

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of March 30, 2022**

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Executive Session of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chair Joshua Levy at approximately 8:30 pm via Zoom Video Webinar pursuant to a unanimous roll call vote by the Committee during an open meeting to enter Executive Session under Exception 3 to the Open Meeting Law.

Present from the Finance Committee:

Joshua Levy, Chair

Members: Barry Coffman, Carol Fachetti, James Healy, Richard Lunetta, Louise Miller, Richard Reilly

Others:

Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager

David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

Dan Matthews, Select Board

Collective Bargaining

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that there were three objectives to the Police union negotiations: (1) to change the way that they recruit and promote officers since the current system is not working; (2) to increase the pay scale to be closer to the top of the range because there is fierce competition for well-trained police officers and Needham is losing excellent people; and (3) to adjust the education pay to be more equitable for similar degrees. She stated that they were negotiating agreements for the current year, and also for the next three years. She stated that for FY22, the agreement is for a 2% increase on the base wage. She stated that for the next three years, the average base wages would increase 2.5% then 3% for two years, based on the classification and compensation study, but the top step would be increasing only 1%, because that pay was already closer to the top of the range.

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that the Town needed to agree to certification pay to get out of Civil Service. This provides recognition for certification under the police reform law. The members will be getting the certification pay because of the pressure of the work and to get out of the Civil Service system. There will be an expansion of benefits under the Quinn bill to recognize more educational degrees. About half of the officers currently fall under the Quinn bill. Mr. Reilly asked if there is any limitation to the types of degrees. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that it was limited to criminal justice or law, but has expanded to include sociology and psychology. She stated that the goal was to keep the increase to 4% for the steps plus COLA. This agreement will not be within the sustainability goals. Mr. Davison stated that comparing FY21 to FY25, the increase will be close to 27%, fully loaded with all costs, but the salary increases will be built into the operating budget. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that they will be making a chart to show the costs. She stated that the FY22 cost increases will come from the Classification Performance and Settlement line. Mr. Davison stated that the FY23 costs will also come from the CPS line and the FY24 costs will be in the Police line of the operating budget. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that an overwhelming majority voted to support the new agreement.

Mr. Lunetta asked if there were other issues negotiated. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that the Town agreed on a promotional process that is close to Civil Service. She stated that they want to be able to attract more candidates. She stated that Civil Service requires that officers live in Needham within a year of taking the exam which is limiting. She stated that the promotional policy will be in the contract. Mr. Healy stated that he is in support of the agreement. He stated that he has spoken with several officers who told him that they feel discouraged. They did not say that they were leaving, but they did not see it as a long term career path.

In response to a question from Mr. Reilly, Mr. Davison stated that the effect of the increased salaries on overtime costs is factored in to the estimated cost increases. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that the estimates are fully loaded with all potential increases. She stated that they added an additional holiday, Juneteenth. The Chief thinks he can cover that within the current overtime budget. Because there are additional personnel, they are now able to cover sick time without using overtime.

Mr. Lunetta asked what happened with the body camera study. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that they found that it was not the right time when they looked at that. The cameras then could not store data. She stated that there are a lot of privacy issues, and they want to explore it further. Mr. Matthews stated that there are new legal standards that apply to police officers, and it is a difficult environment for them. He feels that the current agreement is the best place to be at this time. He stated that in order to improve public service, the Town needs to pay more. Mr. Reilly stated that it would be helpful to know where Needham's pay stands compared to other towns and also to compare what police would make in other fields if the Town wants to make the salary comparable. Mr. Matthews stated that they need fully qualified, good people and the market is very competitive.

Fire Union Strategy

Mr. Levy stated that he wanted to discuss the Fire union agreement. Ms. Miller recused herself due to a potential conflict of interest and left the room at 8:55 pm. Mr. Levy stated that the goal was to have a 3-year agreement. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that the Police union has legal counsel to address sophisticated issues. The Town is working on a one-year agreement with the Fire union through June 2022 because they felt that was the most reasonable option. They did not think that the Fire union would be ready to agree to forgo Civil Service at this point. The Town won't do a 3-year agreement without that.

She stated that they are impact bargaining with the Police superior officers. The Chief and Deputy Chief are not in the union. They will all be subject to one HR policy eventually.

Adjournment

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, there being no further business, and not to return to open session. Mr. Coffman seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote of 7-0 at approximately 9:00 p.m. (Ms. Miller had recused herself from the meeting prior to discussion on strategy for the Fire Union.)

Document: Finance Committee Update, March 30, 2022, Police Union

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd
Staff Analyst

Approved June 21, 2023