

Budget Committee
November 4, 2020

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Priscilla Colbath; Dave Mankus; Peter Kasprzyk, Sanbornville Water Precinct Rep; Ken Fifield, Selectmen's Rep; Elizabeth Conner; Denny Miller; and Paul Romano. Also present were Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; Toni Bodah, Secretary; and Jim Miller & Ted Taylor, Clearview Community TV. Department Heads/Committee Representatives were present as indicated below.

Public Safety – Police Department – Chief John Ventura & Lt. Chris Waldron

Mr. Miller referred to the line for gas (01-42101-635) and questioned why the Selectmen lowered the request by \$2000. Chief Ventura noted that gas prices continue to trend down and, knowing the Selectmen were looking for areas to reduce, he believed this to be one such area. He advised that the Town has contracts with both Irving and the State. Ms. Conner referred to an 8% increase in the salary lines for the 2020 budget, and a 6% increase for the 2021 budget and asked if these are normal increases. Chief Ventura advised that the Board of Selectmen have now adopted a new pay study and have been working over 2020 to bring pay rates up to the level of the new pay study.

Mr. Kasprzyk questioned whether the Town pays for gas for the cruiser that is driven to Kingston. Chief Ventura advised that the Town does indeed pay for that gas. Mr. Kasprzyk calculated the cost to be around \$12,000/year (100 miles/day x \$0.55/mile) including allowance for wear and tear. Mr. O'Connor stated that the Board of Selectmen have offered this as a part of the Chief's employment package, adding that the Police Chief is on-call 24/7. He stressed that this is the Selectmen's purview.

Mr. Mankus asked about the duties of the paralegal. Chief Ventura advised the paralegal assists with prosecution in any way possible, to include communicating with defense attorneys and the Court, organizing arrest files, entering dispositions. The paralegal is currently digitizing arrest files in order to eliminate paperwork. This person is also cross-trained to handle the front desk when needed and is responsible for the calendar of all criminal cases. **Ms. Colbath moved the section total at \$978,394. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 7-1.**

Public Safety – Civil Defense – Chief John Ventura & Lt. Chris Waldron

In response to Mr. Miller, Chief Ventura stated current expenditures include COVID-related costs, reimbursement for which the Town is working to secure via various grants. The expenditures to be reimbursed include the cost of PPE, as well as some salaries. Mr. Scala advised that the Town was allotted up to \$121,000 via Federal grants and GOFERR and had applied for reimbursement of over \$26,000. The State recently advised of an additional 'window' of reimbursement; therefore, the Town has applied for another \$94,000 for reimbursement of specific salaries, which we anticipate receiving. He confirmed that the School has its own fund for COVID relief. In response to Mr. Miller, Mr. Scala stated that we anticipate receiving reimbursement for all but about \$0.97 of the original allotment of \$121,000. **Ms. Colbath moved the section total at \$4500. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Mr. Kasprzyk stated that he has a great deal of respect for the professionalism of the Wakefield Police Department. His dissenting vote is not personal—rather he is looking out for the taxpayers.

Public Safety – Public Safety Building – Chief John Ventura & Lt. Chris Waldron

Mr. Miller questioned the long-term plan for the building. Chief Ventura advised the first order of business is to address the 20-year-old roof. He will request \$35,000 in a warrant article, bringing total funds available to \$60,000, hoping this will be sufficient to address the roof. Smaller things, such as carpet and tile replacement, will come later. He will seek grants to assist with generator replacement, and hopes to convert to a 3-bay sallyport. **Ms. Colbath moved the section total at \$114,693. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Public Health – Animal Control – Chief John Ventura & Lt. Chris Waldron

Mr. Miller asked about the K9 program. Chief Ventura shared that Echo has made some outstanding strides, recently having found a lost autistic person. He is great at drug detection. Officer Martino continues to do a great job with Echo. **Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$25,888. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Financial Affairs – Capital Outlay (Grants) – Chief John Ventura & Lt. Chris Waldron

Chief Ventura confirmed to Mr. O'Connor that the DWI checkpoint is no longer funded and WPD is applying for grants for DWI patrols. Mr. Kasprzyk noted that during COVID, many people are turning small homes into permanent ones, with many people moving into the area. He questioned how Wakefield PD is preparing for this. Chief Ventura advised that preparation is not necessary as the PD has adequate coverage. He reviewed their operations to address speed and noted they do not yet see a problem in addressing the safety of the community. Mr. Miller asked if there has been an increase in calls for security alarms and whether the owner is charged for response. Chief Ventura noted that only 1 establishment has been notified to better train their staff; however, there have been no other issues and no charges for response. **Ms. Colbath moved the section total at \$6121. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Gen'l Gov't – Voter Registration

Mr. Miller referred to staff being inundated with absentee ballots, which were very labor intensive to process. Mr. Scala advised that the Moderator email thread has been 'hot' on that topic. He stressed that all ballots were cast. If these numbers continue in a similar fashion, something will need to change. Mr. Scala advised that Wakefield saw a 75% voter turnout. We will either have to process absentee ballots a day ahead or change the ballot to a form that doesn't need to be folded. Mr. Miller suggested mailing the ballots in 9x12 envelopes; however, Mr. Scala advised that the envelopes are the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State. **Mr. Kasprzyk moved the section total at \$2901. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Gen'l Gov't – Financial Administration – Angie Nichols (and her cookies)

Mr. Kasprzyk questioned why the Selectmen increased the wage lines. Mr. Scala advised the lines were adjusted to reflect use of the new pay chart. **Mr. Romano moved the section total at \$103,427. Mr. Kasprzyk seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Gen'l Gov't – Land Use – Victor Vinagro

Mr. Scala explained that some salaries were previously spread between the Land Use and BI/Code budgets. All are now under the BI/Code budget (other than the line for the Land Use minute clerk).

In response to Mr. Miller, Mr. Vinago advised they issued 113 building permits in 2020, of which 25 were for single family homes; 48 for additions and 13 for demo/rebuilds. A total of 632 permits were issued, totaling \$92,603.75 in fees. In response to Ms. Conner, Mr. Vinago explained that Land Use is comprised of Planning Board and ZBA, while BI/Code involves inspections and is considered part of public safety. Off-setting revenues were briefly discussed, with Mr. Vinago clarifying that the \$92,000 received in permit fees relates to BI/Code, not land use. **Ms. Colbath moved the section total at \$13,002. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Public Safety – BI/Code – Victor Vinagro

For the past year, Mr. Vinagro has been acting as Shoreland Protection Officer, Building Inspector, Code Enforcement Officer, Health Officer and Land Use Clerk. He currently has W. David Stephen as a temporary, part-time deputy Building Inspector; however, the Town has advertised for a permanent part-time deputy. Mr. Miller questioned how much time Mr. Vinagro is able to spend on shoreland matters. Mr. Vinagro stated that staffing issues have not allowed him to spend as much time as he'd like on Shoreland matters; however, he is hopeful that will soon change. Meanwhile, he continues to put out fires in each department. Mr. Fifield stated that the 2021 budget includes funds for a permanent part-time position to assist Mr. Vinagro. Mr. Kasprzyk referred to assistance from the State with respect to shoreland issues. Mr. Vinagro stated there is really not much assistance, noting that the State has only 1 officer for the entire region. We do refer complaints to the State, but rarely does anyone come out. Mr. Kasprzyk stressed that the State should be assisting in protection of the lakes. Mr. Miller added that our lakes are our biggest assets. If the State doesn't do it, the Town must. He commends Mr. Vinagro for his efforts. Mr. Scala stressed that he and the Selectmen share in Mr. Miller's concerns. Mr. Vinagro wears so many hats, that there is a domino effect—each department that he represents starts to suffer. Permanent assistance is needed. Mr. Vinagro confirmed that the State collects fees for its permits; however, it never inspects. It is up to us to take care of our lakes. **Ms. Colbath moved the section total at \$154,507. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Gen'l Gov't – GWRC Repairs/Maint

Mr. Miller noted there is a CRF to maintain this building and questioned why other funds are being requested. Ms. Colbath stated that the purpose of the funds in the CRF are to address the roof (although the wording of the CRF is not limiting). Mr. Kasprzyk was advised that an elevator has been installed; however, the opera house area has not been renovated. **Mr. Miller moved the section total at \$500. Ms. Colbath seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Community Services – Patriotic Purposes

Mr. Kasprzyk moved the section total at \$1400. Mr. Miller seconded the motion. Mr. Fifield explained that the banners will still be used (at each end of a village, and maybe a couple in the middle); however, they will be augmented by American flags. **The motion then passed 8-0.**

Gen'l Gov't – Personnel Benefits

Mr. Miller thanks Mr. Scala for information provided regarding Primex and its competitors. Mr. Scala referred to the Life/Std & Ltd Insurance line (01-41551-212). Actual numbers have been received, and the appropriation should be changed to \$24,000. We experienced a significant increase in the Health Insurance line (01-41551-210). He explained that there was an error in calculating the 2020 appropriation (wrong number of plans), noting that appropriation should have been \$597,888 rather than \$478,094. In addition, rates for 2021 have increased by 6.4%. Across the state rates increased

from 6.4% to 12%. Mr. Scala has explored options available. The Town's current plan is the middle of 3 plans. He has asked other Town Administrators about entering the private sector; however, the cap rate brings them back to HealthTrust.

Mr. Miller referred to a 35% increase over a number of years in this line. He is concerned for the taxpayers, adding that at some point we might have to suggest the employees pay a larger share. Mr. Kasprzyk is in agreement. Mr. Scala stated that the Selectmen are aware and are willing to have that conversation. The Town is currently in the middle of the pack, paying 88%. Mr. Kasprzyk stated it is difficult to expect those receiving a 1% increase for social security to pay for this increase. The Budget Committee must represent everyone in the community. Mr. Fifield advised that the Board of Selectmen has had this conversation and has given department heads a heads' up. He also suggested the possibility of the Town and School employees all being on the same plan. Mr. Kasprzyk suggested we investigate a community health insurance plan, where anyone in the community could buy in. **Mr. Kasprzyk moved the section total at \$1,370,241. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Mr. Miller commended Mr. Scala for his first year in preparing the Town budget. Mr. Scala referred to several questions that arose at previous meetings:

Comstar rate of return – the actual return rate is closer to 70%, rather than the 88% stated.

Fire Department Training - Chief Nason confirmed that EMS Protocols are free, and stated that the language in the Explanation was out of date and will be revised. The Chief uses this line for training of new hires.

Fire Department Emergency Medical Supplies – The Chief does not enter a contract, preferring to purchase as needed, shopping for the best price.

Primex vs. Competition – Previously discussed.

VNA/Hospice – We have now received their request for release of 2020 funds. **Mr. O'Connor moved the request of VNA/Hospice at \$9000. Mr. Kasprzyk seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**
[Note: New section total for Outside Agencies = \$118,891]

Mr. Miller referred to the 2020 year-to-date revenue reports provided, noting that we always underestimate dog licensing. He questioned the 2021 Rooms & Meals payment. Mr. Scala has been advised that payment will decrease by %40. Mr. Miller stressed we will need to be careful in estimating revenues for 2021. Mr. Kasprzyk questioned whether any employees at the Highway Department or Transfer Station have OSHA training, which he believes would be beneficial. Mr. Scala will determine that.

Minutes – **Ms. Colbath moved to approve the minutes of October 29, 2020, as presented. Mr. Romano seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.**

Mr. O'Connor referred to Town warrant articles, which he hopes the Committee can review by late December. Mr. Scala indicated requests are coming in from Department Heads, and the Board will plan to review. Mr. Miller advised he anticipates the Planning Board will approve the new CIP document on November 5, which is an excellent tool for the Selectmen to use for planning purposes. Mr. O'Connor then reminded the Committee members of 2 meetings scheduled with the School in November.

Mr. Kasprzyk moved to adjourn at 7:40 p.m. Mr. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Secretary