

MINUTES
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2007
SPECIAL JOINT SESSION
COMMUNITY ROOM, CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL
8:00 AM

A special meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 8:08 AM in the Community Room of the Chenery Middle School. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present. The Board met in joint session with members of the Warrant Committee to hear from Town departments regarding their FY08 budget requests.

Public Service

Town Clerk/Elections

The legislative budget will stay at the FY07 level. There is a slight increase in salary for the town clerk, assistant town clerk and administrative assistant. Our building rental costs have decreased because we are moving a polling place from the Methodist Church to the fire station.

There was discussion about the Town Clerk's interest in pursuing a by-law change to limit the time period during which political lawn signs may be displayed. There was concern that such a by-law might be thrown out in court, although Keefe said other towns have such by-laws.

Administration/Legal

Younger said the overall budget for these accounts is decreasing for FY08. We restructured and reduced the Administrative Coordinator position resulting in savings. We are increasing the number of Town Reports we will be printing, resulting in an increase for that account.

Legal costs will stay the same for FY08. Insurance costs will rise but previous budget estimates for these items were high so the budget increase will be less than the actual costs.

Accounting

The accounting budget includes the cost of the annual Town audit. The department has been able to reduce the time period in which bills can be processed due to the new financial software.

Information Technology

Dave Petto: Technology use by the Town continues to increase. We are budgeting an increase in the full time salary item to reflect the assumption of \$30,000 partial salary costs for a new assistant network manager shared by Town and schools.

There was discussion of what value in services or staff reductions the Town is getting from technology improvements. Petto gave the example of a GIS application that allows community development to generate abutters' lists in five minutes rather than in three hours by hand. In most cases, staff has not been reduced but is able to apply time to other services.

There is an increase in the software licensing budget as well as for upgrades to keep software current. The Town is also assuming its share (33%) of network maintenance costs from the schools for an increase of \$19,000. There is also an increase for GIS training for the staff.

Some computer replacement expenses for library PCs have been shifted to the library budget because they are not connected to the Town's IT network.

Human Resources

Diane Crimmins gave an overview of the department's activities. She is requesting 5 additional staff hours per week to handle an increased workload. The advertising budget is being increased because we have run short a few times. There is a \$4,000 increase in health care consulting in anticipation of a consulting need for the switch to self-funded health insurance.

Public Safety

Police/Public Safety Communications

Rich Lane: During the first half of FY06 we lost 6 people. We began FY07 with 46 officers budgeted but only 39 fully trained. With injuries, the first half of FY07 the department was run with 35 officers. The department is now up to 41 officers on duty out of 47 budgeted. The department seeks to add a School Resource Officer which hopefully will be partially funded by a grant, and the remaining cost split between the police and school budgets. This will bring the department to a total of 48 sworn officers and 59 civilians or 107 budgeted personnel.

Lane presented an organizational chart for the proposed FY08 structure of the department. There was some discussion about staffing. It was clarified that the department has 5 female officers.

There was discussion about the SRO position and the possibility of preventing incidents involving students by establishing a presence and building a rapport with the students. The SRO would focus on the high school but would be available to the other schools as needed.

There was discussion of regional cooperation efforts.

The Police Administration budget is dropping due to negotiated agreements on the Chief's position. There has been some movement of positions from one division to another to reflect more accurately where the positions are. Public Safety Communications has also decreased.

Emergency Management (BEMA)

Leo Saidnaway: The FY08 budget contains a \$2,500 increase for maintenance of the radio equipment in the new communications center at the fire headquarters. We continue to manage the CERT program to train volunteer emergency responders in basic search and rescue, fire safety, and disaster response - we now have 78 CERT volunteers across the Town. We received a \$6,000 contribution from a private foundation and a \$2,500 grant for equipment to support the program and continue to look for funding opportunities.

Fire/EMS

Frizzell: We received a \$43,000 federal grant for turnout gear, a \$7K state grant and a private grant for fitness equipment at the fire HQ. Most of the budget is unchanged, there are some additional costs associated with the new fire stations such as maintenance of the security systems.

He noted that the police department has been paying the fire department's phone bills for some time. That cost needs to be shifted back to the fire department budget. There is an increase in computer maintenance for fire-specific equipment.

The fire suppression budget includes increases for firefighting equipment including hose replacement. There is a new licensing cost for new fire vehicles classed by the state as ambulances because of the medical equipment they carry.

Frizzell said there have been discussions about bringing ALS to town. This would be done by replacing retiring firefighters with paramedics. Together with the WC subcommittee, we are investigating the financial feasibility of this. Currently increased ALS calls result in decreased revenue for the Town. Having our own ALS personnel would offset this. The goal would be to have 8 paramedics - 2 per shift - to start in order to license the ambulance, and ultimately double that to 16 or 4 per shift.

Culture & Recreation

Library

Maureen discussed the benefits of participation in the Metrowest Regional Library system, to the tune of some \$350,000 in services in FY06. The library has also reviewed its meeting room fees and fines and made some small increases. Circulation continues to increase each year along with internet and online database usage.

The library is facing increased costs for service contracts and utilities along with standard step increases for employees. Because of staff turnover, we were able to fund summer Saturdays and 16 Sundays which were not budgeted for FY07 and we have asked to retain those in the FY08 budget.

There was discussion of staffing and the difficulty of re-allocating staff resources to cover high-demand weekends versus a low-demand weekday morning. Maureen noted that union negotiations are beginning and this would be an opportunity to try to address this.

Maureen presented some requests that go beyond a level services budget. Belmont has a high circulation load per employee, and the Trustees would like to add part-time help for Sundays. They would also like to increase the Young Adult Librarian position by 10 hours, add four more laptops for the training lab, rewire the lower level for wireless network access, and purchase new window shades. These requests total about \$59,000.

Recreation

Bill McKenney: We are increasing wages for certain low wage part time positions such as lifeguards and skate guards for \$17,668. Last year's revenue was an all-time high for the department and our expenditures were under budget. The SPORT special needs program was the only one to operate at a deficit. For FY07 the estimated revenues will exceed expenditures and for FY08 the difference will be negligible.

The Board adjourned at 12:37 PM.

Thomas G. Younger, Town Administrator