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BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS COMMITTEE MINUTES

November 3, 2011

Chairman Don Brabant convened the Budget Recommendations Committee at 6:01pm in the Nowak Room of the Town Office. The members of the Committee and Board of Selectmen present are: Carol Aten, Mark Leighton, Bob Kelly, Corey Stevens, Harry Thayer, Don Woodward, Allen Corey, Dan Chartrand, Chairman Bobby Aldrich, Selectwoman Julie Gilman, Selectman Don Clement, Selectman Frank Ferraro, Finance Director Doreen Ravell, Staff Accountant Laura Hill and Town Manager Russell Dean.

Mr. Brabant said that so far the committee has made \$254,142 in changes to the budget and that the dialogue has been very good. He commended the committee and employees for being well prepared. Mr. Thayer, Mr. Brabant and Mr. Chartrand have worked on the Police and Fire subcommittee, and Mr. Thayer has distributed their subcommittee report.

Police Department

Police Administration

Chief Kane and Captain Fenerty appeared before the committee. Chief Kane stated that his department's budget is about 85% personnel driven, with the other 15% being changeable, with the possible exception of the gas budget. Chief Kane stated that the department has 39 employees. He reviewed the department mission statement, their vision statement and the department's goals. Looking to the future, Chief Kane hopes to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate with residents. He reports that the department fielded 18,236 calls for service last year and made 626 arrests. So far this year they have made 569 arrests. Chief Kane acknowledges that the subcommittee is recommending \$9,500 in cuts to his budget, and he will not argue with this. He will remove the request for a motorcycle in the capital budget. He also noted that the Captain's pay has been moved to the Administration budget which explains the large change in the full time salary lines, but there are decreases where the salaries were before. Another increase is that last year one of the Sergeant's positions was only funded for 6 months and this year it is funded for the full year.

Mr. Stevens asked about FICA for police and fire, noting that it is different from other departments. Ms. Ravell said that most of the employees in these departments are exempt from FICA, but not all of them. She has reviewed the budgets with department heads to ensure accuracy.

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend a Police Administration budget of \$706,049. Ms. Aten seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Police Staff

Mr. Chartrand moved to reduce 402-5000 to \$5,200. Mr. Thayer seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend a Staff total of \$556,979. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Police Patrol

Mr. Chartrand moved to reduce 403-1150 to \$43,007. Ms. Aten seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

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Mr. Chartrand moved to reduce 403-1410 to \$9,000. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Stevens asked why the investigations account was underspent. Chief Kane said that they had been fortunate not to need all of it yet this year, but that one case could use the entire budget, depending upon the case. He urged the committee to keep this item fully funded.

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend a total Patrol budget of \$1,794,240 after salary and benefit changes. Mr. Chartrand seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Animal Control

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend budget of \$1,250. Ms. Aten seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Communications

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend a total of \$434,196. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend a total Police budget of \$3,492,715. Mr. Chartrand seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Vehicles

Chief Kane is requesting 2 cruisers and 1 motorcycle in the vehicle requests. As stated earlier, he is withdrawing his request for a motorcycle at this time. Cruisers are cycled out of service at the police department and distributed to other departments as new cruisers are purchased each year. Chief Kane feels that steadily buying 2 cruisers per year is more effective than buying 4 or 5 vehicles every few years. Mr. Dean also noted that the town receives some revenue from the sale of used vehicles. Mr. Woodward asked about an idling policy for officers, and Chief Kane said that they try to be conscious of gas use, but if it is too cold or hot, he cannot ask the officers to turn off their vehicles. He says that officers put about 100,000 miles on a cruiser before it is cycled out of patrol service and then the detectives put another 25,000 miles on them before the vehicles are distributed to other departments.

Mr. Thayer moved to reduce 117-7420 to \$62,400. Mr. Chartrand seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Thayer notes a total decrease of \$45,773 from the proposed budget, not including the motorcycle. Mr. Brabant asks what other innovative ideas the department might have to save money. Chief Kane said they are looking into online reporting for residents, so that an officer does not have to be dispatched. Mr. Thayer asked about the prosecution contract that the police department has with the County Attorney's Office. Chief Kane said that the arrangement has saved money for his department in vacation costs and other employee related costs.

Fire Department

Mr. Thayer reviewed the subcommittee's findings. Chief Comeau, Assistant Chief Berkenbush, and Assistant Chief Wilking appeared on behalf of the department. Chief Comeau said that the budget being presented is level funded, level service from 2010. He reports that revenue has increased through fees and ambulance billing. The hurricane and recent snow have resulted in 230 more runs this year so far from last year. Recently the Fire Department took part in the Stop, Drop and Read Program for 2nd

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graders and the top reader got a ride to school on the fire engine. The kids had a good time with this event.

Fire Administration

Mr. Thayer moved to recommend \$489,009. Mr. Woodward seconded. VOTE: Unanimous.

EMS/Ambulance

Chief Comeau reported that the ambulance had 1754 calls last year, and that time was lost with old ambulances. Since we have to count on mutual aide, we are losing revenue to the responders. We are about 100 calls behind where we were last year. Chief Comeau explained that the engine hours on the current ambulance has the equivalent of 200,000 miles on it. Mr. Brabant asked why we do not contract out ambulance services. Chief Comeau said that this question arises every year, and that the fees for private ambulances are out of control, and the companies have retainers to base them in town. Assistant Chief Berkenbush said that Exeter would have to respond with ambulances to some calls anyway. Chief Comeau also reports that private ambulances could be out of town for up to 45 minutes at a time, leaving the residents without coverage and forcing firefighters to wait at calls for ambulances to arrive. This would result in Exeter losing its certification. Chief Comeau will be recommending a change in fees to adjust for what private insurance will pay. Under new guidelines, some insurance companies will pay for actual services provided, not just the ambulance ride. This should result in higher revenue, but likely will not be significant until the second year of fee change. Ms. Ravell noted a slight change to this budget due to holiday pay for dispatch personnel.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend a total budget of \$230,942. Ms. Aten seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Fire Suppression

Mr. Thayer says that 503-4320 requests an increase, but there is no reason for it, so it should be level funded. Mr. Chartrand asked if there have been any attempts to change the staffing model to reduce overtime. Chief Comeau said that they hired 4 more firefighters a few years ago and that overtime has changed. He notes that fire emergencies require a lot of people. Chief Comeau also notes that 75% of the town is reachable within 4 minutes and the further outlying residents can take up to 12 minutes to get to.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend 503-4320 be reduced to level funding at \$49,555. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Kelly asked about the fuel rates, noting a significant increase in the budget request. Assistant Chief Wilking said that he works with DPW and monitors the fuel costs. Next year diesel will be \$3.26/gal and gas will be \$3.16/gal. Fire also has supplemental diesel of 250 gallons per year. He notes that new engines run more efficiently than old ones and the fuel usage is lower overall for newer vehicles.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend total budget of \$2,843,891. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Emergency Management

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Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend a total General Expense of \$15,833. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Thayer said that the subcommittee recommends deleting the request for a sign board. The Town already has one and it is not needed this year. Chief Comeau believes that it is an important item and will continue to ask for it.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend \$0 for Capital Outlay. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend a total EMS/Emergency Management budget of \$19,333, which will include radio repairs. Mr. Leighton seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Health

Mr. Thayer said that the subcommittee is recommending reducing line 505-5000 to \$1,200 and reducing line 505-5981 to \$6,500. Mr. Thayer asked if the Sportsman's club lease included water testing and Mr. Dean responded that it did not and that the contract is not negotiable.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend 505-5000 be reduced to \$1,200. Mr. Thayer seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend 505-5981 be reduced to \$6,500. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend a total Health budget of \$117,304. Ms. Aten seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Chartrand moved to recommend a total Fire budget of \$3,700,479. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Ambulance Revolving Fund

The subcommittee recommends a review of the ambulance fund. There is a lot of money that is projected in revenue for the coming year, and there should be a comprehensive look at what should be done with these funds. Mr. Aldrich says that the Board agrees that this type of review is necessary in an effort to reduce the budget for the Fire Department, and a reduction in the tax rate would be welcome as well. He is not sure if the time frame will be workable for the next months, but the Board will review it.

Mr. Thayer moves that the Budget Recommendations Committee supports the recommendation of the subcommittee. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Thayer stated that this year will be the first time that taxpayers will have to raise money for a new ambulance since the town started offering ambulance service. Chief Comeau agreed that the last time this happened was in 1963.

Capital Outlay

Mr. Stevens moved to recommend \$49,811 for SCBA lease. Mr. Chartrand seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

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Mr. Woodward moved to recommend \$117,432 for Engine leases. Mr. Chartrand seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Social Services

Ms. Aten presented a report of the Social Services subcommittee that she, Mr. Corey, and Mr. Woodward worked on. Mr. Woodward began by saying that there are some things that appear in the budget but are not funded through the General Fund, but rather they are funded by the Local Option Fee. Any increased funding requests from agencies that are paid by this fund must be approved by the Board of Selectmen because they are agents of the fund. These agencies are Meals on Wheels Transportation, TASC, Lamprey Health, and the taxi ticket program, for a total of \$41,000.

Ms. Aten presented a spreadsheet that details agency requests for the 2010 through current requests as well as revenue and administrative costs that these agencies have reported to the committee. There is also a column detailing the percentage of Exeter residents that are served by the agency. Mr. Ferraro is concerned about agencies that have administrative expenses over 30%. Mr. Corey was also concerned upon reviewing the financial statements that donors should be aware of where the money goes in these organizations. Mr. Ferraro said that he is bothered by the number of agencies whom Exeter funds that have high administrative costs and that a very low percentage of their services go to Exeter residents.

Ms. Aten said that some of the forms were not properly completed and that these should not be considered for funding. Citizens petitions can be accepted for the ballot until the second Tuesday in January for those agencies who wish to pursue that option. She points out Community Home Solutions as a new incomplete request.

Ms. Aten moved to not fund Community Home Solutions. Mr. Thayer seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Ms. Aten moved to fund Rockingham Community Action for \$11,000. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Corey said that he is voting for Rockingham Community Action because of the services they provide, even though their overhead costs are not determined. He believes that many of these agencies are redundant, but this one appears to do fuel assistance that other agencies do not offer.

Ms. Aten moved to fund Child and Family Services for \$11,000. Mr. Woodward seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Stevens asked if anyone was opposed to any of the line items. Mr. Kelly thinks that the committee needs to take the recommendations of the subcommittee. Ms. Aten recommends that the committee needs a better application form in order to properly assess each application, which is not possible to do for this budget year. She is comfortable with the level funding this year's requests and to work toward a better process for next year to focus on agencies that help the Exeter residents. Mr. Corey is opposed to funding agencies with high overhead costs and low Exeter service or with redundant coverage in service. Mr. Clement thinks the committee needs to keep in mind that many of these agencies are facing reduced or eliminated funding. Ms. Aten does not believe that the spreadsheet numbers are definitive because the sort of information that was on the application was not direct comparisons to one another. Mr. Corey disagrees and says the financial statements can be used to directly compare these agencies.

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Mr. Kelly suggests not entertaining any requests for increases and to level fund all agencies this year and rework the process for next year. Mr. Thayer says that the town departments were asked to cut their budgets this year, so why are these agencies not being asked to do the same?

Mr. Corey moved to table this discussion to another night. Mr. Kelly seconded. Vote: 7-1, Ms. Aten opposed.

At 9:27 PM, Mr. Chartrand moved to adjourn. Mr. Kelly seconded. VOTE: Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Geis
Recording Secretary