

Budget Recommendations Advisory Committee
Police and Fire
October 26, 2022
6:30 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices

Members Present: Bob Kelly, Chair; Christine Soutter, Vice Chair; Andrew Elliott, Kathy Corson, Christopher Zigmont, Enna Grazier, Judy Rowan, Anthony Zwaan, Liz Canada

Members Absent: Eduardo Contreras, Chris Newport

Others Present: Town Manager Russ Dean, Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy, Finance Director Corey Stevens, and Select Board members Niko Papkonstantis, Julie Gilman, and Nancy Belanger.

Mr. Kelly called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

1. Overview

Dr. Rowan said both the Police Department and the Fire Department are fully staffed, with high morale in both departments, which reflects the investments the town has made. Budget increases are mainly a result of contract agreements, CBA negotiations, and inflation. The Departments are increasing in diversity by hiring more females: the PD has 4 female officers, and the FD has 3. The subcommittee recommends no changes to the preliminary budgets. All PD Officers respond to animal control issues, and the Department has shifted the Animal Control Officer position's cost to the second Lieutenant position. The Department has added Maple, a Chocolate Lab puppy, through donations. There were 2,500 medical emergency service calls. The FD has been affected by supply chain issues in gear, vehicles, and apparatus. They expect the replacement for Engine 5 in July 2023, and Ambulance 1 will take 18 - 24 months. Vacation Replacement Overtime, Personal Replacement Overtime, and Sick Replacement Overtime help to keep the Department fully staffed. They call off-duty firefighters to handle trainings and large-scale emergencies. In 2022, long-term absences and injuries contributed to overtime.

There were no new vehicle requests for PD in the CIP. There were 2 vehicle replacements encumbered from 2021 due to supply chain issues. The PD requested ARPA funds for new tasers, but they will be purchased through a 5 year \$177,705 lease purchase warrant article.

The FD is awaiting delivery of a Ford F250 pickup from 2021. The subcommittee does not support the request for the Inspector Vehicle replacement CIP, since it has under 60,000 miles, which means it used under 5,000 miles annually.

The subcommittee supports the concept of a Police Station with Fire Substation. It would be funded by a 20 year bond; the first year would increase taxes \$192 on a \$300,000 property, but in following years, that drops to \$111 for a \$300,000 property.

2. Police Department

Police Chief Stephan Poulin and Deputy Police Chief Josh McCain were present to discuss the budget. Dr. Rowan said the subcommittee is not recommending any changes to the Police budget. Salary and wages are expected to be fairly high next year. The Dept is fully staffed, but four new Officers were hired and they need to be fully trained. One officer is on injured status. There's only one solo Officer now. New Officers must be paired with an experienced Officer as part of their orientation and training.

Chief Poulin said we have 3 Officers in training; it takes about 7 months for them to be solo. We're filling in open shifts with overtime.

Dr. Rowan said line item 51420, Holiday Pay, will be spent in November. Line item 51450, the Education Incentive, is a reinstated item via CBA. Line item 55043, Community Relations, covers Jason Schreiber, the Media Consultant. Line item 55045, Vehicle Computer Equipment, will be spent.

Dr. Zwaan asked Chief Poulin to clarify the use of the Community Relations budget of \$7,500. Chief Poulin said the Media Consultant was new last year, and that program was a success. \$5,000 of that budget is for him. The rest is for any community relations initiatives, such as National Night Out, crime prevention, child safety seats, and plaques. Dr. Zwaan asked how they assess social media. Chief Poulin said we've been posting at least once a week, and have gained over 1,500 followers. Many of our posts have been picked up by media outlets. We've heard from citizens that we're doing a great job with transparency and inviting the public in. Dr. Rowan said it's part of the Department's philosophy of "community policing." Dr. Zwaan said he was initially skeptical of the Police's social media efforts last year, but in the context of community/Police relations he changed his mind. He wants to see that the funds are truly used for community relations and outreach.

Ms. Corson said there are a lot fewer newspaper reporters out there, so information is not getting out to people. Social media posts can't say "vote for this warrant article" but could be informational about the state of the PD building.

Mr. Zigmont said it's a noisy world and the PD has been doing well with social media. He would love to see the FD have the same tool. Social media is here to stay and we need to keep people informed.

Ms. Grazier observed that Facebook algorithms selectively present information. What other outlets do these posts go to? Chief Poulin said we also posted to Twitter. We create press releases for more serious things, but the media will also pick up social media posts. We have an Instagram but it needs more work.

Mr. Kelly said for \$7,500, it's a cheap way to ensure that the right message gets out. Assistant Chief Pizon said Jason Schreiber is a professional reporter and will craft posts that no one else will be able to craft. His work brings out the public's personal feelings for the Police. This has been a great experience. It's a no-brainer that this is something we need to be doing as well.

Dr. Rowan said line item 55045, Vehicle Computer Equipment, will be spent. Regarding line item 55047, Computer Maintenance/Service Contract, there were some changes to the software agreement. Regarding line item 55050, Conference Rooms and Meals, the Chief is planning to attend a professional conference next year; he has not

attended for the past couple of years. Line item 55057, Prosecutor Service, will be spent. Previously the town subcontracted with the Rockingham County Attorney's office for prosecution services, but now Detective Mulholland has taken over those activities along with per-diem attorneys. This was a substantial decrease in cost and is working well. Mr. Kelly asked if that line will be fully spent. Chief Poulin said it's unpredictable, but more of it will be spent. Detective Mulholland is planning to retire in July but will possibly be coming back part time.

Dr. Rowan said regarding line item 55106, Equipment Purchases, there are new hires that need to be outfitted, so that line item will be spent. Line item 55199, Office Equipment Maintenance, will be spent. Line item 55200, Office Supplies, will be spent.

For line item 55270, Software Agreement, Dr. Rowan asked the Chief to explain the changes. Chief Poulin said we're now part of the J1 network, so we're communicating with the State on accidents, traffic tickets, and data. We had to add a J1 mobile client module to the RMS for \$1,475. When there is an accident, our Officers create a report on the laptop and send it to a Sergeant. Once approved, it electronically goes to the State, and the data goes into the State crash and safety data. Traffic tickets go directly to Court. There's less paperwork. All Police Depts are using this; we were one of the last in Rockingham County. The other increase is for new scheduling software. We used to do the complicated scheduling in an Excel spreadsheet, and there was a lot of human error. The new Lieutenant found DTS software which prevents mistakes. It assures coverage with no double coverage. Officers have an app on their phone for open shifts, overtime, holidays, etc. The new system caused a big increase in morale. The cost is \$4,080 per year.

Dr. Rowan said line item 55390, Comfort Dog Expenses, is a new line item. Chief Poulin said Maple will be a fully trained comfort animal through Hero Pups. There's a year of training. Bailey Texeira is her handler. Bailey approached us with this idea; she deals with child victims, and having a comfort dog to break the ice at interviews will be a huge benefit. She also helps break the ice at events, such as the first day of school at Main Street School. We don't want Maple to be an expense to the taxpayers; she's in the budget but will be fully funded through donations. We raised \$2,000 for her with UFO Fest patches, and plan to do more fundraising. Dr. Zwaan asked about how that will look in the budget. Mr. Stevens said there will be an expense line, but there will be offset revenue. He can make a note in this line for the future. Dr. Zwaan asked about the logistics of accommodating a dog at the new facility. Chief Poulin said Maple lives with Bailey, so there are no facility needs.

Mr. Stevens said the new benefits total for the PD is \$1,172,037. The overall total for the PD is \$3,653,837.

MOTION: Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Police Department total of \$3,653,837. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

Dr. Rowan said there were no vehicles requested. Tasers will be a warrant article of \$177,705 over a 5 year lease purchase, or \$22,300 per year. Mr. Kelly said that will

be discussed at CIP night. Mr. Stevens said the cost of the tasers is \$110,665, not \$177,705.

Dr. Zwaan asked if we will have electric Police cruisers. Chief Poulin said we were able to get one hybrid of four, due to an extreme shortage. Four out of 5 patrolling cars are hybrid. Mr. Zigmont asked how they like the hybrids. Chief Poulin said they like them but the 3 point turn is slower.

3. Police Dispatch

Dr. Rowan said the subcommittee had no questions about the Dispatch budget.

Mr. Stevens said the Benefits total is \$128,124, and the total for Police Dispatch is \$436,862.

MOTION: Dr. Zwaan moved to approve \$436,862 for Police Dispatch. Ms. Soutter seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

4. Fire Department

Fire Chief Eric Wilking and Assistant Fire Chief Justin Pizon were present to discuss the budget.

Dr. Rowan said line item 51121, Salary Wages Incentive, was a restored line item through contract negotiations. This rewards the completion of educational degrees. Regarding overtime, line items 51150, 51130, and 51410, Vacation Replacement Overtime, Personal Replacement Overtime, and Sick Replacement Overtime, keep the FD fully staffed.

Mr. Elliot said the town has only grown 30% since the 80s, but the FD has almost doubled. Are we doing more things? Chief Wilking said the FD had more employees in the 80s than now, but they're different employees. Then, it was volunteers, and there were 40 people to handle calls. We moved to a career force in the 80s, and had 12 Firefighters in a four shift model. As time went on, the number of volunteers waned. We transitioned from calls to career FD. That's not just in Exeter, but also Hampton, Portsmouth, Durham, and most larger communities. We're an aging town. When volunteer Firefighters were able to handle calls, we had 762 calls a year, but there are over 4,000 calls now. People cost money. There are 32 career FD and administrative people.

Dr. Zwaan said the FD now does more ambulance runs. Chief Wilking said the first ambulance was grant-funded. This year we're 300 ambulance calls ahead of last year, and there should be more than 2,500 by the end of the year. He added that there's a revenue aspect to those calls.

Ms. Corson asked if there has been an increase in car accidents. Chief Wilking said no, over the last 10+ years the average has remained the same. Some accidents in the past were more severe. More people walk away today.

Dr. Rowan asked if line item 55042, Communications Equipment, will be spent. Chief Wilking said yes. Due to issues with the supply chain, requisitions are in for items that have yet to be invoiced. Most lines are at zero or negative already.

Dr. Rowan said regarding line item 55043, Community Relations, the Department requested \$5,000 but \$2,500 of that was cut at the Town Manager level. We want to give them enough to try out the service.

Chief Wilking said last year, we wanted to watch and assess the PD efforts with social media. We saw a great improvement in their community relations. We brought Jason Schreiber in and asked how we could get involved. We don't have a contract, but have an agreement for the same fee as the PD, \$5,000 annually. The FD Facebook page had 2,620 viewers this last week, which is 400 more than when we posted our own information. Our Twitter account has picked up 200 new followers. 4,700 people have engaged with a post in the last month. Most posts have 100 or more likes. Media outlets capture those posts and rebroadcast them. We sought lines in the budget that we're not spending and reduced those by an equal amount to offset the social media consultant.

Ms. Grazier said the goal for this engagement is slightly different from that of the PD. What's the actual impact? Chief Wilking said it's a way to share information. We have to get our news out to every member of the public. We're not electioneering, just educating about the Fire Department. The FD did not have the negative vibe of the PD; most people respect the FD. Still, we'd like the town to know who the Firefighters are. Assistant Chief Pizon said when the Stryker Equipment was installed at a cost of \$58,000, we posted about the equipment and the decrease in back injuries, and put out that it was bought through a matching \$50,000 grant.

Mr. Zigmont said it's an expense well worth it. An informed citizenry is what we're looking for. As we evolve this, maybe the direction should be to create a communications strategy for members of the FD to manage postings. The consultant could help develop the social media playbook.

Dr. Zwaan said on a budgetary level, he does not see the need for it in this Department in the same way as the PD. Our DPW and Water/Sewer Depts have distinct missions and needs that might also benefit from community relations, so where does it end?

MOTION [not voted]: Dr. Zwaan moved to eliminate the amount of \$2,500 for line item 55043. The motion was not seconded.

Ms. Grazier said this discussion illuminates a larger cultural problem. Facebook, email, and newspapers are not adequate. There's a larger problem we're trying to tackle piecemeal.

Asst Chief Pizon said it's a proactive approach about our identity and what we stand for. We've learned from the Police experiences with the public, and we want to be ahead of that.

Mr. Kelly said a few years ago, didn't think we needed an Economic Development Director, but that's been good for the town and tax rate.

Ms. Corson said Asst. Chief Pizon shared a letter which pointed out that while a post may have 100 likes, that doesn't mean it only reached 100 people. The reach is much greater. Fire crews responding to a dump truck turned over in July reached 15,000 people. There's a safety aspect to this. She would like to see \$5,000 on this item.

Dr. Rowan said \$2,500 will give the Dept an opportunity to see how they could use this service. The overall budget is an increase of around 3%, so we should stick with the cuts that have been made.

Ms. Soutter said the quote was \$5,000 and we're offering \$2,500, what can that do? Chief Wilking said Schreiber News based the cost on how he was interacting with the PD. The FD makes 2-3 posts per week. He's willing to work with us, and can do 6 months at the same rate or 12 months at one post a week. Stale content is a concern.

Dr. Rowan line item 55058, Contract Services, will be spent. Regarding line item 55106, General Equipment Purchase, the FD is no longer servicing Fire Alarm boxes. Asst Chief Pizon said the Fire Prevention lines are no longer included in the budget; that was taken out in 2020. Chief Wilking said the businesses that required monitoring sought local monitoring. It costs \$1 a day to have a Fire Alarm monitored. Part of the rationale for moving away from monitoring is that it was bringing in \$35,000 but had expenses of \$39,000. If we stayed in the business, due to changes in code compliance, we would have needed a warrant article of \$150,000-200,000 to replace the equipment and two additional Dispatchers in the communication budget. There were businesses that we had no idea were being monitored and they hadn't been invoiced in years, but it's been 2 years now and the bumps have been smoothed out. Mr. Kelly said there was an increase in the Public Works budget for professional Fire Alarm monitoring. Chief Wilking said there are only 5 town buildings that need to be monitored by law. Public Works is monitoring facilities with no life hazards.

Dr. Rowan said line item 55149, Hoses, has already been spent. For line item 55230, Protective Equipment, there are two new firefighters and six replacement firefighters who require new gear. Chief Wilking said we have to replace gear on a rotating basis every five years. With new hires, the replacement plan went out of wack.

Dr. Rowan said line item 55319, Vehicle Maintenance, was spent, but there were invoicing issues. Chief Wilking said we blew the engine in 10 year old Engine 2, which is not due to be replaced until 2032. We were able to repair it for \$16,000, but it took almost all of the vehicle maintenance budget.

Chief Wilking said line item 55042, Communications Equipment, includes the reverse 911 system RAVE. We agreed with the Police Chief and Town Manager that signing a three-year service agreement with them was prudent.

MOTION: Dr. Zwaan moved to approve line item 55042, Communications Equipment, at \$10,793. Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

Mr. Stevens said the FD benefits are \$1,341,470. The FD total is \$4,088,563.

MOTION: Dr. Zwaan moved to approve the Fire Department total of \$4,088,563, Dr. Rowan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

5. Health Department

Dr. Rowan said line item 55055, Consulting, is a placeholder for future lead monitoring and other DES required work on Sportsman's Club. Otherwise the budget is straightforward.

Mr. Stevens said the Health benefits total is \$42,060. The overall Health total is \$152,117.

MOTION: Dr. Rowan moved to approve the Health budget of \$152,117. Dr. Zwaan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

6. CIP

Mr. Kelly said two vehicles were requested by FD. The subcommittee did not support the Inspector Vehicle replacement at \$49,313. The replacement of the Utility 1 Pickup at \$61,986 was deferred in Town Manager's budget.

Dr. Rowan said the subcommittee did not recommend the Inspector vehicle replacement because it was a good possibility for replacing with electric vehicle down the line. The current vehicle is under 5,000 miles a year, so we could hold off for a decently priced electric vehicle. Chief Wilking said \$49,000 would cover a hybrid Interceptor, same as PD. It would be the FD's first electric vehicle. The little jeeps don't serve the town well. It's 12 years old and only 60,000 miles but is in very rough shape underneath and the roof has leaked, creating mold. We have 13 vehicles in the fleet to prioritize. The other vehicle deferred is 15 years old. The cost of replacement is already at \$61,000, and it's going to be more in the future. We should stay with a regular replacement schedule of 10 years. Ms. Corson said the proposal is hybrid, not electric. Electric technology is just not there yet. Mr. Kelly said we will come back to this on CIP night.

Mr. Stevens said the total for Public Safety Shared Services is \$588,979.

MOTION: Dr. Rowan moved to approve the Public Safety Shared Services of \$588,979. Dr. Zwaan seconded. The motion passed 9-0.

Dr. Rowan mentioned the Police Station and Fire Substation. Mr. Zigmont said the Select Board took in a lot of input. Things were listed as alternate vs inclusive, and he requested reshaping that. Will we see that presented differently? Mr. Kelly said this committee will provide input on the financial aspect. The Select Board listens to us but are not beholden to us. There won't be another full presentation on Nov 17.

Dr. Zwaan said if viewers haven't seen Monday's Select Board meeting, it's available on the town website. In the presentation, net zero ready and covered parking were presented as a 4% add-on at the bottom. That was confusing. They should add those lines to the main presentation of numbers. It wouldn't change the bottom line.

Mr. Kelly said if it's slightly more to do those environmental aspects, this committee should make those recommendations.

Dr. Rowan asked who would provide oversight for the project on behalf of the town. Mr. Dean said we would look to hire a Construction Manager, as well as creating a building committee for this project with reps from the Departments and himself.

Chief Wilking said there is an Open House at the current Public Safety complex on Tuesday Nov 15, 4:30 - 6 PM.

7. Meeting Calendar

The next meeting is Wednesday, November 2nd, to discuss the Public Works budget.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Kelly adjourned the meeting at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary