

Finance Committee Minutes

March 21st 2019

The meeting was called to order at 6:08PM. Present were Mr. Steven Klein, Mrs. Sandra Walker, Mr. John Pshenishny, Mr. Robert Miller, Mr. Richard Long, Mrs. Prudence Spaulding and Mr. Douglas Newman (arrived at 6:15), with Mr. Nathaniel Yohalem, Ms. Michele Shalaby, Ms. Tara White, and Mrs. Sharon Fleck. Guests included Chief of Police Graham Frank, Mr. Chuck Loring Fire Chief and Highway Superintendent, Mr. Maureen Krejci and Mr. Joseph Krejci from New Marlborough Rescue. This was a joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee to discuss some of the larger budget requests with their department heads.

Police Chief Frank came with a more detailed breakdown of his FY 2020 budgets figures. Under **Police Salaries** [60210.00] he had requested in FY 2019 four extra shift coverages so that the town would have police coverage for 16 hours a day 7 days a week. At that time, he had been granted funds to cover two extra shifts. This year his budgets with the proposed increases in salaries of \$12,709 will allow that coverage. Questions centered about "Vacation, Personal meetings, training and overtime" (\$17,904). Chief Frank explained that he received three weeks' vacation (which needed coverage when he was away), and Officer Mullen received two weeks' vacation. Court attendance does not take place during the policeman's regular hours; and forty hours of training per year is mandated. Mr. Newman stated that he felt that 10% of the total police budget on this type of coverage was reasonable. Chief Frank stated that he makes every effort to maintain a carefully controlled budget.

Mrs. Krejci came to provide information about the **New Marlborough Rescue Expenses** [60291.77], the **New Marlborough Rescue Clerical** [60291.78] and the **New Marlborough Rescue Stipend** [60291.80]. Ms. Shalaby asked if she could describe the financial flow of these accounts. NM Rescue Services are supported by town funds and COMSTAR which at town meeting results in a warrant article allowing the transfer of these funds from COMSTAR to pay the accounts for the Expenses and the Stipends. When the NM Rescue provides services using the ambulance, insurance payment for these services is placed in the COMSTAR account. Some calls do not generate funds.

The NM Rescue Expense and the Stipend accounts are supported by COMSTAR, the NM Clerical is paid through the town budget.

Mrs. Kerjci stated that the **New Marlborough Rescue Expense** Account [60291.8] was asking for an increase of \$2,750. This request was based upon the number of calls. This past year there were between 100 and 130 calls. FY 2019 budget of \$26,100 is almost depleted. Some of the activities paid out of the Expense account besides paramedic services and ambulance supplies (\$11,500) include training and education. There are eleven EMTs serving. All EMTs must be certified every 2 years. This

certification involves three days and mileage. New EMTs require certification. Mr. Newman stated that he felt that the expense for training was well worth the money.

Because there were some discrepancies in the budget request Mr. Klein asked that Mrs. Krejci review the itemization on this budget and the amount that had been expended to date and provide accurate figures.

Mr. Chuck Loring Fire Chief came to answer queries regarding **Fire Protection** [60220.00] **Firefighters Stipend**[60220.05] and **Fire Department Clerical** [60220.88]. Mr. Klein stated that he had noted several large items in the **Fire Protection** budget such as “hoses” and “air packs” appear yearly. Mr. Klein asked whether the **Fire Protection** budget had put aside specific funds for these and if there was a longterm plan for the payment of consistently larger items, perhaps these should be considered in the “capital” items budget. Mr. Loring assured the Committee that the Fire Company made every effort to maintain a careful budget, but reminded all that repairs on the vehicles, should an emergency occur, are very costly. Mention was made of the Reserve Fund and how funds were obtained from that fund.

Mr. Newman talked about the great care the firefighters took of their equipment and that folks present at this meeting should go to their meetings!

Regarding the **Firefighters Stipend** there are twenty- one members in the Fire Company. Firemen get \$250 per training and receive money for each call that they attend.

Mr. Newman reminded the committee that if there were three full time fire fighter shifts the cost would be between \$90,000 and \$1,200,000 per year.

Mr. Loring, as Highway superintendent, discussed the Highway Department expenses under the **Roads and Bridges account** [20422.05]. The roadside mowing figure which in FY 2018 was \$15,000, and in FY 2019 was \$17,500 was now listed at \$25,000. The gentleman who had done the mowing for the past years is no longer able to do this. This past summer Mr. Loring put the mowing out to bid, and choose the lowest bidder, but added that mowing the roadsides in the town with 90 miles of roads 40 of which are dirt roads is no easy task. Mr. Klein asked if bids could be structures to limit the town’s exposure for how long the mowing takes. Paying by the hour puts all the risks on the town. Mr. Loring will put this out to bid again this year.

Mrs. Walker stated that she had noticed that Mr. Loring was requesting an additional employee. She wondered if the town bought a mower and used the additional staff would this perhaps save money over the coming years.

Mr. Loring is requesting under **Roads and Bridges Salaries**[20422.03] an additional full time laborer showing an increase in that budget of \$37,440. Mr. Loring explained that employees’ vacations cannot be granted during the winter months and the bulk of the road maintenance takes place during the summer months when one of his staff leaves to take care of the New Marlborough cemeteries. The maintenance of the towns’ 240 culverts and catch basins is vitally important to road

maintenance, and these need to be cleaned out frequently especially after heavy rains. If these become blocked water will erode and damage the roads.

Mr. Klein asked about the road inventory that had been done. Mr. Loring stated that this was not complete, but felt that it would be helpful once the data base had been established.

Mr. Klein also asked how the tree work was divided between the Tree Warden, the Highway Department and National Grid. Mr. Loring stated that if a tree fell on the road the Highway department took care of it. The Highway Department also took care of trees when they were working on repairing the roads. The Tree Warden was more involved in working with the John Fields Tree Company working on trees that were on the side of the roads and provided a danger to the road. Mr. Loring stated that he does work with the Tree Warden and National Grid. Mr. Newman stated that he thought that it was very important that the Tree Warden and Mr. Loring work together!

Mr. Loring was asked about planning the care of the roads during winter storms. He stated that during a night snow storm the workers begin to plow at 4AM. He added that folks wanted to be able to get to work and not all have 4-wheel drives. Regarding school busses they are now going on dirt roads which need to be plowed and sanded early. Because the number of dirt roads which other districts do not have (such as Lenox and Great Barrington) our town is not ready for school busses as soon as these other town are. Mr. Loring stated that he thinks that our roads are in crisis, for despite the laying of tons of gravel; a heavy rain will remove it and leaves problems.

Mrs. Walker asked if the Highway Department was granted another employee would he be used for mowing. Mr. Klein asked if the Highway budget received 50% of its increase request how Mr. Loring would use the money?

In closing Mr. Klein stated that the next meeting would be used to look over the entire budget keeping in mind the requests received by the larger departments and also keeping in mind the 2 ½ % tax- rate increase allowed. Other items like the Reserve Fund and Stabilization Fund need to be factored in.

When questioned about the "capital " budgets, the following items may be part of the capital requests, 1) the blacktopping of the highway parking lot {\$115,000} 2) Umpachene Falls Park {\$4,000} 3) Cemetery Roads, with no care for some time there are trees etc. that are falling down and breaking headstones, and the roads are rutted, 4) perhaps fire hoses.

Mr. Klein added that in the FY 2020 school budget the new formula assessment would be used assuming that it would be passed in all the school district's towns. Should this not pass our school budget request next year will be much lower that it would be with using the new formula.

Mr. Newman questioned the acceptance of the new formula stating that our town might not really benefit from it. Ms. Shalaby stated that the goal of the new formula is to even out the yearly

requests so that the amounts the town needs to pay did not fluctuate so severely and budgeting will be easier to plan.

The total budget must be complete by April 11th so that the Committee can plan to be available for meetings for the next three Thursdays.

The next Finance Committee meeting will be Thursday March 27th at 6:00PM.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mrs. Spaulding and Mrs. Walker 2nd and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted.

Prudence Spaulding, secretary.