



Board of Finance
Budget Hearing Minutes *REVISED*

Wednesday, February 28, 2024
Waterford Town Hall

Present: Chairman Glenn Patterson, Ronald R. Fedor, Bill Sheehan, Michael Rocchetti, Robert Tuneski, David Peabody, Joseph Filippetti

Absent: Robert J. Brule, First Selectman

Elected: Paul Goldstein, RTM; Thomas Dembek, RTM

Staff: Kimberly Allen, Finance Director; Christine Johnson, Library Director; Maria Balestracci, Chief of Police, Lt. Nicole VanOverloop, Lt. David Ferland, Lt. Patrick Flanagan, Admin Sgt Michael Fedor, Diane Driscoll, Office Coordinator Police Department; Michael Howley, Director of Fire Services, Linda Finnegan, Office Coordinator Fire Services; Rebecca Hall, Admin Assistant Finance Office/BOF Recording Secretary

Other: Aaron Rosenberg, President, Library Board of Trustees

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
WATERFORD, CT
2024 APR - 21 P 3:00
TESTED BY TOWN CLERK

1. Establishment of a quorum and call to order:
A quorum was established and a call to order was established at 7:02 pm, February 28, 2024.

2. Public comment:

An opening statement regarding the budget process was made by Glenn Patterson, Chairman.

Standing Motion: A motion was made by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Joseph Filippetti to have a standing motion by Robert Tuneski and seconded by Ronald Fedor to consider each budget as presented.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

3. **Library Budget:**

Opening remarks by Christine Johnson, Director of Waterford Public Library discussing the past year and the future role of the town's library for FY25. Aaron Rosenberg, President Waterford Public Library Board of Trustees stated that the library is a "modern version of the town square" and town's people value a good library in their community.

Discussion from the Board of Finance began with a summary of finances by Bill Sheehan. Ron Fedor questioned why the mission statement was changed this year. Mr. Rosenberg stated the mission statement had not been revised since

1999 with Director Johnson adding that lifestyles have changed over the past 20+ years and the mission statement required updating. Mr. Fedor remarked how he had not seen “entertainment” as a scope for a library and wondered if this in line with what other town departments in Waterford may be offering. Director Johnson noted that many libraries in New York and Massachusetts offer small, folk type music so it is not out of the norm to offer that type of enrichment.

Robert Tuneski queried if the new Strategic Plan was vetted with the Town of Waterford and synced with the goals of the Town in mind. He asked if other departments were included in the formulation of this plan. Director Johnson answered that all town departments were invited to read the newly proposed Strategic Plan and Rob Brule met with her in a few meetings to discuss this new plan. She pointed out that other town departments provided no input at monthly department head meeting and departments such as Recreation & Parks and Youth & Family Services did not respond to multiple meeting requests she sent to them. She met with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent to discuss the plan. There was a public survey held regarding the wants and needs of the town’s residents for their public library and there were approximately 400 responses recorded. It was noted that no other town department coordinated efforts to formulate the library’s new Strategic Plan and Mission.

Mr. Tuneski ultimately asked Director Johnson, who her boss is: the Town of Waterford [who is providing overall funding to the library and pays her and the library’s employees] or the Library’s Board of Trustees. Mr. Rosenberg responded to this question saying the Board of Trustees is the first operating body for library. Director Johnson said the Board of Trustees is her boss. Bill Sheehan clarified citing a revision in 1995 to the Town of Waterford’s Charter that any department in the town receiving funding from the town reports directly to the 1st Selectman, not another entity such as a board of trustees. Mr. Rosenberg retorted that over the next 3-4 months, the library and the town will have their relationship clarified. Recently, having met with the town’s attorneys for another topic, Mr. Rosenberg stated the relationship was discussed.

The board noted that the entertainment portion of the library’s new plan has seemingly been rejected by other departments in town, hence the lack of response and feedback. Robert Tuneski pointed out that the four pillars of the new Strategic Plan should directly coincide with the vision of the Town of Waterford and that the 1st Selectman should have the final say in what that plan should read. As a taxpayer himself, he is concerned that the library may be acting independently while receiving money from the Town of Waterford for its programs, building maintenance, and capital improvements.

Bill Sheehan questioned why the budget for FY25 shows a \$0 increase. Mr. Rosenberg added that an endowment was paying for several line items this year so no additional monies needed to be requested.

Chairman Glenn Patterson requested Director Johnson to provide the board the number of people through the door since Covid closures in March of 2020. The board would like to get a better idea of the number of residents served in the community by the library. Director Johnson provided the number of library card owners is approximately 6,000.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Library budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of \$1,006,837.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

4. **Police Department Budget:**

Chief of Police, Marc Balestracci, opened with a presentation of the FY24 year and the projected FY25 year for the police department.

Bill Sheehan questioned how the reduction in the budget by the Board of Selectmen will impact the cost of hiring three (3) new police officers. Chief Balestracci responded that the hiring of the officers can be staggered 4-6 months to absorb the reduction.

Mr. Sheehan then asked what the greatest danger Waterford's police officers face when responding to calls today. The chief said the first is domestic violence and the second is the current climate for police officers in today's culture. Bill Sheehan noted that the police department is adding an SRO (school resource officer) at the elementary level in FY25 as well as two (2) ASO's (armed security officers). He expressed concern for their training amongst our youngest residents and the staff at these schools. Chief Balestracci assured that all ASO's are currently retired police officers who have undergone specific training to maintain safety at the elementary school level.

Chairman Patterson requested explanations for line items such as overtime, staffing hour fulfillment, K9 Maintenance, and replacement overtime for the FY25 budget all of which were satisfactorily answered by Chief Balestracci and his attending staff.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Police Department budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of \$7,152,676.

Vote: 6-0-1

Abstained: Ron Fedor

Motion: Passed

5. Fire Services Budget:

Opening presentation by Director of Fire Services, Michael Howley discussing the FY25 challenges and financial impacts for Fire Services.

Bill Sheehan made a note to state that Director is indeed the town's "Director" of Fire Services and not a "Chief" due to the Town of Waterford's Charter and if Director Howley is interested in changing that title, he should lobby to the 1st Selectman to make that amendment.

Mr. Sheehan asked if Director Howley believes that the overtime costs will decrease moving into FY25. The director's response was no. Bill pointed out a discrepancy with the backup paperwork to the budget summary for overtime costs and projected costs. Bill wondered aloud if there may be more transfer requests necessary for Fire Services in the future in addition to the multiple transfer requests recently received by the Board of Finance in the past few months.

Bill questioned with concern the current understaffing of the Quaker Hill and Goshen Fire Stations. At times, there are zero personnel at those fire stations when there should be a minimum of four (4) responders to a call. He asked if manpower could be spread throughout the town in a more useful manner. He asked if the part time shifts could assist in some of the understaffed times. Director Howley said no due to fewer part time staff employed by the town. Fire Services faces many obstacles in hiring which includes: part time employees seeking full time employment and the competition that other local communities present for hiring the same individuals.

Ron Fedor pointed out a discrepancy in costs for part time fire fighters in the backup paperwork to the budget summary. Director Howley acknowledged the discrepancy and noted that part time employees tend to be more fluid than full time employees so the numbers will fluctuate year to year. Mr. Fedor pointed out there are many discrepancies in the backup paperwork and the budget summary. Director Howley stated he was late in submitting the budget proposal and documentation during the budgeting process and was unable to match the supporting documentation to that which was submitted in the budget summary. Ron suggested that everything should be updated to match the summary prior to the presentation to the RTM.

Mr. Sheehan asked for explanation of the cell phones issued for Fire Services and the landline costs at the Quaker Hill Fire Station. Director Howley said he is working directly with the phone companies to determine what lines MUST remain and those that are able to be disconnected. There have been multiple lines added over the years and several can be disconnected at this time but they need to be sure they do not cut off vital lines to the station. Bill Sheehan continued with questions regarding repairs and maintenance to the Fire Services fleet. He questioned if a large increase in these costs are anticipated for FY25.

Director Howley said yes as the current fleet has several apparatuses in the range of 18-20 years old which all require significant upkeep. The director added that the call volume has increase so wear and tear on the vehicles is inevitable.

Chairman Patterson questioned Director Howley about the specifics of the personnel summary and categories listed in the budget request. He also asked how the director could forecast that he would utilize less money for training in FY25 seeing that Fire Services has already spent \$188K of the \$245K for FY24 training budget. The director clarified the listing of categories for the chairman and responded that the training was heavy in the fall and winter months but will slow down in the spring so expenses for training should decrease. In FY25, Director Howley said they will be managing training more closely to help balance the budget cost. The chairman concluded that Fire Services adopt the Fleet Plan model for their maintenance and repairs report for their fleet so there aren't so many questions for explanation in the future and the two reports would work in synchronicity with one another.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Fire Services budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of **\$3,632,425**.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

6. Board of Finance Budget:

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Board of Finance budget requests for FY24/25 in the total amount of **\$80,713**.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

7. Contingency Budget:

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Contingency budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of **\$265,000**.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

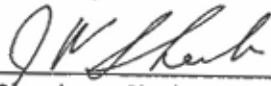
8. **Adjournment:**

Motion by Bill Sheehan and **seconded** by Michael Rocchetti to adjourn the Budget Meeting of the Board of Finance at 9:52 p.m.

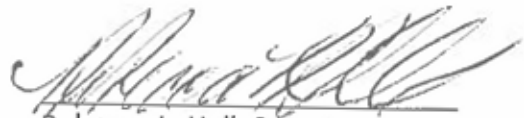
Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Respectfully submitted



Bill Sheehan, Clerk



Rebecca L. Hall, Secretary