

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of January 8, 2020**

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chair Tom Jacob at approximately 7:00 pm at the Needham Town Hall.

Present from the Finance Committee:

Tom Jacob, Chair; Carol Smith-Fachetti, Vice Chair

Members: John Connelly, Richard Lunetta, Louise Miller, Richard Reilly

Others present:

David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

Patricia Carey, Director, Park and Recreation Department

Christopher J. Gerstel, Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

Cynthia Chaston, Vice Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

Theodora Eaton, Town Clerk

John Schlittler, Police Chief

Chris Baker, Police Lieutenant

Paula Sheerin, Police Department, Administrative Assistant

Dennis Condon, Fire Chief

Deborah Bonnano, Fire Department, Director of Administrative Services

Citizen Requests to Address Finance Committee

No citizens requested to speak.

Approval of Minutes of Prior Meetings

MOVED: By Mr. Reilly that the minutes December 18, 2019 be approved as distributed, subject to technical corrections. Ms. Fachetti seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 5-0-1, with Ms. Miller abstaining.

FY 2021 Department Budget Requests (operating and capital)

Park and Recreation

Mr. Jacob introduced the budget and stated that there are some increases in expenses, but the biggest changes are the costs of the pump specialist, since the FY20 budget included only a partial year of that expense, and the pool chemicals, because of the unexpectedly high use of the pool and because some of the costs had previously been covered by the project budget. He reported that the pool use numbers were much higher than expected. He stated that there are two DSR4 requests for FY21, including a request continued from last year for \$67K for pool staffing which was funded through a warrant article. The second request is for \$20K to add booth staffing to cover the high demand. Ms. Chaston stated that they had expected about 19K visitors to the Rosemary Pool in 2019 based on averages from prior years, and there were almost 50K visitors in the summer of 2019. She said the operation went very well, and they were only three days short of their goal of being open from Memorial Day to Labor Day due to staffing availability.

She stated that revenue far exceeded expenses. Ms. Carey provided a packet with information about the Rosemary Pool Complex revenue, expenses and attendance in 2019. She stated that the pool expenses are still being balanced out as there are some items that are under warranty, and other some mechanics being worked out. She noted that the figures covered the summer of 2019, which bridges FY19 and FY20.

Ms. Carey stated that the FY20 budget included a new office staff person for the Department, shared 2/3 for Park and Recreation and 1/3 for the Health Department which has worked out very well. The position has provided constant desk coverage for the public, and allows Ms. Carey and other staff to do more work. She stated that she still has the goal of moving the maintenance for playgrounds to the DPW Building Maintenance division, which would move that portion of the budget out of the Park and Rec Department budget.

Mr. Reilly suggested that the Town consider creating a fund from the pool revenue to cover capital needs for the facility. Ms. Chaston stated that they have not yet discussed that, as the immediate goal was to have revenue cover expense, and they did not expect this amount of surplus. She also noted that CPC funds could also be available for the recreational facility. Ms. Fachetti asked if there were days that the pool was at full capacity. Ms. Carey stated that there were some days, particularly toward the end of the summer, when there were more limited numbers of staff. She stated that there were some volunteers who worked as slide monitors who could also work selling ice cream. She stated that it was very helpful to be able to offer bonuses to staff who could work later in the season. They used \$8,100 of the \$10K budgeted for such bonuses. Mr. Connelly asked if the pool expense numbers accounted for everything including staffing, filters, maintenance, etc. Ms. Carey stated that the numbers included all salary and expenses costs, including the bonuses, but did not include the Park and Rec Department staff.

Mr. Connelly asked for data about the revenue and expenses for the building at the Pool Complex, similar to the pool data. Ms. Carey stated that it could be provided. She stated that most of the programs use revolving funds. She stated that some programs have moved from other locations, and are going well. She stated that there have also been many Town related meetings in the spaces.

Ms. Carey stated that the 1st priority DSR4 request is necessary to operate the pool. The pool could not be run without the funding for this staffing, including the bonuses. The 2nd DSR4 would provide for more than one person in the booth. The request amounts to hiring three more people at 35 hours per week for 16 weeks. She stated that this would double the booth staffing. There was a question about whether 35 hours of training was needed. She stated that the booth and maintenance people are cross trained to be able to cover each other. She stated that the booth and all staff are trained in CPR and first aid, as well as keeping themselves safe, and are also given sensitivity training. She stated that the booth staff plays a role if an ambulance is called, so adequate training is important.

Mr. Jacob asked when they will be hiring a Park and Rec Director in light of Ms. Carey's upcoming retirement. Mr. Gerstel stated that they are very close to hiring a new Director. Ms. Chaston stated that there may be a future capital request to provide some kind of shade structure for the pool area. She noted that the one repeated complaint from guests was the lack of shade.

The Finance Committee thanked Ms. Carey for her many years of service to the Town.

Town Clerk

Mr. Jacob stated that he met with the Town Clerk, and that the budget was primarily affected by the number of elections. Ms. Eaton stated that there will be 2 elections in FY20 and 3 elections in FY21. There will be early voting for 10-12 days for the November 2020 election, but none for the state primary in September. She stated that there were 8,500 early voters in 2016 and in 7,500 in 2018. She expects at least as many early voters in 2020 as in 2016. She stated that the elections with early voting are most expensive, and account for most of the increase in the budget. She stated that the minimum wage has also been increasing. She noted that the pay for election inspectors is increasing, as well as for the election coordinators.

Ms. Eaton stated that the Select Board has voted to relocate the voting place of 6 of the 10 precincts to move away from using schools. Mr. Reilly stated that there are news reports of foreign interference in US elections, and asked if any measures are being taken to prevent that. Ms. Eaton stated that she is not aware of any such issues, and that the Mass. Secretary of State has testing requirement to make sure the elections are accurate and secure. She stated that the ballot counting machines are standalone machines and not connected to outside networks. Mr. Jacob noted that that upside of paper ballots is that they can't be hacked, although they are inefficient. He stated that absentee ballots are handled 4 times by staff.

Mr. Jacob asked if there have been any steps to combine precincts within the polling places so that the same staff could cover both precincts. Ms. Eaton stated that the most important factor is to be accurate, and that the precincts need to be kept separate.

Police Department

Mr. Lunetta introduced the budget and provided data about the department including that there are 61 staff, with 51 officers, who answered over 47,000 calls in FY19. This was slightly less than the previous year, with 8.8% being high priority calls. The requested budget increase is \$62K higher than FY20, and there are also DSR4 requests totaling \$207K. Mr. Lunetta stated that the collective bargaining agreements for the Police Union and Police Superior Officers Union expired at the end of June 2019, so there are no salary increases for covered employees in this department budget. Funding for any increases is in the Townwide expenses. Other increases are included in the request. He stated that there are currently 2 vacancies in the department and one possible upcoming retirement. He stated that the department is trying out hybrid cruisers. Chief Schlittler stated that they will have to get new specialized equipment such as cages for the new vehicles, but they will be able to re-use the equipment for 7-8 years until the model of the car is changed and it no longer fits. He stated that 11 defibrillators need to be replaced, and that there are also costs for new service weapons and ammunition.

Chief Schlittler stated that the first DSR4 is part of a strategic staffing study under Chief Droney which concluded that 4 officers were needed to provide adequate police coverage for the growing community. The plan was to add the four new officers over three years, with one officer added in FY19, one in FY20, and two officers added in FY21. He stated that this is necessary to provide the services needed to the community and to keep the officers safe. He stated that the study looked at residential, commercial, and commuter needs, as well as at school growth. He stated that without the additional officers, the strategic plan would be compromised. He stated that the proposed staffing level is 63, which would be 6th highest of 8 comparable towns.

Mr. Reilly stated that in the past there have been difficulties filling officer positions because of all the steps needed to bring them on. Chief Schlittler stated that they have been working on the issue, and now have people slated to attend the academy in the spring. He stated that it would not have been feasible to try to bring on all of the new officers at once. Ms. Miller asked if additional vehicles would be needed for the additional officers. Chief Schlittler stated that an additional vehicle was added last year. If another vehicle is needed, they would move an older vehicle into the rotation. Ms. Miller asked what happened to the plan to add an additional patrol sector. Chief Schlittler stated that it was decided that adding another sector would be too cumbersome, and instead they have added 2 umbrella cars that can provide backup for Sectors 1 and 2 and for Sectors 3 and 4. Mr. Reilly asked why there is scheduled overtime built into the contract. Lt. Baker stated that the scheduled overtime provides coverage for elections, and vacation and training and sick time coverage. He stated that it is considered scheduled because it is in addition to regular work hours. He stated that it is not actually scheduled but is anticipated. Mr. Connelly asked if overtime would decrease with the additional officers. Chief Schlittler stated that the overtime for shift coverage should decrease. Ms. Miller stated that the shift overtime would only decrease if there were fewer cars on patrol. Chief Schlittler stated that there will be additional staff for covering absences. He stated that the staffing should stay steady after a few upcoming retirements are filled.

Mr. Connelly asked why the Department should not continue the pattern of adding one officer each year for the next two years as it did in FY19 and FY20, rather than add two officers next year. Chief Schlittler stated that it would compromise the strategic plan, and that it is important to get to the appropriate level of staffing as soon as possible for service and safety reasons. Mr. Davison stated that the need for 4 officers existed three years ago, but the Town could not do it all at once for budgetary reasons and because of the lack of work space available. He stated that the current plan that adds two officers in FY21 is a compromise

Fire Department

Ms. Miller recused herself from the discussion of the Fire Department budget because her son is a firefighter in the Department.

Mr. Lunetta introduced the budget and noted that the department had revenue of \$1 million for ambulance services. There were over 4,000 calls, mostly for EMS services. He stated that most of the 17 open positions were filled, including the 8 new positions. He stated that they are expecting 2 retirements. He stated that the SAFER grant will provide salaries and benefits for the 8 additional firefighters at a rate of 75% for the first 9 months of FY21 and then 35% for the remainder of the year. He stated that department overtime is decreasing. He stated that, like the Police Department, the collective bargaining agreement for the Fire Union expired in June 2019 and the next agreement is in negotiation. Mr. Lunetta stated that there is a capital expense of \$304K for structural firefighting gear. Each firefighter has 2 sets of gear. He stated that the budget request is 1.6% higher than the FY20 budget, and does not account for any wages increases under the collective bargaining agreement.

Chief Condon stated that the number of runs has increased, and that the number of calls (emergency not inspections) was 4,167 in calendar 2019, an increase of 120. He stated that the SAFER grant has had a huge beneficial effect. The department can provide better service, and they rarely need to call for mutual aid ambulances. He stated that in May there was a 5-alarm

fire that they were able to handle. He stated that the new building will be a game-changer for morale as well as function. Chief Condon stated that ambulance response times have decreased noticeably. Mr. Jacob asked how the SAFER grant is reflected in the budget. Mr. Davison stated that the PRD1 form shows salaries, with an adjustment of approximately \$304K to remove the grant-covered salaries from the FY21 budget request. He stated that in FY22 there will be a residual amount of grant funding, and in FY23, there will be no adjustment and the full salaries will be in the budget. Mr. Reilly stated that the request showed 12 structural fires last year and asked if that number is consistent with other years. Chief Condon stated that the number bounces around. One year had 49 fires, and another had less than 10. Mr. Reilly asked if the 113 mutual aid calls was consistent with other years. Chief Condon stated that in the past the Town could provide one engine or one ladder truck for mutual aid, but now are able to provide both if needed. This gives the department better credence among nearby towns and gives the firefighters more opportunity to gain experience. He described how the mutual aid system works. He stated that having more help to contribute means that other towns will help them more willingly. He noted that there is automatic mutual aid with Newton in the Needham Crossing area because of the location. Mr. Connelly asked why the overtime is not decreasing further with the additional firefighters. Chief Condon stated that there are contractual reasons such as vacations that still require overtime coverage. He noted that before the recent hiring, they had fallen back by two people. He stated that one of the major reasons they were awarded the grant was because they were below adequate staffing levels. Now they are able to keep all of the equipment regularly in service. Mr. Lunetta stated that the union contracts are still in negotiation and asked if the Town could negotiate the contractual overtime. Mr. Davison stated that he could not discuss that outside of an executive session.

Finance Committee Updates

Mr. Jacob stated that he, Ms. Fachetti and Mr. Reilly attended the recent Planning Board meeting. He stated that he described the Finance Committee's concerns about the proposed zoning for the Muzi Ford area, and that the Committee would need to have supporting information with enough time so that there is an opportunity to review it, ask questions, and discuss the issues. Mr. Reilly stated that the problems with the article in the fall were more about the process than the substance. Ms. Fachetti stated that she was concerned not only that the information was not provided in time, but that supporting information had to be requested. Mr. Jacob stated that the meeting did not address the issue that the Board is planning to bring the same article back to Town Meeting without making many changes. He stated that they discussed the special permit process, and that he let the Planning Board know that the Finance Committee understands the process, but did not think it was relevant to the Committee's concerns.

Mr. Jacob stated that Ms. Fachetti would chair the next meeting in his absence.

Adjournment

MOVED: By Mr. Lunetta that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, there being no further business. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 6-0 at approximately 8:40 p.m.

Documents: FY 2021 Town of Needham Department Spending Requests; Packet: 2019 Snapshot – Rosemary Recreation Complex

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd
Staff Analyst

Approved January 15, 2020