

Public Safety Subcommittee
September 29, 2009

Fire Department, 7:30 AM:

Present: Jay Lyon, Fire Chief; Steve Ensign, Chair, Board of Firewards; Kathy Bianchi, Celeste Cook, Jack Sheehan, Doug Baxter, Larry Ballin, Tina Helm

Jay Lyon explained the Fire Department's budget process, which uses a zero-based budget for transparency purposes starting at the time that the full-time position was added to the department. He said that the only problem with a zero-based budget is the lack of funding for unforeseen problems, such as the pump repairs on the ladder truck. Unfortunately, other items that were in the budget this year will not be purchased and will have to be added to the budget in the future. This has happened in the past (for example, the axle for the air trailer was bumped because of another ladder malfunction). The budget proposed for 2010 contains a 1.5% increase that includes \$3,500 for a vehicle stabilization kit to safely stabilize rolled vehicles so that they do not roll back onto the patient or emergency workers (to replace cutting a tree out of the woods to support the vehicle) and \$4,000 for replacement of a thermal imaging camera that detects heat and saves work and impact on homes because the camera can locate the fire source rather than ripping out the wall to find the fire (Jay referred to a fire in Pressey Court where one of the lieutenants located a smoldering fire behind the fire place and was able to isolate the damage to a small area).

Doug Baxter asked if the \$4,000 increase was for the thermal imaging camera, and Jay Lyon confirmed that it was. He explained that the modified camera will decipher temperatures up to 2000 degrees rather than 700 degrees that the current camera measures. Mr. Baxter asked if that device also helped find people or animals in a fire, and Jay Lyon replied in the affirmative.

Jay Lyon pointed out that the remaining line items are primarily the same, even though it's a zero-based budget, because there are some costs that are the same from year-to-year (telephone, pager expenses, for example). Equipment Repair & Maintenance has been wiped out in 2009 due to the ladder repair, and the Engine is also out for repair. Jessie Levine asked if the \$7,700 figure in the budget would go up next year to cover what was bumped this year, and Chief Lyon said that he would like to wait to see how the next couple of weeks come out.

Steve Ensign said that he has spoken to Jessie Levine about creating a contingency fund, because when we budget tightly in the town, we do not have the funds available when something goes wrong and our trucks need to be functional. Mr. Ensign asked if there is an opportunity going forward to address a serious malfunction in an important piece of equipment in a short period of time when no funds are available to fix it. Mr. Ensign said that he is concerned because stuff happens, and the older the equipment gets the more likely it is to happen. Doug Baxter said that with the life expectancy that we have and the way the equipment is used, these things are going to come up.

Jack Sheehan asked if there is room in this \$6 million budget to take funds from another department. Ms. Levine explained that the budgets are too tight at this point and it is inappropriate for one department to rely on another department underspending to cover emergencies. Jessie Levine explained that she is analyzing the repair & maintenance budgets for each department so that planned repairs can be part of the annual budget and a portion of the funds placed into an expendable trust fund that can be used in emergencies. She hopes this can be done using the same budget. She stated that the Public Works Department budgets \$48,000 for equipment repairs and that line item has been over spent for the last few years.

Jay Lyon explained the hours and use of the two full-time positions, which allow cross-coverage during the daytime hours so that while one person is doing inspections, the other person is available to respond to calls. The on-call officers are on-call in the evening hours. In the past, when there was one full-time officer, he was scheduled from 8-4 and he would either stay on call or the on-call officers would go on-call at 4:00 or so. Now, the on-call officers can get home from work, eat dinner, and take call after 7:00 PM and cover overnight. So this has worked well from a personnel perspective but also from a budgetary perspective. Steve Ensign said that this is particularly true with the number of calls that we have now; we could not continue to run a department in which everyone is sent out to every call.

During the day, Chief Lyon is available for planning board meetings, site plan reviews, inspections, and similar functions, leaving Karl Bjorkland available for other calls. Some of the calls may not be fire-related calls, but when people don't know whom to call, they call the Fire Department. Steve Ensign said that the Fire Department is a good source of man-power and said that it has been interesting to watch the transition to better management of resources and man-power. When the Fire Department argued for the second full-time officer and set in place the current system, there was some debate as to how it would work and it has worked out well.

Jack Sheehan referred to the Fire Department's supplemental handout (tab A in the budget packet) and pointed out that the heads "2008 budget" and "2009 proposed" should be 2009 and 2010, respectively. He said that the cost for the stabilization system is \$3,500, but noted that on the breakdown the cost was \$4,950. Jay Lyon replied that this year, the budget was prepared to purchase certain things, and those have been purchased and different items are being planned for purchase this year. Jessie Levine explained that different things were being purchased in last year's budget than this year's budget, and the net increase is \$3,500.

Jack Sheehan said that if one takes year-to-date expenditures through September and projected them at a constant rate for the balance of the year, the year-end expenses would come in at about \$240,000 against a budget of \$278,000, and next year's budget is proposed to be \$285,000. He asked if it's appropriate to project a straight-line of expenses from now to year-end. Jay Lyon said that it is not, because the 2009 budget was submitted in August 2008 and the year started January 1. Departments minimize spending from January 1 until the budget was approved at Town Meeting, and even then funds cannot be spent until June when the tax bills come in. In addition, he does not spend all of the funds right off the bat in case something comes up during the year (for instance, ladder truck repair). He noted that there are some maintenance issues that have to be performed on-going, but he tries to wait until October-November to be able to spend everything by December. Last year, part-time wages were pinched because of the ice storm during which we responded to 75 calls in 24 hours and had not planned for that. Jack Sheehan said that given that some spending is being delayed until year-end, does that address Steve's question about the contingency fund? Jay Lyon said that it does not, because when specific items are being delayed, they have to be bumped to next year, which creates a leap frog effect.

Jack Sheehan said that of the two big expenditures for next year -- the stabilization system and the thermal imaging camera. -- if one had to be given up, which would he prefer to give up. Jay Lyon said that as a life safety issue, with 16 rollovers and a number of motor vehicle accidents, the stabilization would be used a lot. The thermal imaging camera is also a vital piece of equipment and there is only one for the whole department. He said that the existing camera works, but by retrofitting rather than purchasing a new one, the Fire Department is spending \$4,000 rather than \$10,000. Jack Sheehan asked how many of the 16 rollovers had to be stabilized and Jay Lyon replied that all motor vehicle accidents must be stabilized right off the bat. Tina Helm asked if the imaging camera is something that could be shared with another town. Jay Lyon replied that it is not; NFPA recommends a thermal imaging camera on every single piece of apparatus. He said that departments want a camera in the building as quickly as

possible rather than waiting for another town to get there; the longer it takes to get the camera there, the less chance of finding a survivable subject. He added that fires double in size every 30 seconds, so time is of the essence to find the source of the fire.

Celeste Cook asked if there are grants for this type of purchase. Jay Lyon said that the existing camera was received for a grant and he applies for every grant possible, but there are 32,000 other fire departments going after the same funds. Kathy Bianchi asked if we will receive any grants this year. Jay Lyon said that we have applied for a \$150,000 grant to replace air packs, but we will not know if that is successful until at least December.

Jack Sheehan noted that the budget does not include health insurance benefits and asked when that would be known. Jessie Levine said that should be known by mid-October. Tina Helm said that in listening to Jay Lyon and hearing that he had to postpone spending, she asked if the change of fiscal year would ameliorate the waiting game in any way. Steve Ensign said that his understanding is that we would be approving the budget before we get to the year, so there would be a tax bill collected even before spending began. He said that he has not given it a lot of thought but thinks that if we are fully funded going in, it would make the cash flow much easier. Jay Lyon said that he does not foresee any problems with the change of the fiscal year.

Jack Sheehan asked if the \$10,000 of capital deposits for the air packs is for replacement equipment, and Jay Lyon confirmed that it was. Some of the equipment on the airpacks is from 1978. That is what the grant is being applied for. The Town was successful when it applied for an air station grant and was able to return the unspent capital reserve funds to the taxpayers. As the Fire Department waits to make replacements, the cost of the packs goes up (currently \$6,500 per pack). The money that is being put away is not going to be enough to replace all of them, and we should replace them all at the same time because as technology changes, two packs could be entirely different. That is the rationale for replacing them all at once.

Jack Sheehan said that in order to replace the pump on the ladder, other items had to be deferred. He asked if they are significant and have been included in next year's budget. Jay Lyon said that they are all important maintenance and repair items.

Jay Lyon offered to give Jack Sheehan a tour at a time of his convenience, since he was appointed to the Budget Committee after the tours took place. Meeting suspending at 8:20 AM to go to the Police Station.

Police Department: The Public Safety subcommittee went to the Police Department and joined Police Chief David Seastrand. Chief Seastrand explained that the department is halfway through this year's major purchases, replacing the Comlog in the dispatch center that holds obsolete DVD systems to one that holds almost a years worth of recordings on its memory and uses the standard DVD's. That was from the Department's capital budget in 2009. The video portion will still go in this year, and the old SUV is being replaced by the new Expedition and the radios will be transferred today into the new vehicle. When the radio people come today, Chief Seastrand will also talk to them about replacing some of the old portable radios.

Chief Seastrand said that going forward into 2010, there are only a few increases: the telephone line item will increase \$500 because it has crept up even though we have gotten rid of some pagers; Dues & Subscriptions has increased by \$100 to cover the increase of the Special Operations Unit membership; under dispatch Computer Support & License, \$4500 has been moved from the police line item into that one for contract work that has to be done for the dispatch computers, Crimestar licenses, etc., and should

be shared by the other towns; dispatch uniforms are being replaced this year and will continue to next year (there has been some difficulty finding larger sizes on some clothing and having consistent logos).

Chief Seastrand said that in talking to his Sergeant about cruiser maintenance, as a result of an error on his part about using the towing agency owned by the Sergeant's family, the PD has looked at all of the department's practices and where the Department has been able to save money in the past by using a local shop that the sergeant is affiliated with (Series 2000), the Department is now going to S&P Auto in Andover. A recent brake job cost \$800 and would have cost \$400 at Series 2000. Ms. Levine asked if an RFP was done before the brake job was completed, and Chief Seastrand said that it was not. Ms. Levine explained that there is not an issue with using the employee-related business if an open bid is conducted and it can be shown that the process was fair and open to all. Chief Seastrand explained that Series 2000 does not want to bid. Chief Seastrand said that the oldest cruiser will be an issue when it finishes its fourth year; the Sergeant anticipates that we should probably put more money into the repair line because the newer of the two cruisers may need \$1000-\$1200 of transmission work.

Jack Sheehan asked if the vehicle repair lines are for operating expenses, and Chief Seastrand confirmed that they are for general maintenance, not including fuel. Jack Sheehan noted that one cruiser would be replaced in 2010 and Ms. Levine said that was postponed from 2009. Jack Sheehan noted that the CIP listed a 2000 vehicle, and Chief Seastrand stated that was a typo.

Tina Helm noted the phone increase of \$500 and said that the Fire Department budget has remained flat. She asked why there is that difference in the Police Department budget. Chief Seastrand said that sometimes there is not as much phone usage, and other times there is more depending on what is going on in the department. He said that he has looked at the cost and is trying to manage it, but it seems to keep going up. Chief Seastrand said that with the dispatch center and the investigations, it is hard to predict how many calls will be made each year. He added that pagers are \$50 each to replace when lost or damaged, and the monthly cost is about \$2 per month per pager (but once we exceed a certain number of pages, there is an added cost). He is looking towards going away from pagers altogether and use a text phone message if the service remains consistent. He said that one of the employees removed the land line at her house and uses only her cell phone. Larry Ballin asked if employees are compensated for using their own cell phones, and Chief Seastrand said that they are not. Larry Ballin said that we should leave it that way.

Tina Helm referred to the Comlog replacement where valuable records were being lost. She asked if that was because the equipment was malfunctioning or if it was because a disk got full. Chief Seastrand said that discs do get full and overused and the technology was no longer good and was discontinued. It was a system that was state-of-the-art at the time and became antiquated. The new equipment has a hard drive system that can store up to a year's worth of communication. Chief Seastrand said that there was a call in Sunapee that they wanted to review for training purposes and the recording was missing.

Jessie Levine noted that benefit increases are not in the budget yet, although retirement system increases are. Jack Sheehan asked about the transfer of costs from the state to the town. Ms. Levine explained that in the past, the State covered 35% of the retirement costs for police, fire, and teachers, and in the most recent budget that was reduced to 30% for 2009 and will go to 25% in 2010. Chief Seastrand noted that overtime and probably gas are budgeted to increase due to the transfer to Newport District Court as of October 2009. Chief Seastrand said that preliminary numbers were run initially when this subject arose and he tried to do his best estimate, and anticipated somewhere in the neighborhood of \$20,000 increase in expenses (for instance, if a duty officer needs to be in court, that position will have to be backfilled here). Ms. Levine noted that expense does not include a loss of \$35,000 in rental income to the Town.

Ms. Levine noted that 35% of the dispatch budget is recovered from the other towns that we serve. Larry Ballin asked if there is any chance of increasing the fees to other towns, and Ms. Levine said that she looks at it every year but is wary of increasing the price to the point that we lose the customers. Mr. Ballin asked if any other towns are interested in coming on and Chief Seastrand said that he does not think that we should take on other towns. Tina Helm asked which towns we served and Ms. Levine stated that we serve seven towns: Sunapee, Newbury, Wilmot, Sutton and Croydon (all agencies), Goshen PD, and Grantham FAST.

There being no other questions, the meeting ended at 8:55 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessie Levine
Town Administrator