

Public Safety Preliminary Budget Summary

Exeter is fortunate to have both its Police and Fire departments fully staffed. Given the extremely tight labor market, there is much competition for these highly skilled personnel. In light of this labor environment, the town has granted retention bonuses in both departments paid for out of ARPA funds.

Police Department.

The Exeter PD is dedicated to a community policing model. All decisions and budget priorities flow from this model. The goal of this budget is to have a force that is well-trained and resourced to meet the demands of 21st century policing.

The department is forward-thinking in its approach to problem-solving as exemplified by its being the only PD in the state of NH to be a One Mind Campaign department. Mental health calls are a daily event. Through its One Mind commitment, officers have undergone specialized education and training to respond to calls in a sensitive and effective manner. The department is at the end of the first phase of accreditation which will allow increased credibility in court presentations and also lower the town's Primex insurance premium. Another positive initiative is the purchase of vehicle cameras last year to augment the body cameras worn by officers in the field. These cameras provide both transparency and enhance effectiveness. A new cloud-based system to track field training records for new hires is also budgeted. This system provides for enhanced trainer and supervisor workflow and communication. Contracts for these and other computer services and equipment show increases per contractual agreements.

The department ended its contract for external prosecutor services and has added an in-house, part-time position for an overall savings of over \$45,000. To better reflect payroll codes and to improve tracking, the PD worked in coordination with the Finance Department to review and adjust several overtime items especially in Dispatch.

Although the department is presently fully staffed, recruitment and retention of officers continues to be an area of concern. At present the high morale, commitment to professionalism and the community policing model are the department's best marketing and retention tools.

Fire Department

The nature of Fire Department work has changed substantially over the years. Call numbers have increased with the increase in Exeter's population and the addition of several large retirement and assisted living facilities. The ratio of fire suppression to emergency medical service (EMS) calls has shifted such that EMS now makes up 60% of all calls and fire suppression 40%.

Funds from EMS calls go into the EMS Revolving Fund which covers the purchase of a new ambulance, when needed, with the remainder of the money going back into the General Fund. This year EMS rates were increased with the bulk of payment coming from insurance reimbursement. (Rates are still lower than surrounding towns.) With the increased revenue, the FD would like to propose that EMS overtime (60% of runs) be charged to the EMS Revolving Fund before monies are returned to the General Fund. This change would reduce the FD overtime costs by \$56,180. There would still be enough money left in the Revolving Fund for a new ambulance when required and a similar contribution to the General Fund as in past years.

The proposed budget shows salary/wage increases due to the CBA. Following the retirement of Chief Wilking in April of 2024, the department would like to take advantage of his specialty knowledge in emergency management by hiring him part-time to be the Emergency Management Director.

The Hydrant Maintenance Fee (#55151) is presently located in the FD budget. Following a water rate study, the FD line item was increased to \$50,000 even though no additional departmental personnel time or material increased. At the recommendation of the Town Manager and Finance Director, the line item will be moved to General Fund Miscellaneous. It remains to be determined what number amount should be in the FD line item and what should be in the Miscellaneous line. It is expected that the increased amount in the General Fund will be offset as revenue in the Water Fund.

CIP

The subcommittee recommends approval of the Police Station/Fire Substation project. Given the failure of the project at the polls last year and the increased price, we recommend a vigorous campaign of print and social media to broadcast the need for this important project.