

BUDGET COMMITTEE

January 24, 2023

MEMORIAL BUILDING

7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Ken Jacques, Whit Smith, Justin Hastings, B. Manning, Darrin Patten, Jeff Milne, Tim Cook, and Bryan O'Day Ex-Officio member: Dick Hendl

Also present Select Board members Poul Heilmann and Amy Lewis
Police Chief Pat Zullo, State Police Lt Mike Kokoski, Steve Dzubak and Pam Laurie

Ken asked for a roll call. All members were present including the Select Board representative.

Bryan moved to accept the minutes of January 17th Tim seconded Board approved.

Ken thanked Pat for attending and gave a summary of the Budget discussion at the Select Board meeting on Monday. He then asked Dick to share with the Board the updates from the Select Board.

Dick shared with the Board that over the past week he had been approached several times by people that are not happy with the prospect of having 3 police officers. One even went so far as to say "that new Police Chief is attempting to build his empire". Because of the negative comments he has spoken with Pat and Tim and they have decided to revise the Police Dept budget removing the request for a 3rd officer and cruiser.

B. voiced that he is very pro police having had family in the profession but feels that because the town has 2 high quality officers, they should be paid well so we don't lose them to other communities or to the State. He wanted to know why other towns that don't have police departments are allowed to pull coverage from the State Police which is a drain on the force that is supposed to be available to all towns. He would like to see Springfield hold off a year and relook at the situation. Ken agreed that the past 2+ years have had extenuating circumstances with illnesses and other events. Whit shared that he also had been approached with negative feelings about having 3 officers, some even wondering if the town needs 2 officers.

State Police Lt Mike Kokoski, Commander, Troop C spoke to the Board. Troop C is dispatched out of Keene covering 38 communities in Sullivan and Cheshire counties of which 18 towns use the State Police are the primary law enforcement entity because those towns do not have a police department. Statewide there are between 320-330 with 60 vacancies. Calls to Springfield are most often on the weekends and late evenings when there is not a town officer on duty. Some calls are not responded to if the event is not a true event or an emergency. Question came from the audience if there is a plan in place to fill vacancies. Lt Kokoski responded that there is active recruitment occurring, sign-on bonuses are one item being used. An example of the lack of interest in the profession; prior to Covid there would be 300+ showing up for info meetings/recruitment shows where most recently 16 showed up and all failed the physical fitness test which is the first test given. Another question was what types of calls are being received. Lt Kokoski shared that generally they are domestic issues, mental health, highway safety and winter weather. There were 84 calls between 1/1/22-12/31/22 that State Troopers responded to in Springfield outside of the hours Pat and Tim were on duty for. Ken thanked Lt Kokoski for attending the meeting.

A question from the audience was what hours Pat and Tim are on duty for. Springfield has coverage from 8am to 8pm Monday through Saturday. Ken asked Pat if he was ok with staying with 2 officers for the

coming year and possibly relooking at the situation next year. Pat responded that he and Tim were ok with that plan. Whit asked if something should be put in the part-time line in the event that something unexpected happens to either Pat or Tim and they are not able to work. After discussion the Board and the Select Board agreed that \$22,500 would be put in the line.

Extensive discussion of the additional employee for the highway department, to include was it the best idea for the Board to determine if and when a new employee would be needed since Peter is retiring and a new Road Agent would be taking over. The Board determined that the best course of action would be to hold Peter to his plan to retire the end of June, hire a new Road Agent and if the new RA determines they need an additional employee they would come before the Board during the next budget season and have that discussion.

Discussion moved to replacing the 2008 Sterling and if maybe just replacing the body of the truck would be a more prudent plan. The truck is still in good condition it is the body that has rusted out. A 3-year non-lapsing warrant article in the amount of \$70,000 that states either purchasing a used truck or outfitting the current 2008 Sterling with an aluminum body was agreed upon.

Tamara will update the budget with the above scenario and send to the Board members along with the current Fund Balance amount and the Revenue amounts for review prior to the Budget Hearing on the 8th of February at 7pm.

Submitted by,
Tamara Butcher
Budget Committee
Administrative Assistant