to an engineering firm. Mr. Wells wondered why it took 2 years to get an engineering firm on board and why they are looking for an additional \$120,000. He will ask Mr. Walden when he meets with the AFC on 2/20.

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Mr. Behn mentioned that he believes the warrant closes at the next Selectmen's meeting on 2/11/14. He is waiting to find out how they will deal with the net metering credits and whether there will be new budget sheets for the departments affected.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Behn asked AFC members to get back to him regarding their attendance at future meetings for voting purposes. He also mentioned that he is waiting for receipts from Town Accountant, Leah Talbot, and cherry sheets from Town Manager, Jim Malloy. Once he receives this information then he will run the R&R report.

Mr. Arnold mentioned the Charter Review Committee. He had intended to be the liaison but, if he is Town Moderator, he cannot. He wanted to encourage someone to take it on from the beginning so they are informed from the start.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

There were no comments or concerns from Committee members.

Adjournment

Mr. Wells made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:34 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 8 in favor, with 8 being present.

Document List

Westborough Public Safety Radio Sites
Town of Westborough Fire Department pamphlet

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Thomas
AFC Administrative Assistant