

**Town of Williamsburg
Minutes of the Finance Committee
Meeting Held Virtually
April 14, 2021**

Members Present: Paul Wetzel, Charles Heath, Julia Peters, Gil Loud, Charles Dudek, Richard Kisloski, Lisa Sheehy

Members Absent: Linda Rowley, Eric Cerreta

Selectman William Sayre and Fire Department Chief Jason Connell (first part of meeting) were also present.

The meeting was called to order by co-chair Paul Wetzel at 6:12 PM.

The minutes of the March 31, 2021 meeting were reviewed. L. Sheehy moved to accept the minutes. C. Dudek seconded the motion. C. Dudek abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting with Fire Chief Connell on Fire Department budget submission

Chief Connell reviewed the FY22 staffing budget requests. For Fire Department Labor: \$25,745 (an increase of \$2,782). For Fire Department Training: \$15,334 (an increase of \$2,066). For Fire Department Administrative Assistant: \$8,295 (an increase of \$2,808). The FD Labor line item is labor to respond to calls. FD Training is labor for training and events/details. The requested increases in FD Labor and FD Training would cover increased hourly rates for firefighters at all ranks, recognizing that our volunteer firefighters usually need to leave their other jobs or businesses in order to respond to calls, and would cover a night differential of \$1/hr for calls from 11 PM – 7 AM. Firefighters would increase from \$15.93/hr to \$17.75/hr; Lieutenants would increase to \$17.97/hr; Captains to \$18.19/hr; Deputy to \$18.41/hr; Chief to \$19.34/hr. The Department received 381 calls last year. 51% were medical including motor vehicle emergencies. The rest were fires and alarms. The FD Administrative Assistant line currently funds 6.5 hr/wk. The duties have expanded and can now take up to 20 hrs/wk. While Chief Connell hopes to further increase the position's hours in following FYs, the FY22 request would cover 10 hrs/wk, which the Board of Selectmen (BOS) supports.

Chief Connell reviewed and answered questions about capital priorities in the next 5 years. They are: a replacement for Engine 3 (mini-pumper); a medical rescue truck for support at fires; refurbish Engine 4 in FY23 or FY24 hoping to extend its useable life as much as 15 more years; and replace the Chief's car on the Town's Capital Plan in FY23. In the longer term, he would like to replace Engine 2 pumper with a tanker. The Department applied for a federal grant to purchase a truck, which is a long shot as there are only 100 grants nationwide.

The Department has applied for a \$50,000 grant for a bottle fill station with a 5% Town match. In FY21, the Department purchased a lot of equipment. In FY22, the goal is to purchase 3 or 4 sets of gear at \$2,500/set to replace gear nearing the end of its 10-year useable life.

Chief Connell is trying to avoid deferring costs and bunching them up in later years. There being no further questions regarding the Fire Department budget requests, Chief Connell left the meeting.

Review of budget expenses and Town revenues

The Committee reviewed and discussed the proposed budget, including the recommendations of the BOS.

The Police Chief's salary includes a \$2,000 negotiated increase. Selectman W. Sayre stated that the BOS offered a yearly increase of \$2,000/yr for 3 years, which was accepted. The contract will not be signed until after the annual Town Meeting. Prior to the offer, the BOS and Town Administrator Charlene Nardi surveyed Police Chief salaries in comparable towns, and the BOS concluded that our Chief's salary is below average. The negotiated increase is not meant to cover a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), so a COLA would be additional.

Certain required or fixed cost categories were reviewed including the Vocational School tuition and transportation, Veterans' expenses and benefits, an increase in Library Labor to bring all employee wages up to the state minimum wage, currently \$13.50/hr.

The Committee discussed purchase of a Police cruiser. C. Dudek asked if the Town is considering a hybrid Interceptor which may be eligible for some state funding. On behalf of the Committee, P. Wetzel will ask C. Nardi to direct this question to Chief Wickland and ask to investigate funding for a hybrid cruiser such as through a state Green Towns grant.

The Committee discussed Free Cash levels and how much to apply to the FY22 budget. A preliminary amount of \$150,000 was discussed. No vote was taken at this time.

There was a brief discussion of Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) from solar arrays. The Town currently has three solar PILOT agreements for 20-25 year periods which together generate revenue of approximately \$133,000/yr. There was brief discussion of the best use of these funds since they expire after a certain number of years. Such funds are better used for expenses such as paying debt or vehicle or equipment purchases, rather than for the general operating budget.

Discussion of certain anticipated expenses in later FYs

C. Nardi advised the Committee of anticipated costs of approximately \$80,000/yr for the next three years for re-engineering of Mountain Street, to eliminate direct drainage from the road to the drinking water reservoir. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the lead partner, is coordinating this with Williamsburg and Whately.

Discussion of COLA increases

The Committee discussed what recommendation to make regarding a COLA for Town employees. There was no COLA in FY21. In past years, the COLA has been 1-2%. Discussed whether a COLA should be for all Town employees or whether any categories should be excluded if they will receive wage increases for other reasons. Increased COLA costs will need to be balanced with other budget cuts or from Free Cash. The Committee agreed to resume discussion of COLA and possible budget cuts in next meeting.

Library Reserve Fund Transfer Request

L. Sheehy moved that the Committee approve a reserve fund transfer request in the amount of \$315.00 to be transferred to Meekins Maintenance Line #001-610-5400-000-240 to clear a negative balance for snow removal. C. Dudek seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Next Finance Committee meeting

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled on April 22 at 6:00 PM to be held virtually. Agenda to include: How much free cash to apply to the budget; identification of areas for budget reductions; and vote on a COLA recommendation.

There being no further business before the Committee, D. Kisloski moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by L. Sheehy. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 8:24 PM.

Submitted by Lisa Sheehy