

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

December 9, 2015

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**Meeting Date:** December 9, 2015

**Called to Order:** 5:00 PM

**Location:** 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

**Finance Committee Members Present:** Michael Naughton, Fred Bowman, Greg Garrison, and Patricia Pruitt. John Hanold and Chris Menegoni were absent.

**Selectmen Present:** Michael Nelson and Rich Kuklewicz. Chris Boutwell was absent.

**Others Present:** Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Police Chief Chip Dodge, and Dispatch Manager/Office Manager Marsha Odle

**Police and Dispatch**

Mr. Hanold had questions for the departments. Mr. Naughton will forward them, and Ms. Olsen will distribute the responses.

The Police Chief is in charge of the Police Department, Dispatch office, and Animal Control services. Ms. Odle, while not the official department head, runs the Dispatch office and is here to present that information.

**Dispatch**

- Mr. Naughton explained that the original intent of this meeting was to give departments an opportunity to discuss whether their departments should be budgeted beyond “level services” in order to improve services and operation.
- Ms. Odle is looking to request a level services budget for Fiscal Year 2017, with only step increases to increase the total request for Dispatch.
- Use of per diems dispatchers saves approximately \$65 per shift. Total savings this year to date is about \$650. One per diem in particular is taking more shifts as a result of the pay increase.
- Dispatchers are required to have a minimum of 16 hours of continuing education every year to maintain their certification.
- Ms. Odle described some of the additional duties done by dispatcher, which include doing background checks, putting together arrest packets, verifying that home checks are done and summonses are served, and tracking parking tickets.
- Chief Dodge added that larger dispatch centers just handle phone calls. Ours also takes over many tasks normally performed by police officers. So when the phones aren’t ringing, the dispatchers are busy with other duties. Dispatchers also handle a large number of walk-ins and deal with the media.
- Mr. Naughton noted that if the Town ever decided to merge our dispatch with a regional office, we’d lose the benefits of all the other work our dispatchers do for the police department.
- Ms. Odle noted that there is a strong involvement of dispatchers with police operations to the benefit of both groups. Morale is good, and dispatchers enjoy being involved with police work.
- Chief Dodge noted that he’s been approached by the Greenfield police department and local fire departments to handle their dispatch duties.

- It's difficult to hire part time dispatchers because they have to have the same training as full time dispatchers, but if we train them they usually leave for a full time position elsewhere once they've completed the training.
- The recent wage increases are helping to retain dispatchers because our wages are now comparable to other dispatch offices in the local area.
- The state has acknowledged the cost of the required training, and has offered grants to help offset some of the costs. There's no guarantee that these grants will continue to be offered.
- Mr. Kuklewicz asked what dispatch equipment the Town owns. The Town owns the CAD system and the computers for the state computer system while the state owns the router for the state computer system and the 911 system equipment.

#### Animal Control

- The Town's always had some sort of an animal control officer (ACO) except for a short period of time.
- Recent legislation requires every town to have an animal control officer. This led to the reinstatement of a shared ACO with Deerfield and Greenfield. Greenfield pays 50% of the cost and agreed to be the lead agency, which benefits Montague.
- The cost to Montague is about \$16,000 annually for an ACO who's available whenever we need him.
- The ACO has to attend an academy for training due to the job description. The ACO handles all animal complaints, removes dead animals from roads, and investigates dog bites.
- Of all the strays picked up, our ACO only had to put down one dog in just over three years. He works very hard to find homes for all town strays and works with the Franklin County Sheriff's Animal Shelter (which only houses and finds home for animals, but does not pick them up).

#### Police

- The budget for next year is looking pretty good because up to four highly paid officers will be retiring over the next two years and will be replaced with lower paid employees. The Chief is anticipating total wage savings of \$30,000, which will be partially offset by the costs of hiring new patrolmen.
- While the overtime cost is high, it isn't economical to hire additional officers to work those shifts because of benefit costs.
- Chief Dodge said he wants to create a Lieutenant position as a second in command. Chief Dodge has had so much administrative work that he's passed some down to Sergeants, which in turn means the Sergeants don't have as much time to be on patrol.
- The Chief plans to phase out one Detective position to help fund the Lieutenant position.
- The Lieutenant will be very involved with administrative work. The Chief wants the Sergeants to be on the street. The hope is that the new position can also take over some tasks, such as records requests, from Ms. Odle to free her up for other

- things. The Lieutenant will also be responsible for overseeing staff training requirements.
- Chief Dodge said that he offered his IT person to the town, with the idea that this could save the town money by reducing the cost of the town's IT contract.
  - Chief Dodge wants someone else who is trained to handle incidents as head of an incident command center. Most emergency departments recognize the need for this position do to handle increased needs.
  - The new K-9 officer has been working to raise money for a new K-9 cruiser. Over \$16,000 has been donated so far. There's also a grant available to outfit the cruiser once it's purchased. This was done to save the Town the costs for the new K-9 cruiser.
  - Chief Dodge received a \$5,000 grant for body cameras. Vests need to be replaced, and new guns are also on the list of things needed.
  - Fuel costs are down 42% compared to last year at this time in the year. While gas prices are down, the new cruisers have V6 engines that are powerful but are much more fuel efficient.
  - The department is switching over to SUVs for their cruisers.
  - The School Resource Officer (SRO) is paid for by the Tech School, but is available to the Town when not working at the school. Mr. Kuklewicz noted that the Tech School gets an experienced officer, but is only paying for the replacement officer. Mr. Kuklewicz also noted that the Tech School is very open, and since it's so far from town, it's helpful to have an officer on site. He'd rather be asked why they're paying for an officer than having to answer "why didn't you have an officer on site?"
  - The SRO is now linked to the police department's computer system from the Tech School.
  - The police department gets an annual list of 40 hours of required training for each officer. To help offset this expense, officers have become trained instructors, so most of the training can be done in-house. While overtime is still paid to participants, it's eliminated travel time and expense.
  - The Fiscal Year 2016 overtime budget request was reduced by \$30,000. Chief Dodge is still incurring the original costs, but is trying to reduce other spending to offset this.
  - Chief Dodge would like to reinstate the position of Special Police Officers. Specials do the same work as Reserves, but do not go through Civil Service to be hired. Reserves are paid \$14.50-\$16.00 to cover shifts, but when Reserves aren't available the shift has to be filled by officers. That overtime cost is between \$32 and \$40 per hour for patrolmen. Because the Reserve Process is Civil Service, there are not usually many candidates. Having a Special Police Officer allows the Town to hire someone not on the Civil Service list or to pick someone lower down the Civil Service list.
  - Mr. Kuklewicz noted that the DPW Superintendent commented that the new Public Safety Facility had a lot of issues. Chief Dodge forced himself to learn the HVAC system, so they've stopped calling the company that installed the system.

Their main service company sent someone to be trained on this specific system. The Chief then locked everyone out of the system and assigned only two people with passwords to operate the system. One is Ms. Odle, and one is the repair person. They also set up each room's temperature setting at set rates. The repair person will also be set up to fix the system remotely. Given the opportunity, Chief Dodge would rip the current system out and put in baseboard radiators. Other than the HVAC system, the building is doing well. The lighting system was replaced earlier.

- Mr. Naughton encouraged having someone in-house, either the Police Department or DPW, learn the HVAC system so everything can be maintained in-house.
- The Community Room has been a huge success with the public.
- Chief Dodge noted that he'd like better lighting in the front of the building.
- The Code Red system has also been a hit with departments and the public.
- In a plug for his officers, Chief Dodge shared that the Police responded to a fire at Judd Wire at 5AM. Employees were evacuated without their coats. The responding officers got a 16 passenger van to shuttle the employees to the Community Center so they could stay warm until the situation was resolved.

The Selectmen adjourned at 6:34 PM.

- Mr. Naughton asked how the Community Policing program is going. There's a day shift available for this, which involves being out of the car for most of the shift. The second officer on the shift will handle some of the Community Policing officer's calls to enhance the Community Policing officer's availability.
- Chief Dodge is involved in the Opiates Task Force. As part of this, he encouraged several local businesses to install sharps' containers in their rest rooms. Cumberland Farms has now changed its policy so that all of their stores have these containers.
- The department received an AFIS fingerprint system through a grant. This also can be used for pistol permits, which cuts down the processing time significantly.

### **Minutes**

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of December 2, 2015.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements-None**

**Next Meeting:** January 6<sup>th</sup>

**Meeting adjourned at 6:45 PM**

### **List of Documents and Exhibits:**

- Minutes of December 2<sup>nd</sup>