

FEBRUARY 12 2024
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 HULLY, MASS.

FINANCE COMMITTEE
 Minutes
 Zoom Number 894 1172 1322

Date: February 5, 2024

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Present: O'Connell, Cooper, Pratt, O'Connor, Wells, Kuphal

Absent: Cooney

Meeting called to order at 6:35 p.m.

Motioned by Cooper, seconded by Wells to accept the minutes of January 31, 2024 as written. Unanimous.

Jennifer Barrett, Finance Director and Karyn Clark, Acting Town Manager were present at the meeting.

Fire Department-Chief Steve Kosiba

Steve Kosiba went over the Core Responsibilities of the Fire Department.

Russell Wells: Please explain what the Fire Engineers do.

Steve Kosiba: I have a Deputy Chief and 3 Assistant Chiefs. They respond to the fires with me. If I can not be there, they take over. We are responsible for the personnel and equipment at the fires.

Steve Kosiba went over the Department Structure

Jen O'Connell: Is 44 firefighters normal for a town our size?

Steve Kosiba: We used to have 65. A number of our firefighters have retired. We would like to have more. They have to go through the training academy in Stowe. This is an 18 week training. It is on Tuesday and Thursday evenings plus all day Saturday and sometimes Sunday.

Steve Kosiba went over the Fire Incidents through June 2023

Russell Wells: How often do you go to the Mall?

Steve Kosiba: It varies. Sometimes I get no calls and other times I might get called up there 2-3 times a day. We average about 4-5 calls per month.

Charles Cooper: Do we charge for multiple false alarm calls?

Steve Kosiba: After 3 false alarms, we can fine them.

Steve Kosiba went over the Fire Inspections and Permits through June 2023

Judith O'Connor: Are the permits for propane storage increasing?

Steve Kosiba: We have seen an increase in propane storage.

Russell Wells: Has the future of the old station been discussed?

Karyn Clark: We shored up the walls to make everything safe. The Board of Selectmen will have to decide what to do with it. They can vote to sell it, demo it or use it for another use. Nothing definitive has been done yet.

Steve Kosiba: We should be in this building sometime this month.

Steve Kosiba went over the Trends/Needs for Optimal Service

Steve Kosiba: We have had an increase in calls that we respond to. We don't just respond to fire calls. We have had to respond to assist the ambulance with some medical calls. We have started helping to block traffic on the Pike for the safety of everyone on the scene of the accident. We also have 2 engines that are about 2 years overdue on replacement.

Russell Wells: How long does it take to get a truck once it is ordered?

Steve Kosiba: It takes roughly 3 years to get a truck once we order it. We were told that if we were to order both trucks at the same time, we would save the Town about a million dollars. The trucks are running between \$¾-\$1Million.

Judith O'Connor: Where do the old fire engines go?

Steve Kosiba: They go to auction. There are some states that don't have the same constraints that we have.

Russell Wells: What happens if the price goes up while the vehicle is being built?

Steve Kosiba: Once we place the order, the price is locked in.

Kevin Kuphal: Do you have any idea what the trucks would go for at auction?

Steve Kosiba: It varies based on age and condition of the vehicle.

Fire Department Budget

Jen O'Connell: What is LOSAP?

Steve Kosiba: That is the firefighter's retirement account. This was just implemented a few years ago. The actual amount that the firefighter will get is based on their years of service. This cannot be collected until that person reaches the age of 65. They also must have at least 10 years of service.

Jen O'Connell: Where does this money actually go?

Jennifer Barrett: It goes to the company that provides the benefit. This only benefits the Fire Department alone. This is why it is in this budget. The company does an annual audit. We are budgeting more accurately in this account with 2 years of data on it.

Jennifer Barrett: I do not know if what we put in the utilities line will be enough. We have no history on this new building, so we will keep an eye on it.

Judith O'Connor: What happens when the solar panels at the Transfer Station get turned on? Who gets the money/credit from that?

Conor McCormack: Amaresco will send us money for the leasing of the land.

Judith O'Connor: How much will Millbury get?

Conor McCormack: That will vary. I am not sure what kind of agreement they have with National Grid.

Russell Wells: Does the money that the Town receives for the lease of the land have to go to the General Fund or can it be applied to individual accounts to defray the cost of electricity?

Jennifer Barrett: Lease payments have to go to the General Fund. That is something that I will be looking into.

Russell Wells: The Fire Equipment Maintenance is going up?

Steve Kosiba: That is due to the equipment being so old.

William Pratt: What is driving the Professional Services to go up?

Jennifer Barrett: It is general maintenance on the aging fleet.

Karyn Clark: Everything has gone up. The Chief is going to need new boots and turnout gear for his guys along with some tech items and pagers. There will most likely be a Warrant Article for some of this.

Jen O'Connell: Is there an opportunity for any grants to cover some of these items?

Steve Kosiba: I will apply for them, but grants are going down too. Most of our turnout gear is getting up in age. We have been trying to replace 4-5 each year. The boots were given to us by the Lions club. Those are only good for 10 years. Helmets are good for 10 years. We do not have a second set of gear, like other towns. They are washed after each call, provided we do not have a call right behind it.

Building Department-Julie VanArsdalen Director of Public Health

Karyn Clark: I have asked Julie to prepare for this meeting since she has been working closely with this department.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the Staffing of the Department

Julie VanArsdalen: The Building Commissioner/Zoning Enforcement Officer position is vacant. We have an Acting Building Inspector until the position is filled. We currently have 4 Electrical Inspectors and 4 Plumbing/Gas Inspectors. These are all on-call people. The Assistant Building Inspector can work up to 16 hours per week. Inspections are done after they finish at their regular day jobs. They are paid by inspection, not by the hour. There is a revolving account that takes care of the inspection fees and it in turn pays for the inspectors. The Building Inspector is paid through the budget.

Russell Wells: Who gives out the occupancy permits?

Julie VanArsdalen: The Building Commissioner.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the responsibilities of the Building Department and the metrics of those departments

Julie VanArsdalen: The numbers may be a little off. There may be more than what I have here. I am addressing the problem of inconsistent input of completed permits.

Charles Cooper: Does the Town pay for the tablets for the inspectors?

Julie VanArsdalen: Yes, they do.

Karyn Clark: As Julie indicated, we are working on some inconsistencies in the office.

Judy O'Connor: Does the Gas Inspector work closely with the Fire Department?

Julie VanArsdalen: The Fire Department does their own inspections for the gas tanks.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the Needs for Optimal Services

Charles Cooper: Is your plan to have all of the same tablets for the inspectors?

Julie VanArsdalen: Some of them are asking for smaller ones. It would be ideal to have all of them the same.

William Pratt: Have you given any thought about approaching Best Buy about something like this?

Karyn Clark: We will be looking into this. I can also speak to the new person in charge of the Mall to see if he has anything. He just donated a laptop to the Police Department.

Julie VanArsdalen: We would also like to request some supplies for the department. We would like the new code books and once we hire a new Building Commissioner, he/she will need some supplies.

Russell Wells: Is this already in the budget?

Karyn Clark: No, it is not. We can probably purchase some of these items out of this year's budget.

Charles Cooper: How often do the Code books come out?

Julie VanArsdalen: Whenever there have been changes.

Jennifer Barrett: We used to get the supplements. If we get the e-version, the changes get added. Some people like the hardcopy.

Julie VanArsdalen went over some of the upcoming projects for the Building Department

Department of Planning and Development-Conor McCormack, Director

Conor McCormack went over the Core Responsibilities for Planning and Conservation and the Staffing Pattern for both departments

Conor McCormack went over the Metrics for FY24 to date including ongoing and new grants

Conor McCormack: The By-laws need to be recodified. These by-laws are from 1957.

Jen O'Connell: Will changing the by-laws change the waivers that some of the contractors get?

Conor McCormack: Our goal is to remove it from the by-law and move it to a regulation that can be easier to control.

Discussion of the Rt 146 sewer extension.

Jen O'Connell: What is the ROI in putting this sewer line up Rt 146?

Conor McCormack: We are looking for additional grants and reaching out to other businesses to help defray the cost of the project.

Jen O'Connell: I just want you to be mindful of the cost of this and the ROI.

Karyn Clark: This is also part of the Master Plan.

Conor McCormack went over the Trends and Needs for Optimal Service

Conor McCormack: We are looking to hire a full time Assistant Town Planner. This position has been vacant since March 2022, when I took over the Town Planner position. We have had very few qualified candidates willing to work part time. We also would like to make some improvements to our technology.

Karyn Clark: We definitely want to move towards more on-line services.

Karyn Clark: From what I understand, the Public Hearing was posted, but it will be postponed to another date?

Jen O'Connell: We have always had our Public Hearing in March. We have had no one participate in our hearing. My feeling on this is that we haven't had the opportunity to have all of our budget hearings and would not be able to answer questions accurately if we have it too early. We also have it after you present the budget to the Board of Selectmen. We used to have a Public Hearing on the budget and one on the Warrant. I just do not feel that we are fully prepared to have a Public Hearing at this point.

Department of Public Health-Julie VanArsdalen, Director

Karyn Clark: I know that there were some concerns about why we now have a Public Health Director. Millbury was with Central Mass Regional Health. It was clear to me that Worcester didn't need to regionalize. I did a cost analysis to see if it was worth it for the Town to continue with this. The only constant I saw was Julie.

Karyn Clark and Julie VanArsdalen went over the 10 Essential Public Health Services along with the responsibilities of the Public Health and Board of Health.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the staffing of her department

Jen O'Connell: Is the Animal Inspector different from Animal Control?

Julie VanArsdalen: The Animal Inspector does barn inspections, quarantines etc. Animal Control does not do this.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the Roles and Responsibilities of the Board of Health and Public Health along with the Public Health Nurse, who is partnered with Sutton.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the needs and plans for optimal service

Julie VanArsdalen: I would like to request a Social Worker for 5-10 hours a month. There is a real need for this. I can help, and I do, but I feel that a Social Worker would be beneficial to the Town. I would like to create and lead an inter-departmental planning and enforcement team. I would like to get Survey Monkey for a community assessment survey. I think this will help the department focus on the needs of the community. I would like to develop a public health communications campaign, utilizing social media. I will be putting in a request through Region 2 PHEP for an additional laptop and software and also for some non budgeted equipment.

Julie VanArsdalen went over the permits issued in FY24 year to date.

Jen O'Connell: Our next meeting will be on Saturday, February 10, 2024 at 9:30 p.m. at the Town Hall in the Large Conference Room.

Motioned by Cooper, seconded by Pratt to adjourn at 9:47 p.m. Unanimous.

Jen O'Connell

Chris Cooper

W Pratt

Sam Welch

Julie O'Connell
MBM