

Finance Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes: December 11, 2023

Present were:

Mike Abel, Chief, PD
Dennis Howe, Chair, FAC
Lou Alvarez, BOS
Luke Moran, FAC
Jason Somero, BOS
Peter Somero, Director, DPW
Shawn Talbot, Chair, BOS
Joe Woodworth, FAC

Introduction

Dennis provided an overview of the process. Dennis and Luke spoke specifically about challenges with the Cemetery Department.

- Luke has salary details included in the budget, but no additional expenses
- Expenses such as mowing are not included in the 2024 budget
- FAC and Town Administrator unable to obtain budget plans from the Department Head.

Police Department

The team reviewed the draft Police Department budget.

- The 2023 budget was \$910,881.02; full-time wages were \$466,125.05
- Adjustments were proposed to: 1) adjust the salary range for competitive positioning; 2) increase incentives for retention purposes; and 3) the temporary COLA adjustment of 3% (which is a placeholder at this point in time).
 - \$18,699.20 was allocated for salary range adjustment impacting officers 2, 3 and 4 positions. These were prioritized as “suggested (2)”.
 - Holiday pay details were reviewed. The PD pays each officer (officers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, not the Chief) 8 hours per 10 holidays (80 hours). Officers are paid straight-time if they work the holiday.
 - Lou suggested we check labor laws to ensure that his policy does not violate any labor-related guidelines.
- New Ipswich participated in a Regional Prosecutor program with neighboring towns (Antrim, Bennington, Deering, and Hancock). Unfortunately, the Prosecutor, Michael Beausoleil is not able to continue in 2024.
 - Chief Abel has identified a temporary solution with Upton-Hatfield which is estimated to cost New Ipswich approximately \$100,000
 - Chief Abel is in discussion with the Towns of Hancock, Dublin, and Fitzwilliam to identify another prosecutor with the expectation that the \$100,000 will be significantly reduced.
 - At this time, \$100,000 remains in the Prosecutor budget but more details are expected within the next week.
- New Hire fees were not included in the 2023 budget. In March, the Chief expects the Department to be down to three (from six). \$3,000 has been included (priority 1) with an

additional \$3,000 for priority 2. This covers psychological screening (\$750-\$850 each) and background checks (~\$1100).

- Vehicle maintenance was overspent this year – mostly due to a faulty steering column and a water leak. Both were not covered by warranty. For 2024, the budget slightly increased from \$7,035 to \$7,300.
- Mandatory software purchases were reduced from \$5,115 to \$4,432. Telephone diagnostics (i.e. mobile phone analysis) – SPOTS - was discussed and a decision was made to seek neighboring town capabilities that can be leveraged if necessary.
- Fuel charges were discussed. An administrator could pull the Wex fuel card records and identify consumption per vehicle. Chief Abel and the team had previously been able to maintain these records, but with staff shortages it is no longer possible. More discussion necessary. With current staffing, the fuel expense was reduced from \$20,000 down to \$16,000.
- Much discussion around the empty positions and challenges with filling them. Chief Abel felt that we would likely not be fully staffed until the middle of the year, and a decision was made to remove the salary from one position for the first 6 months. All positions remain fully supported, but as there will be a delay in filling positions, the BOS and Chief Abel felt that we could budget for less than full staffing levels.
- Incentive programs were reviewed. The Longevity Stipend, in place since 2023, was funded with an incremental \$2,150 (priority 2). The Fitness incentive at \$1,200 was added and supported, at this time by the BOS (priority 2). The Education incentive of \$5,500 (priority 2) is included.

Department of Public Works

The team reviewed the draft Department of Public Works budget.

- Dennis and Peter provided a summary of the wages and personnel expenses.
- Currently there are three (3) full-time employees and four (4) vacant positions. As discussed in the Town work session, Director Somero is requesting:
 - A sign-on bonus of \$1,000 each for up to two (2) new-hire employees
 - A salary range adjustment of \$2.00 each for up to four (4) employees
 - There will be a continued need for overtime and part time employees
- With similar challenges as seen by the PD, the BOS questioned the feasibility of filling the remaining four open positions. Peter felt that it was unlikely, and for budgeting purposes only, the expense of the 7th position could be removed from the 2024 budget. It is important to note that this 7th position is fully supported by the BOS, but given the timing and challenges of hiring, the expense of a full staff will be reduced.
- The DPW proposes to include \$11,000 to fund CDL certification (Class B) for two personnel. This will help entice new hire candidates to consider working for the Town. This was tentatively supported by the team. The team also discussed an early termination clause such that a new hire would be responsible for reimbursing the Town if they resigned within a period of time.
- Vehicle maintenance increased from \$100,000 in 2023 to \$120,000 in 2024. Maintenance costs are often unpredictable, and the spending trends indicate that an increase is justified.
- The electric utility prices were reviewed, and the FAC has calculated expenses based on 2023 utilization. Dennis and Joe will revisit those predictions based on the December 5, 2023 charges.

- Fuel expenses will likely be less than 2023 due to staffing levels. Peter will set the total fuel expenses to \$50,000 (a reduction from the 2023 budgeted amount of \$73,442). This is also based on lower fuel costs, and specifically due to using the State depot for diesel fuel.

General Government Buildings

- The team briefly reviewed the General Government Buildings budget.
- Lawn care was overspent in 2023; the 2024 budget now reflects \$23,500 which is an increase from the \$19,173 2023 budget.
- Peter included a priority 3 item – replacement of the waste oil burner at a price of \$30,000. It is anticipated that this will not need replacement in 2024, but Peter wanted to make the BOS aware of its eventual need. The team will review the DPW capital funds to determine if we need to budget specifically for this item (possible warrant article).
- Two major improvements are required: 1) the pool filter house roof will cost \$35 - \$40k ; and 2) the transfer station roof will cost \$30 - \$35k. These will likely come from a capital fund as opposed to the maintenance line item.

Transfer Station

- The team briefly reviewed the Transfer Station 2024 budget
- Training was increased from \$100 to \$400. This provides for eight (8) certifications at \$50/person. This ensures that we have adequate coverage as needed. The BOS agreed.
- The trash removal expenses in 2023 have exceeded the budgeted amount. In 2024, Peter anticipates we will spend approximately \$27,000.
- Peter purchased trash bags for ~\$7,000. The team felt that we did not need to budget for purchasing these bags as the account would ultimately be reimbursed. \$1 will be added to the account to assist with tracking (revolving account).
- Dennis and Joe will revisit the electric utility predictions.
- The propane heater in the transfer station is unreliable; the pilot blows out with the wind. Heat is critical to prevent items and water from freezing. Peter recommended we include \$2,000 for an electric heater.

Meeting Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45pm.