

The Select Board met on Tuesday, November 16, 2021 beginning at 7:00pm in the Finance Committee Room of Town Hall. The following members were present:

Mark Gallivan, Chair
Benjamin Barrett, Vice Chair
Glenn Maffei, Clerk
Nancy Mackenzie
James O'Neil

Also participating
James Johnson, Town Administrator
Aoife Kelly, Executive Assistant

Finance Committee Members:

Mark Sullivan, Ally Hamilton, Doug Shea, Jeff Fisher, Mark Trudell, Susan Lawson
Jean Kenney, Kathleen Greulich, Lisa Van der Linden, Steven Hendricks, Andrew Flowers – Remote Participation

Appointments

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Gallivan called the meeting to order at 7pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding Discussion

Finance Director Jodi Cuneo was present. Jim Johnson provided some information on this item and outlined that he is asking for authorization to submit an application to the County requesting the transfer of the available funds and authorize the Town Administrator to sign any documents related to the request for funding. Jim informed the Board that by seeking the funds to cover lost revenue, this allows the Select Board to allocate the funds to specific projects as they deem appropriate.

A discussion occurred among the Board members in regards to first obtaining the funds as lost revenue, the list of capital items presented to the Board by Jim Johnson in his recent memo and any new projects that need to be considered. The possibility of having another meeting in January with Department Heads to talk through the specifics of the capital projects was also discussed.

The Board expressed an interest in using the ARPA funding for special projects that might be overlooked or could potentially have a hard time funding in the future. Potential projects that were talked about were OPEB, culvert repairs, small business grants for business affected by COVID, Old Town Hall improvements, pond work such as dredging, public works in general – roadway, bridge improvements and HVAC updates in the schools. There was consensus among the Board that the approach going forward needs to be thoughtful with a lot of input at both the Town and community level.

Members of the Finance Committee also provided some input in terms of possible projects, including items mentioned in the Walpole Rapid Recovery Plan, reoccurring expenses such as funding grants to cover kindergarten fees for families, public healthy/public safety needs and a Johnson property study on the best utilization of the space.

On motion of Board member Mackenzie, seconded by Vice Chair Barrett, voted to direct the Town Administrator to submit an application to Norfolk County requesting that the County transfer available funds to the Town of Walpole and to also authorize the Town Administrator to sing the grant agreement with Norfolk County and any contract documents and paperwork related to the request for funding. Motion Passed (5-0-0).

Police Department Operations and Budget Discussion

Police Chief Kelleher was present. The areas within the Police Department budget that the Chief discussed in more detail were, staffing, fleet increase, connected energy weapons, and training.

Staffing

The Chief informed the Board that there are currently 44 sworn officers and funding in the budget for 46, but in order to stay ahead of the population growth and in order to increase the minimal manning on certain shifts and meet the 2.1 officers per resident the department would need to move forward to 56 officers.

Fleet Increase

The Chief spoke about increasing the motorized fleet, currently 11 marked and 10 unmarked vehicles but with an increase in officers would come the need for more vehicles, possibly an increase to 23 or 24 and adding a 4th marked motorcycle that deals with all of the traffic enforcement and also the community engagement events.

Connected Energy Weapons

The Chief explained the current contract is set to expire and would like to transition to better technology and have the ability to get the service the department needs. With discounts costing could be \$70,000-\$80,000 over the life of the contract.

Training

Chief Kelleher provided some information on two different training programs that the department would like to continue working on; bias training and ASHER training in conjunction with the Fire Department.

The Board discussed the gaps in officer coverage particularly on the overnight shift and the need to provide adequate coverage to the people of Walpole. The Board had questions in regards to any need for additional bikes and the frequency of mutual aid calls. The Chief informed the Board there was not a need for additional bikes at this time and the calls for mutual aid were fairly infrequent.

Members of the Finance Committee discussed seeing a staffing chart to better understand the breakdown within the Department and building in a vacancy factor into the hiring plan that would account for potential retirements. The Committee asked the Chief about the potential for different types of officers coming on board, potentially adjust the model in terms of the types of safety officers. The Chief informed the members present that he has been looking at the possibility of add a mental health officer something that has been very successful in other communities. This person would work a shift and respond to calls with officers, potential for this position to be covered by a grant.

The Board asked the Chief to provide them with more details and information on this new position and how the program works in other towns.

Fire Department Operations Budget Discussion

Fire Chief Bailey and Deputy Barry were present. The Chief outlined that in essence there are two departments within one – Fire and EMS. The areas within the Fire Department budget that the Chief discussed in more detail were staffing, fire stations and training.

Staffing

The Chief outlined to the Board three different staffing scenarios; current, immediate need and proposed full staffing of the department. The Chief spoke about the new challenges facing the department including the increase in numerous stories on new buildings which tends to be manpower intensive.

Fire Stations

The Chief spoke about the three stations, Station 2 built in 1911 and Station 3 built in 1923 that is only utilized during sold out stadium events and the stadium does offset the costs to staff during these events. Station 2 requires some modifications due to staffing. The Chief briefed the Board on the possibility of building a seconded substation on the Route 1 corridor or just off the corridor which would greatly assist with response times to the commercial districts, Route 95 accidents and easier access to the south, east and downtown areas. Something the department is looking at but no potential sites at this time.

Training

The Chief explained how the department completes all training while on duty, however this can be difficult with the amount of calls but it is cost prohibitive to bring the groups in for overtime. The department has a firefighter that doubles as a training officer and he is responsible for writing up the programs that the shift officer works through with their group. The department does not have a budget for sending out officers for training except for EMS/EMT training.

The Board discussed current staffing levels of 36 members but moving to 44 at the end of June once the remaining new recruits finished the academy and spoke about the need to adequately grow the department to keep in line with the growing population. The Board spoke about the need to have the Tower manned on a more frequent basis as buildings are moving vertically. The discussion continued around recalls, possible cross staff for the Tower, progressing through the staffing scenarios and the staggering increase in call volume.

Comment was provided by members of the Finance Committee on the need for staffing progress – funding aspect and also finding the staff, increased budget needs, uptick in mental health calls and regionalization.

On motion of Board member Mackenzie, seconded by Board member O'Neil voted to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the contracts for the two new fire engines. Motion Passed (5-0-0).

On motion of Board member Mackenzie, seconded by Board member O'Neil voted to adjourn the meeting and the meeting was adjourned accordingly at 9:40pm. Motion Passed (5-0-0).