

TOWN OF FREETOWN

Finance Committee combined with the Board of Selectmen

Minutes of meeting: Wednesday, April 26, 2023

Police Station Community Room

15 Memorial Drive, East Freetown, MA

Meeting called to order: 6:12 PM

As the meeting was hybrid, all votes were taken by roll call.

Finance members present: Margaret French, Christine Dupras, George Grunwald, Katie Calheta, and Bob Alderson

Excused: Emily Anne Dors and Kent Wilkins

Also present: Jared Zager, Carlos Lopes, and Trevor Matthews (BOS), Deb Pettey (Interim Town Administrator), Matthew Parent (Town Accountant), Carlton Abbott (Police Chief), Harrie Ashley (Fire Chief), Lisa Podielsky (Animal Control Officer), Carl Bizarro (Building Commissioner), Lu-Ann Souza (Executive Assistant), and Lola Furtado (Administrative Assistant)

Omnibus Fiscal Year 24 Budget Review with Finance Committee. It is anticipated that Departments listed below will be reviewed. Others may be discussed as may come up or as they relate.

a. Police

Police Chief Carlton Abbott

Police Chief Carlton Abbott thanks the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee for the time he has worked with them over the last twenty-five/twenty-six years. He has looked forward to meetings with the Finance Committee due to always been respectful and having supported Public Safety. He also wanted to thank Bob Alderson and George Grunwald for being fiscally conservative and having worked with them over the years.

Ms. Katie Calheta asked Chief Abbott about clothing allowances for both retiring and replacement officers. He confirmed yes, they will still get the allowance. It will be a double hit for both positions. Mr. Alderson asked a question and Ms. Pettey stated she requested a number was added to the total in case we needed consulting/transitioning services for the Chief to come back and help with the new Chief. Chief Abbott stated in selecting the successor Chief and Lieutenant has taken a lot longer than we anticipated and is not finalized. We are down to the wire without sufficient training. This money will take care of paying someone to acclimate them to the new budgeting, firearms, vehicle leasing and more. Mr. Alderson asked if it will be Chief Abbott. Selectmen Zager stated the Board was hopeful there would be overlap with the current Chief. The prospective candidate has not served in the Chief or Lieutenant capacity. This is an administrative issue. The other challenge is he can't be pulled away from his current job to train

because that would leave that position to run short of manpower and supervision.

Mr. Alderson asked the increase from 2.4 to 2.5 million is contractual, Chief Abbott said yes, what drives that is the collective bargaining agreement. With the Board negotiating wages, stipends, benefits that drives the numbers up in the personal categories. It depends on their base pay, college degree, day/night shifts. The overtime budget was bumped because of the police reform wiped out all of our part-time employees. Our part time employees fulfilled approximately three to four full time equivalents. All of the shifts that had part time people are either going to run short. Trying to fill them now is at a cost of overtime. The nineteen dollars an hour we were looking at, is now an average of fifty-six dollars an hour. Ms. French asked about dispatchers. Chief Abbott stated we are down one or two full-time positions. They have been interviewing candidates. Some of the part time people are helping with the shortfall.

Town-Wide Fueling is under Chief Abbott. First step was to look at FY23 monthly average cost which was Ten Thousand Three Hundred and Eighty-Four Dollars and Forty-Nine cents. (\$10,384.49) was multiplied by twelve months which gave them One Hundred and Twenty-Four Thousand Six Hundred and Ten and Twenty-Eight cents (\$124,610.28) and then we used a fifteen percent increase which gave us a One Hundred and Forty-Three Thousand, Three Hundred and One and Eight-Two cents (\$143,301.82). If the money is not used up it goes back into the general fund. Another consideration is plows, some winters they are less in use than others.

b. Fire

Fire Chief Harrie Ashley Jr.

Mr. Alderson asked Fire Chief Harrie Ashley, Jr. how much did the Fire Department roll back into the town with ambulance fees last year. FY22 total income with ambulance fees, all our permit fees were Nine Hundred and Six Thousand Seven Hundred and Seven Dollars (\$906,707.00) back into the general fund. Ambulances alone were a little over Seven Hundred and Seventy Thousand Dollars (\$770,000.00) Chief handed out a document to the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee Members with an overview for the need of additional two (2) firefighters to be added to his staff for the next fiscal year. The Fire Department has 2 firefighter paramedics at Station 3, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 70% of the work week the staffing level is 2 people. 30 hours of the week I have 5 people on duty which included the Deputy Chief who works Monday to Thursday and flexes around the weekdays. Mondays he has 4 people. 1 Firefighter paramedic at Station 2 and on Fridays he has 3 people on. Also, I have a 10hr. day shift paramedic at Station 2. The proposal of adding 2 firefighters, I would move my 2 daytime firefighter paramedics to a 24hr rotation and the two new firefighters as well. That give him 3 people at Station 3, 24/7. We are in the process of an addition-renovation at Station 3. He would move the second ambulance to the center of town. 70% of the time when that ambulance leaves, everyone comes from their home. There is no one at the Fire Station if there is a second call. If a call come in, they come from home, go to Station 2 to pick up the second ambulance. If the call is from Assonet, people pick up the squad that has medical items on it. That is all a delay. At least if I have three, I do not need to hire 2 more firefighter paramedics, I need to hire 6. I know

the town can not deal with that right now. The proposal is hiring 2 for now. 2019 was the last time we added staffing. Rescue 3, the ambulance at Station 3 responded to 869 calls. The backup ambulance which is at Station 2 responded to 323 calls. Ambulance income from billing at that time was Four Hundred and Eighty-One Thousand, Eight Hundred and Four Dollars (\$481,804.00) Covid years misconstrued the numbers. FY 22 had over a thousand calls and the seconded truck had 116 calls. As of this year Rescue 3 had already done 600 calls. We are projected to do 1200 calls this year. 54% of our calls are when I only have 2 guys in the building, during that 70% of the week. The MBTA will be a mess. Over half of train accidents happen at crossings. We have 11 railroads crossing in Freetown. New Bedford only has 3, Fall River has 1, Berkley and Lakeville each have 2 crossings. We need to plan to get to 4 people at the station 24/7, so both our ambulances have 2 paramedics with it all the time. The other safety factor from a firefighting standpoint is a fire engine with 3 people on it gets an awful lot more work done than 1 with 2. He realizes 85% of what we do is EMS work but when the fires come that is very, very important. Selectmen Lopes asked if all the calls are Freetown. Chief stated about a hundred mutually aid calls a year. The majority is going to New Bedford. There is income generated through the billing on those calls. So, it is not a loss. Sister communities of Rochester, Berkley and Lakeville those are back and forth about 50/50. They help us and we help them. New Bedford has been going on for 25 years. Some communities have shut them off.

Mr. Alderson asked Chief if there was a new vehicle in his budget. Chief Ashley replied that there was for \$78,000 and that would be for the Chief and the current Chief's vehicle would be used by Deputy Fire Chief. He noted the Deputy Fire Chief is currently using his personal vehicle to respond to calls and he really needs a town owned vehicle.

Ms. French asked if anyone had any questions on Civil Defense Budget. Selectmen Lopes asked if MBTA, drills or the Lake trainings comes out of this budget? Chief said no, it comes out of the fire department training budget. The only thing that is salary wise is the Emergency Management Director's salary. Chief Ashley is taking classes and needs to work on getting re-motivated and reorganized. Taking a bigger role in somethings that we do now. There are things that fall under Emergency Management that we just do at the fire department level. Especially with sheltering and trainings. went up. Not contractual.

Ms. Pettey noted the Town got a grant for Hazard Mitigation Plan and Victoria D'Antoni from Planning will start the work on Hazard Mitigation Plan and we'll have a plan for any future issues such as the floods of 2010. Chief Ashley updated the SEMP Community Emergency Response Plan with new players and infrastructure changes and hopes to bring that information to the next department head meeting.

Mr. Alderson EMA Part time salaries went from \$2700 to \$6200 was that contractual. Chief Ashley said no that is set by the Board of Selectmen. He noted that he has compiled a study and wanted to have enough funds in there to fund any increase that is negotiated in June.

c. Animal Control

Animal Control Officer Lisa Podielsky

Mr. Alderson asked if this was an exception for the rate of the raise? Ms. Pettey noted she didn't get a raise in FY23 so this was a raise for two years. The assistant rate went from \$250-\$1,000. Ms. Podielsky noted she doesn't have an assistant and this is to get someone to be on call while she is away as she currently doesn't have anyone to cover. Selectmen Lopes asked if mutual aid from Lakeville. Ms. Podielsky said David Frates will come and help with any emergencies, dog that got hit with owner not present or an arrest and a few other reasons. He is seventy years old and he is not compensated for this work. Selectmen Matthews asked how does that communication work if you are on vacation would dispatch contact the assistant or call Lisa to redirect. Ms. Podielsky said dispatch would have a list of what are emergencies and they would send those calls to this proposed assistant. Mr. Alderson asked if there is any mutual aid from other times? Ms. Podielsky said at this point there isn't any agreements. She noted in the past there did have one but was only \$30 per call which she wouldn't go out for. Selectmen Matthews asked about training, she said they have to go to Animal Control Academy and there is continued training yearly. Selectmen Matthews noted that the \$50 per call she is proposing is reasonable. Ms. Podielsky noted the cost of academy was \$400 twice a week for ten weeks. Mr. Alderson asked how many calls a month does the animal control officer get. Ms. Podielsky did not know, she gets them through the Police, Facebook and Messenger messages and questions, Animal Control phone.

Postage went from \$60 to \$650 why increase Ms. Podielsky said with added technology the Town Clerk previously handled a lot of the things for example citations and now the ACO will be responsible for this clerical work. Ms. Pettey noted this was moved from the Clerk's budget and into this budget.

Selectmen Lopes asked if she is keeping office hours. Ms. Podielsky said she isn't there all the time as she has calls for kennel inspections, barn inspections. She is trying to be at the office and noted it has been a good thing as she has a dedicated space for administrative staff. Selectmen Lopes asked if residents know she is there. Ms. Podielsky said its very busy there and Vicky King let's people know she is there. He asked if there were any pamphlets or info to hand out to residents. She noted not yet but she will be adding them soon. She noted she is going to a coyote seminar on how to live with them which is great and this will be important as we live in the woods.

d. Building

Building Commissioner Carl Bizarro

Mr. Alderson asked if the custodial/maintenance is it one person. Mr. Bizarro noted that it is one person who takes care of the outside grounds, light maintenance putting up shelves that sort of thing. Highway does the mowing and he assists when needed.

\$52K for electricity for the police station each year and no one thought about solar. Mr. Grunwald said it's not too late. Selectmen Matthews asked Ms. Pettey to look into adding solar panels for the police station. Ms. French said you can't put them on this roof because it is a thermal controlled roof. Carl Bizarro noted we can put them in the field. Ms. Pettey sent the

electric bill to a vendor and has a meeting with them on May 4th and will have options for her and this also includes a potential opportunity to get a new roof for the Elementary School if we add solar panels on it. Selectmen Matthews noted to look into adding solar to the new addition at Fire Station. Mr. Alderson asked for an update on getting solar panels at the Transfer Station. Ms. Pettey noted there is not phase three electricity up to the transfer station there and she is working on getting a new RFP out to see about getting that done. Selectmen Zager noted that Ms. Pettey is a planner by nature and if she says she will do something it will get done. Ms. Pettey said she will continue on these projects to save the Town money.

Ms. Calheta asked about adding a part time position for facilities and maintenance. This person would help us do more things in house and not having to outsource. This would save the Town money in the long run. He noted we've fixed three roofs which resulted in an insurance credit and utilized veteran and senior work off program workers to also save money. He is working on making a maintenance schedule for many items that haven't been kept up. Ms. Pettey noted that over the last few years there was no maintenance done so Nadine, Tim and Carl are working on a maintenance schedule to ensure the preventive maintenance is taking care of as needed. Selectmen Matthews noted not taking care of things can make for a lawsuit if someone gets hurt.

Ms. French asked are we still paying to heat the old police station. Ms. Pettey said the Town pays the invoice and the food pantry reimburses.

Selectmen Matthews asked if the pods increase our costs. Ms. Pettey noted there are heat pumps in them to heat and cool them so she doesn't expect them to increase too much and the pods need to be ordered and will be nine months out so it won't affect next year's budget.

Mr. Alderson asked about Town Property Repairs and Maintenance Service Buildings and Grounds-Police went from Five Thousand to Twenty-Five Thousand, Mr. Bizarro stated it is about preventive maintenance. Because it was not done before and now, we have to try to keep those programs in place to stop any further deterioration of the building. It is a beautiful building but it going to have to be maintained. It went up because there was nothing in place. We are trying to create a program and offset costs. Systems like the HVAC systems for a yearly maintenance was quoted at Thirty Thousand Dollars. Ms. Pettey stated just for reference we have spent Twenty-Five Thousand, Three Hundred Thirty-Six Dollars to date just on repairs to this building. We just had another repair to the back gate that was Three Thousand Dollars. She was the one to increase that number because we are way off the mark with what we need to do for this building. There is also the sprinkler system, water system and generators. That is not including repairs just maintenance contracts. Selectmen Matthews mentioned that this is a Fourteen Million Dollar building and Thirty-Five Thousand is .25 % of the original cost. Carl Bizarro noted that the water filtration system was not properly maintained and that has caused other issues with valves and other areas in the building. Mr. Alderson asked if there was a way to avoid this in the future for the Police Station and Fire Station. Carl said you need high tech services which cost more. Selectmen Zager said it was like we have a new building and forgot about it and didn't do the maintenance and he wants to ensure this doesn't happen moving

forward. Ms. Pettey said going forward on the day these buildings get occupancy permits we have to have a maintenance plan in place.

Mr. Alderson asked what is the total cost in electricity for all buildings in town? Carl Bizarro said he doesn't have that information Matt Parent said it is \$106,200 excluding schools, for electricity for the year.

Now we are looking at 241- Building budget. Selectmen Matthews noted it is mostly level funded. Mr. Alderson asked about the increase in Building Commissioner wage is going from \$78K to \$80,506. Ms. Pettey noted it is a 2% increase. In the gas budget Mr. Alderson questioned salaries and wages went from Five Thousand to Seven Thousand Eight Hundred, was it contractual? Ms. Pettey stated with our electrical, gas and plumbing inspectors, there is a lot of guess estimation are involved in how many inspections we are going to need and we need to increase it from Thirty-Five dollars per inspection. We plan to increase that before the Selectmen in June. Last rate change was 2010. The inspections are both residential and commercial and the fees for that are paid by the people who are being inspected. Those fees go back into the general fund. Mr. Matt Parent Town Accountant, stated building permits in total is Eighty Thousand Dollars, residential and commercial, everything under the building, plumbing and electrical umbrella. Ms. French stated it might look like a big increase but we budgeted for Five Thousand and so far, we used Twenty-Six Hundred. All of those gas, plumbing and electric are all paid per inspection, whatever is used is used, but it comes back in the general fund.

Motion to adjourn: Bob Alderson; seconded: George Grunwald
Meeting adjourned: 7:52 PM