Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 17, 2022
Via YouTube Live
Special Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I; Haines; E. Dill; T. Govert
Also Present: D. Angersola; Fire Chief B. Auld; C. Brownell; L. D'Aquila; D. Dill; R. Dill; R. Gross; C. Mansfield; J. Moreau; T. Reynolds; J. Ventres; L. Woodward; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public via virtual media

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 4:12 p.m.

2. 2022-2023 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. Fire Department Operating/Capital: Chief Auld advised that the proposed FY2022-2023 Operating Budget was created by a collaboration of the volunteer and professional staff in conjunction with the Fire Commissioners. He reviewed Departmental staffing and its FY2021-2022 accomplishments.

   Chief Auld stated that the changes to the 2022-2023 Operating Budget total $591,610.00, representing a 15.91% increase over the previous fiscal year. He noted that the majority of the increases occurred on the career staff side.

   Chief Auld reviewed increases in the Physicals (+11%) and In-Service Training (+25%) budget lines. In response to a question from Ms. Haines regarding the 25% increase in the Training budget, Commissioner Reynolds provided data on the year's call volume. Mr. Dill inquired about retention statistics and Chief Auld stated that the current average retention rate is 2-years.

   Chief Auld reviewed the proposed Repairs & Maintenance (+6.3%) budget and, in response to a question from Mr. Dill, provided information on the maintenance schedule for the Department's vehicles. He also reviewed the proposed increase to the Building Maintenance (+20%) budget and agreed to Ms. Haines' request to break-out the expenses for each individual firehouse. Commissioner Reynolds stated that the proposed increase in Medical Supplies is due to an increase in EMS calls that the staff responds to.

   Chief Auld reviewed increases in the Telephone/Cell (+33.3%) and Office Supplies (+20%) lines. He responded to an inquiry from Mr. Dill regarding a spike in the 2021 Actual figure and stated he feels $3,000.00 for FY2022-2023 is realistic. Ms. Zemienieski noted that copy paper is paid for out of the Central Services budget and toner is covered under the Department's copier maintenance contract.

   Chief Auld reviewed increases to Electricity (+2%), Propane (+100%), Heating Fuel (+16.7), Gasoline/Diesel (+25%), Uniforms (+33.3%), and Fire Ponds (+14.3%). In response to questions raised by Ms. Govert and Ms. Haines, he confirmed that Fire Company No. 2 had switched to LED lighting and the cost of dredging Wigwam Pond was partially accounted for in the Fire Ponds budget.

Chief Auld reviewed additional increases to Equipment/Gear (+8.7%), Public Education, Communications/Pagers & Radios (+37.9%), and Dues & Fees (+6.7%). In response to a question from Ms. Haines about whether or not there is a redundancy in the use of cell phones and pagers, Mr. Auld clarified who receives a cell phone stipend of $30/month and all of the staff receives pagers. He noted that both are used because there are occasional technology glitches.

Commissioner Reynolds reviewed the 14.5% proposed increase to Salaries & Wages which included a 175.4% increase to Overtime pay. He advised that the number of calls the Department responds to has increased and they would like to fill three part-time per-diem positions. Ms. Govert noted that motor vehicle accidents have increased nationally and asked about East Haddam's experience. Chief Auld noted that there were 34 motor vehicle accidents in FY2020-2021 which was down from the previous fiscal year.

There were no decreases proposed in the Fire Department's FY2022-2023 Operating Budget. Commissioner Reynolds reviewed the Department's Capital budget and noted that approximately $217k for repairs/upgrades at Fire Company No. 2 are being deferred until a decision is made regarding how the structural issues at the firehouse will be addressed.

Commissioner Reynolds provided information on several Capital requests, including Thermal Imaging Cameras, the Fire Hose Replacement program, Air Pack Replacement program, replacement of the Duty Vehicle and Ranger ATV. He advised that the Capital request for a Heavy Extruder and Dryer Closet is on-hold at this time.

There was a general discussion regarding the project to replace Fire Company No. 1's roof in 2030. Ms. Zemienieski advised that the roof had last been replaced in 2003 and 50-year shingles were installed at that time.

In response to an inquiry from Mr. Dill, Commissioner Reynolds discussed the Department's philosophy for cost-savings and keeping the taxpayers in mind. He stated that, in preparing their budgets, they gather input from the membership and strive to have the right equipment at the right time. He advised that their goal is to be budget-ready to perform their public safety responsibilities to the best of their ability.

In response to a question from Mr. Dill, Commissioner Reynolds provided an overview of the Department's use of their three boats. He stated that the Department responds to an average of 6 marine calls per year and would prefer not to lose a boat but noted that they do have Mutual Aid agreements in place. Mr. Dill expressed concern that the rescue boat does not perform up to the required specifications the Department identified in its justification for purchasing the boat and questioned its usefulness for public safety. Chief Auld offered to take Mr. Dill out the boat to see how it operates as a rescue vehicle.

B. Emergency Management Operating/Capital: Craig Mansfield provided some background on the $2.1M Town wide Radio project that began in 2011. He stated that it came on-line in February 2021 and Fire, Police, Public Works, and Town Government staff are now all up on the system. Mr. Mansfield reviewed the Emergency Management's proposed FY2022-2023 Operating Budget and advised that ValleyShore has requested the Town earmark a 4% increase in the fee for their service this year; however, he noted it could be slightly less.

Mr. Mansfield reviewed the increase in the Repairs & Maintenance budget line. He noted that there was a 1-year warranty for all of the Town's tower sites; however, going forward the maintenance contract will run approximately $50k annually. He stated that he had included $12.5K in this line to cover the last quarter of FY2022-2023. Also included in the Repairs & Maintenance budget is $20k for the portable radios and $500 for maintenance of the Town's siren system. In response to a question from Mr. Dill, Mr. Mansfield advised that there are 174 portable radios that need to be inspected, re-tuned, and updated on an annual basis.
Mr. Mansfield reviewed the Department's Capital budget and stated that he feels the $10k annual Capital request for the Tower sites can be removed because the towers will be under warranty. He responded to several questions from the Board members.

C. Ambulance Association: Ms. Zemienieski contacted Laurie D'Aquila and Lynn Woodward by phone. Ms. D'Aquila advised that the Town has a contractual agreement with the Ambulance Association to contribute to a reserve account annually to share the cost of purchasing a new ambulance. She stated that new ambulances cost approximately $250k and the Association's current ambulance will be 10 years old in 2025.

Ms. Haines asked about the Town's outstanding bill of $7,000.00 for EMS services provided by the Fire Department in 2020. Ms. Woodward advised that because the Fire Department had submitted the bills so late, their Service Administrator was unable to authenticate them and the Association has since closed it books on FY2019-2020.

In response to a request from Mr. Dill, Ms. Zemienieski provided him with a copy of the Town's latest contract with the Ambulance Association.

Ms. D'Aquila responded to several questions from the Board. She stated the Association's call volume has increased significantly and noted that, on average, they receive $300.00 for each ambulance run. She confirmed that coverage by VinTech staffing services is getting better. In response to a question from Ms. Govert, Ms. D'Aquila stated that their mutual aid numbers had been impacted by COVID since no one was offering EMT classes during the pandemic and both the Association and VinTech had lost staff. She stated, however, that the Association is anticipating bringing on 5-6 new EMT's in the near future.

D. Agriculture Commission: Dr. Ron Gross, Chairman of the Agriculture Commission, provided some background information about the Commission and advised that Shaleen Thody has a very robust agriculture program at the Middle School with which the Commission has been working.

Dr. Gross stated that Jim Curtin is negotiating with the state to purchase a strip of property in Town known as "Old Town Street" with the intention of erecting a year-round farmers' market on the site. He advised that the Agriculture Commission would like to assist him in the project and the increases in their FY2022-2023 budget are reflective of their interest in the project.

Dr. Gross stated he estimated it will cost $250-$300k to construct the farmers' market pavilion and advised that the Commission has requested $5,000.00 in the Technical Services line for a grant writer for the project. They have also included $750 for Travel Reimbursement so several Commission and Town representatives can visit some out-of-state model farmers' markets, and $1000.00 in Legal/Advertising for public education regarding the project.

Ms. Govert advised that the state Department of Agriculture is offering Farm to School grants and she agreed to contact Shaleen Thody with the information.

E. Land Use Office Operating/Capital: Mr. R. Dill thanked the Board for rescheduling their review of the Land Use Budget. He recommended that, going forward, it would be helpful to begin the process earlier to give everyone time to review the budget proposals before presenting them to the Board. He noted that applications submitted to the Inland Wetlands &Watercourses Commissions have begun to pick-up and, consequently, he feels the $1,000.00 increase in the "Purchased Professional Services – IWWC Engineer" line is appropriate.

In response to questions raised by Mr. R. Dill, Land Use Administrator Ventres provided additional information regarding the use of the Land Use Department's Engineering budget and noted that a recently adopted state statute allows municipalities to charge applicants back for outside consulting fees incurred by the town. Mr. Ventres also provided clarification regarding the budget line "PA235 to State".

Mr. Brownell stated he disagreed with carrying WPCA expenses in the Land Use Department's budget. In response to a question raised by Mr. R. Dill, Mr. Ventres confirmed that the IWWC's income from application fees is included in the Department's Revenue budget. Mr. R. Dill recommended more narrative be provided in the Department's budget regarding what percentage of time the Land Use Administrator spends supporting various Boards/Commissions/ Committees. He also expressed concern about the potential for conflicts of interest in that support work.

Mr. Brownell reviewed the Planning & Zoning Commission's $30k Capital request for a conceptual design study to develop a master plan for the Moodus center. Mr. Ventres responded to several questions and there was a brief discussion regarding the Capital request to fund the state mandated 10-year update of the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development.

F. General Overall Operating/Capital Budget Review: Discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

3. Public Comment

Jay Moreau provided the following comments:

- He confirmed that the Captain and paid Fire Department staff neglected to submit their ambulance run reports to the Town for approximately 1.5 years and, consequently, there is no way to verify the Town's billing. He advised that HIPPA requirements preclude verification efforts through hospital admissions.

- He asked why the Ambulance Association is being required to secure an apartment for the VinTech staff?

- He noted that the Town had allocated $200-$250k to equip the Quint and recommended the BOS ask the Fire Department to provide an accounting of what has been spent.

- He supported the recurring Capital request to replace Fire Department hoses.

- He supports the hiring of a human resources professional and expressed concern that the BOE had backed out of its agreement to share that service. He stated he believes they should be held to the agreement they made with the Town.

Mr. Moreau and the Board members discussed whether or not Capital requests for safety vehicles typically include requests to fund the additional required equipment that is not included in the base

vehicle. The group also discussed the need to have the Fire Department create and maintain, on an on-going basis, an inventory of their assets.

4. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m. Unanimous aye.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Dill, Secretary