

Board of Finance
Budget Hearing

Wednesday, March 1, 2023
Waterford Town Hall

Present: Chairman Glenn Patterson, Ronald R. Fedor, John Sheehan, Kevin Petchark, Robert Tuneski, David Peabody, Joseph Filippetti

Elected: Robert J. Brule, First Selectman

Staff: Christine Johnston, Library Director; Marc Balestracci, Chief of Police; Lt. Tim Silva; Lt. Nicole Van Overloop; Sgt. David Ferland; Sgt. Troy Gelinas; Steven Sinagra, Director Emergency Management; Mike Howley, Director of Fire Services; Linda Finnegan, Office Coordinator; Kimberly Allen, Finance Director; Shea Moses, Secretary

1. Establishment of a quorum and call to order:

A quorum was established and a call to order was established at 7:00 pm, March 1, 2023.

2. Public comment:

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

Glenn also stated that the Waterford Board of Education approves the Education Budget for the 2023-24 fiscal year in the amount of \$55,230,455.00.

3. **Standing Motion:** was made by Ronald Fedor and seconded by Joseph Filippetti to tentatively approve the budget requests for FY23/24.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

4. **Library Budget:**

There was a discussion regarding the personnel and reallocation of job duties. With the renovation it is operating more of a public space. Library Director Johnson and President of the Board of Trustees Aaron Rosenberg made a statement that they will be celebrating the Library's 100th year anniversary on 5/20/23 which is open to the public and people of all ages. They will be having live music, art, and activities. Feedback from the public is welcome to help focus on the future of the community and what they would like to see.

Bill Sheehan commented that the Library FICA line was not increased when the BOS voted to increase the OT budget to fund Sunday openings.

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Bill Sheehan asked about the fines for overdue materials, Director Johnson stated that they just reinstated the return policy back in November and people rejoined the library with a clean slate and it is averaging about \$15 weekly on money from returns.

There was also a discussion on the amount of visits from the same family and if the online services would affect in person visits. The library is seeing transitions and a lot of collaboration comes from the community center. Even though there has been online services, audio books, and emails, people do still prefer printed books in hand. They also have incorporated more children's books as well.

Motion by Ronald Fedor and **seconded** by Joseph Filippetti to approve the budget requests for FY23/24 in the total amount of **\$1,006,837.**

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

5. Police Department Budget:

Bill Sheehan asked about the greatest danger that officers face. Chief Balestracci noted ambushes toward Police officers have increased around the country and any call can be extremely dangerous.

Chief Balestracci and his team internal training and he pays tribute to his department's success coming from highly trained officers that will investigate a case until the end or there is nothing left to investigate.

Mr. Sheehan also asked about the sharing of resources between East Lyme and Waterford for the marine patrol control Waterford, East Lyme and the Coast Guard share resources.

Chief Balestracci noted the department will receive about \$50,000 from the state for a task force. He also stated that he is not at full strength as they are down 1 officer and expect a retirement around June of 2023. There was also a discussion around Animal Control was still receiving occasional material donations at the police station but are no longer seeing any monetary donations.

Ron Fedor asked about whether vehicles other than the Fords currently being purchased were an option given the current vehicles repair histories. The Chief

noted that options are limited and LT Silva noted Ford provided the best options for the car and accompanying equipment.

There was also a mention of the long standing issues regarding traffic and trying to slow down the motor issues in the public has been challenging. With regards to staffing issues and filling in the vacancies, Chief Balestracci stated that he refuses to lower the standards to fill in vacancies and he is happy with the team he has now as they have a very positive culture in the workplace and it seems to work to get the longevity within the department. Chief Balestracci is happy with the budget as requested and it will work for his department.

Motion by Ronald Fedor and **seconded** by Joseph Filippetti to approve the Police Department budget request for FY23/24 in the total amount of **\$6,830,602.**

Vote: 6-0-1

Abstain: Ronald Fedor

Motion: Passed

6. Emergency Management Budget:

There was a discussion regarding personnel and training. Director Sinagra stated that the town has grown and that call volumes has increased significantly over the last 5 years. The dispatchers are taking advantage of training incentives and right now 1 dispatcher has a Master's Degree, 1 has an Associates and 1 holds a Bachelor's degree.

He noted the department cross-trains dispatchers in both Fire services and in the Police department.

There was also a discussion on interpreters for emergency calls, which Emergency Management does work with a contractor, however, if the emergency is critical they do work with the Police Department to be able to interpret the call faster. Ronald Fedor mentioned that there are software programs such as AI to help with the transition of transferring the call to an interpreter, however, he does not know the specifics regarding costs, and it is something to look into.

John Sheehan inquired about the status of preventive maintenance on the towns emergency generators, Director Sinagra replied that all generators are up to date and are covered under Northeast Generators.

He also noted the radios used by Emergency Management are replaced based upon how often they are used and the main radio system's life span is 11-12 years. The last time the radio system was upgraded was in 2007 at a cost of where \$6.5 million. The department is working towards replacing the current

system and is exploring options included the state system. He noted that New London, the town's partner in the current system is also pursuing similar options. There was also a discussion on where emergency shelter supplies stored. Steve pointed out that some are still stored in the Town at the Community Center and Recreation & Parks.

Motion by Ronald Fedor and **seconded** by Joseph Filippetti to approve the Emergency Management budget request for FY23/24 in the total amount of **\$1,094,563.**

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

7. Fire Services Budget:

There was a long discussion regarding the shortage of fire fighters. Recruitment and retention as far as volunteers has been the biggest challenge. They have been reassessing the current program and will go before the RTM in April. They are trying to make volunteering more attractive by going into schools to build relationship within the community and how they can help. Fire Director Howley and his team have been working on rebuilding the incentive program to help with the retention of fire fighters. Mike did mention that their ISO rating has been great regardless of the shortage of volunteers. The volunteer companies that he works with have great volunteers.

John Sheehan raised a question on whether the fire fighters have taken advantage in the education incentives. The Director stated that 50% of staff have taken advantage of education enhancements offered. The new incentive program depends on the education, the more the fire fighters are educated the more incentives they receive. They are doing more education classes online to make it easier to fit the training and education to fire fighter's schedules as well as a lot of in house training by career firemen.

The budget reflects 3 additional fire fighter positions to the current total of 12 full time positions. The Director noted that staffing challenges have reduced staffing at Goshen and Quaker Hill fire house. Quaker Hill fire house is only open 3 days a week for 8 hours a day, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Goshen fire house is staffed only on Saturdays and during the summer Saturdays and Sundays. He finally noted that there was a retirement in October and they hired someone to take their place a few weeks before.

There was a discussion regarding the Oswegatchie fire house based on the fire study that was done. John Sheehan expressed that he would like to know what is going on with the location of the Oswegatchie fire house. Mike Howley did state

that the Ad Hoc Fire Services Committee is still active and was addressing the Oswegatchie issue as well as other priorities.

Board Member Robert Tuneski the chair of the Ad Hoc Fire Services Committee stated that the Ad Hoc committee had made a recommendation to the RTM to form a Building Committee which the RTM approved and was in the process of filling the membership. He noted that there is not enough data to provide a timeline as to when any construction would begin.

John Sheehan raised a question of the Knox boxes. Mike Howley stated that they are secured devices made out of heavy cast metal in the schools and commercial buildings to give access to fire fighters in the event of a fire or emergency. Over the last couple of years Mike has been working with Chief Balestracci and Steve Sinagra to make sure that the Police department and Emergency management have access to those boxes as well.

Motion by Ronald Fedor and **seconded** by Joseph Filippetti to approve the Information Technology budget request for FY23/24 in the total amount of **\$3,531,618.**

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

8. Board of Finance Budget:

Motion by Ronald Fedor and **seconded** by Joseph Filippetti to approve the Board of Finance budget request for FY23/24 in the total amount of **\$70,159.**

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

9. Contingency Budget:

There was a question raised by Ronald Fedor if there was a ball park figure regarding upcoming retirements in FY24. Director of Finance, Kim Allen stated that is a hard number to estimate.

Motion by Ronald Fedor and **seconded** by Joseph Filippetti to approve the Contingency budget request for FY23/24 in the total amount of **\$265,000.**

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

11. Adjournment:

Motion by Joseph Filippetti and **seconded** by Robert Tuneski to adjourn the Budget Meeting of the Board of Finance at 10:00 p.m.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Respectfully submitted



John Sheehan, Clerk



Shea Moses, Secretary