

Budget Committee

September 7, 2022

Present: Jerry O'Connor, Chair; Marc Taliaferro; Tom Daniels; Howie Knight; Ken Fifield, BoS Rep; Dave Mankus; John Parker; Priscilla Colbath; Bob Ouellette, School Board Rep; and Denny Miller. Also present were Dino A. Scala, Town Administrator; Michelle MacDonald, Finance Clerk; Police Chief Mike Fenton; Superintendent Anne Kebler; Brennan Peaslee; Joe Williams; and Toni Bodah.

Mr. O'Connor called the posted meeting to order at 6:31 p.m., leading all present in the Pledge of Allegiance. He announced the Committee would first review Town YTD expenditures.

Mr. Miller referred to the need to be proactive in the area of salaries so as not to lose employees. He supports wage increases, but he would like to know when, how much and the impact on the current budget. Mr. Scala stated that most of the impact would occur in 2023, except for the Police Department pay rates, which rates appear to be behind the curve. The Town has lost several officers. Part-time officers in Ossipee earn \$30/hour compared to \$20 in Wakefield. Wakefield hires a fulltime for around \$20/hour, while Ossipee pays \$27/hour for an uncertified fulltime officer. The 2022 COLA was put into effect as of April 1, 2022, and the same is anticipated for 2023. Mr. Miller reiterated that we must do something about these pay rates.

Mr. Fifield noted that throughout the year we have adjusted several lines as necessary. However, the increase for the Police Department is significant, and the Board of Selectmen did not feel comfortable implementing the changes without input from the Budget Committee. The Board supports the proposed Police Department wage chart but has not implemented same. All recommended rates are still below the average rates of other towns. The Board would like to implement this prior to year's end. Mr. Miller stressed that the Town's rate of pay should be at least the average so that we don't train staff only to lose them to other towns. Mr. Knight noted that we lose staff not only to similar towns but also to the bigger towns and cities, and we should keep this in mind when revising the pay scale. Mr. Fifield would like to find a happy medium, as this would be a large increase to the 2023 budget.

Mr. Mankus would like to know what our investment is to train non-certified recruits, compared to the cost to raise pay rates. Mr. Fifield confirmed that Wakefield is typically a training ground. He explained that a new hire signs a 3-year contract. The academy is 16 weeks, for which we do not pay other than paying the employee while at the academy. Our goal is that if our pay is competitive, employees will not leave after the 3-year commitment. The increases relating to revised wage lines for other departments were able to be absorbed without addressing the Budget Committee. Mr. O'Connor questioned whether the Town offers benefits that would assist in employee retention. Mr. Daniels questioned the cost of the proposed change. Mr. Fifield advised the change would be about \$52,000 in salaries only. No calculations were made regarding NHRS, etc. He added that the positions up through Sergeant would be about a 12% increase, with the lines for Chief and Lieutenant increasing by 4%.

Mr. Miller asked how many departments will exceed their 2022 budgets due to current inflation. Mr. Scala stated that gas and electrical lines have been hit hard; and several maintenance issues have affected the DPW budget; however, the overall budgets should be ok. Mr. Fifield stated that the Fire Chief is happy with current pay rates; however, he will be looking to add personnel. Calls have increased dramatically. Mr. Scala noted we are no longer a Town with 5600 residents. Calls for service have increased in many departments.

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Chief Fenton noted that a decreased staff has been attempting to handle an increase in calls. Mr. Scala referred to the Fire/Rescue overtime line being overspent due to lack or unavailability of call personnel.

Mr. Miller referred to the increase in the number of containers being hauled from the Transfer Station. Mr. Scala noted we no longer rent containers—we now own our own, and they are hauled on Wednesday & Thursday. We have seen about \$195,000 in recycling revenues. Mr. Fifield noted that the user fees were changed to cover the actual cost of disposal. Mr. O'Connor referred to the contract with Brookfield and wondered whether there has been any adjustment due to increased costs. The cost of this contract is adjusted annually based on the Town of Wakefield budget. The cost is not based upon the number of calls to Brookfield.

Mr. O'Connor stated that it appears the Budget Committee supports implementation of the revised Police Department wage scale. Mr. Knight would like to see the impact including NHRS, etc. Mr. Fifield noted those areas will be impacted by the same percentage as the salary lines. Mr. Miller would not like to see the Chief and Lieutenant take a pay cut. Chief Fenton stressed that those lines can be adjusted later if necessary. They are more concerned with patrol officers. Applicants are not coming through the door at the same rate as they used to. Mr. O'Connor noted that often it is more than money that influences people to seek employment elsewhere.

Mr. Fifield questioned whether the Budget Committee is ok with the Board implementing the revised PD wage scale this year, if we can stay within the current budget (knowing it will affect next year's budget). Yes!

The Committee concluded discussion of the Municipal Budget at 7:16 p.m. Discussion commenced regarding the School Budget at this time. [Take it away, Priscilla!]

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Bodah, Acting Secretary