

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
BUDGET/MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Town Hall Council Chambers
April 18, 2006 - Tuesday

Present: Kenneth DiFazio, Chairperson
 Paul J. Leary
 Michael Molisse
 Patrick O'Connor

Not Present: Susan Kay

Also Present: Jane Hackett, Chief of Staff
 James Wilson, Chief Financial Officer
 Richard Swanson, Town Auditor
 Chief Leary, Fire Department
 Michael Smart
 Arthur Mathews
 Thomas J. Lacey
 Kevin Whitaker

Recording Secretary: Mary Briggs

Chairman Kenneth DiFazio called the Budget/Management Committee meeting to order at 6:15 PM. He noted that Councilor Kay was unable to attend due to illness, but that Councilors Lacey and Whitaker are present.

The purpose of the meeting is a Review and Discussion of Fiscal Year 2007 Fire Department Budget - inclusive of:

06-039 - Operating Measure-General Fund Appropriation Request FY07 Annual Budget

Chief Leary was invited to the table to give a brief overview of his department's budget and provided two handouts to the Committee. He thanked the committee for their indulgence in postponing his review from last week for health reasons. Auditor Swanson prepared a list of questions for review to the committee as well, and the chief expected his first handout would help with some of those questions. He reported that the Mayor initially requested level funded budgets. Because of increased utility costs and contractual increase obligations, he had to look to personnel to meet level funding. Originally the Mayor requested reduction of staffing by four positions to meet the needs of the department. On further review, the Mayor determined only two

of the initial four positions would be necessary. He also was able to add to the overtime budget and to the utilities, and still fulfill all contractual obligations. He felt it was a good compromise, and that the department was very tight as far as expenses were concerned. The majority of the funding must go to personnel costs.

Chairman DiFazio asked for clarification of what “down two positions” means.

Chief Leary responded that in December of 2004, the department was able to reestablish 4 of the 12 positions which were cut in July of 2002. Of those 4 positions, 2 are now being lost once again, but on the positive side, they will be up 2 positions from 2002.

Chairman DiFazio asked if there are two firemen that we currently have that we won't have in FY07. Chief Leary responded that these are vacant positions that will remain unfilled. There are currently 7 vacancies, due to a series of retirements in the past year; one in September, 3 in December, a resignation when a firefighter went to the state police, and a disability retirement that took effect two weeks ago. For 2 of the retirements, the position will not be filled to meet the directive. The department will have 5 vacancies to fill.

Mr. Swanson asked what the total complement budgeted for FY07 will be and how it compares to current levels, and what was on the revised FY06 budget. Chief Leary had distributed an organizational chart to show what was budgeted. In FY06 he was originally budgeted for 106 uniformed positions and 3 civilians. Going into FY07 he will be budgeted for 104 uniformed members and 3 civilians. Actual number currently is 99 uniformed members and 3 civilians.

Mr. Swanson asked if the Administrative Assistant was still doing everything revolving around the payroll. Chief Leary responded affirmatively. Mr. Swanson pointed out to the Council that this person is paid at \$33,000 per year, while the police department expends \$106,000 for their payroll. Chief Leary noted also that she does more than payroll; she is essentially the receptionist for the department.

Mr. Swanson asked the Chief to walk the committee through the salary process for the department, and the Chief gave a brief overview. There is 1 chief, 4 deputy chiefs, 5 captains, 16 lieutenants, and the remainder are firefighters. The numbers don't generally change, as they are needed to maintain daily operations. Part of preparing the budget is to forecast who is in line for step increases and salary augmentation plan, which have definite timetables. In addition, educational courses which are eligible for stipends are factored in. Mr. Swanson noted that when he audited the payroll for the department, each employee was at a different rate or schedule, so the need is there to look at the individual. The chief agreed, and further noted other factors which affect pay rate, such as first responders, paramedics, etc., and this is where his Administrative Assistant earns her money.

Mr. Swanson asked if any members of the department were charged to any fund other than the general fund. Chief Leary responded no. Mr. Swanson asked if there weren't grants in the department. The Chief responded that grant money is used to purchase equipment and training,

but not for personnel, and that none of the grant money received can be used to supplement payroll.

Mr. Swanson asked if there have been any steps taken to begin hiring to replace the vacancies. The Chief responded that he has begun to interview potential candidates for lateral transfer from other communities, and feels he may have one identified from there. He plans to begin the hiring process within a week or so, to look at filling the 4 vacancies for July 1st. There is the potential for an academy to be available in July through Boston; if the hiring process is begun now, they can be available for the academy by then.

Mr. Swanson asked if the 5 vacancies were all entry level firefighter positions; the Chief responded affirmatively.

Mr. Swanson asked what level of truck operations is assumed in the FY07 budget. The Chief responded that the budget is based on 4 engines/1 ladder. The roster he supplied shows how many are currently working on a shift as compared with the number assigned to the shift. There are currently 8 people out on injury; it is hopeful 1 will be back to work next week, and a few more of those who have applied for retirements. The number is always in flux, but the minimum number needed to staff 4 engines/1 ladder is 25 per shift. The formula in use is that for every 4 positions, 1 more is needed to maintain staffing. As of now, there isn't sufficient staffing to consistently maintain the 4/1 level, and they have had to drop to 3 engines/1 ladder on occasion. In that case, the minimum staffing number then drops to 18.

He has not been authorized to change staffing levels, so the 4 engine/1 ladder is the standard to which the budget was driven. He referred the request to the Administration.

Chairman DiFazio asked for clarification on the numbers. Chief Leary noted that not all personnel will man trucks; there is a fire alarm operator and deputy chief to take into consideration in the total number.

Mr. Swanson noted he used the original budget book provided by Administration, and compared salaries from there. Extracting the 53rd week, he notes salaries are going up, with CBA requirements. (He withdrew the fifth question on his list.)

Mr. Swanson asked about the overtime budget; the total is \$430,750 for '07, and he asked for the basis for calculations. The Chief responded that the one constant over the last several years has been a salary adjustment, so he added the percent adjustments for each year to the starting point at FY03, which is the year there was a change in apparatus and staffing. Using the first year as the ideal and factoring in each year's increases brought it to a level of around \$416-418,000, and then factored in additional costs with the money from the 4 positions he thought he would be losing, basing additional overtime costs to this. The Mayor has pared it down to the \$430,750.

Mr. Swanson asked if the overtime would be incurred in FY07 if the department operated at 4/1

staffing levels. The Chief provided a second handout indicating the weekly overtime costs for the department. The chart begins in FY03 and runs through current. The chart indicates a reduction over the course of the last few years, and especially from last year to this year. The significant driver to the reduction has been the 3/2 staffing ratio for this entire year, and the 4 additional positions added in December 2004. With the exception of some of the summer weeks, the Christmas holiday week, the retroactive payments, and blizzard coverage this year, each week's overtime has been kept to under \$10,000. It has been a significant savings to having those 4 positions, as well as 3/1 staffing levels. Running the 4/1 staffing for the entire year, he estimates overtime would be approximately \$100,000 more.

Mr. Swanson noted the slight increase in clothing allowance would be expected in the CBA.

Mr. Swanson asked what the \$140,000 in the capital equipment line item represented. The Chief responded that it is used for two items; first is \$97,000 for the lease payments on engines 1 and 3, and the second is \$42,957 for the lease payment on the Kingfisher Fire Alarm System for the town buildings. These will continue for the next few years.

Mr. Swanson asked what another line item for equipment which is being increased by 200% to \$15,000 is used for. The Chief responded that it is used to purchase turnout gear, and with hiring of new members, turnout gear will be needed. He anticipates having to purchase 10 sets, at a cost of about \$2000 each. In the past it's been as high as \$25,000 budgeted for fire equipment, last year it was down to \$5,000 but no firefighters were hired. They were also able to purchase turnout gear through a grant matched by the town. Mr. Swanson asked if the grant money would be available in FY07; the Chief responded that it will be significantly reduced. A grant application was submitted for a ladder truck two years ago, and it was denied during the last round when funding ran out. The application has been rewritten and submitted 2 weeks ago. Unfortunately, the amount of a grant provided through the Assistance to Firefighters grant through Homeland Security has gone from a high of \$750 million to \$600 million next year, then \$200 million before going away completely, because of the cost to fund the war.

Mr. Swanson asked how much was expended in FY06 on equipment through grants, and the Chief responded that it was \$376,000. They received one from the Department of Homeland Security for the purchase of \$276,000, and the Council approved a measure a few weeks ago for \$100,000 in matching funds to purchase breathing apparatus. They also received \$48,000 in grant money from the Department of Homeland Security for a fire prevention grant which will be used to purchase a fire prevention trailer -to be used for educational purposes. The trailer will be brought to schools, Weymouth Day and other sites in the town to promote fire prevention safety programs. Since the grant program began in 2001, WFD has received 4 grants, 3 from the Assistance to Firefighters, and one state grant, for a total of about \$800,000. He noted the department would be in worse shape without grants. Mr. Swanson remarked that the department could use a grants administrator.

Mr. Swanson asked whether \$1500 will cover all building maintenance, and the Chief responded

that it should. Costs for maintenance are part of the DPW budget; budgeted funds are used to purchase smaller hardware items. The funds are intended for small projects. Any larger project proposals are submitted through the DPW. The DPW is handling both building and vehicle maintenance for the department.

Mr. Swanson questioned the reduction by 50% for fire alarm maintenance. The Chief noted the wired fire system is being removed, so equipment will not be needed. The funds were redistributed from this line to help defray utility costs, and some moved to radio system maintenance line. Other services are in the alarm line which will require maintenance, including the computers, and digitized recording system. There is still the need to maintain a level of funding in the line.

Mr. Swanson asked if the department is selling fire alarm boxes. The Chief responded that the box system and the boxes are offered for auction through the Ebay store on Washington at Pleasant Street. Several hundred have been taken down, and 5 or 6 boxes are taken in for auction every two weeks- the minimum bid is \$49.99. Some have sold for as much as \$185. The revenue goes to the general fund.

Mr. Swanson asked if any independent study has been done on staffing levels, or whether there are guidelines to staffing. The Chief responded that he is not aware of any study. The Insurance Service Organization is in town doing its usual 10-year audit. Mr. Swanson asked if the Fire Chief's organization puts out any guidelines. The Chief responded that depending on the source and location opinions will differ. The northeast compares differently than to the southwest in fire protection handbook. An overall perspective for staffing would be difficult, and needs to be done on an individual, regional basis, by an independent study organization that would be specific.

Mr. Swanson asked if the Chief would be interested in having a study done if the money were available. The Chief responded that he would, and that the City of Quincy has an upcoming study being done. He thinks the results will determine a decline in Quincy's department, forcing the closing of stations, due to today's standards. He would be interested in seeing the results through an independent source.

Mr. Swanson asked if any new vehicles were purchased in FY06, and were any purchases planned in FY07. The Chief responded that a new car was purchased for the deputy chief, a 2005 GMC Yukon. He is hoping to receive funding for another new car in FY07. He also wants to purchase a ladder truck to replace Ladder 1, and if grant funding comes through under the Assistance to Firefighters Grant, it will cost the town less. Ladder trucks cost over \$600,000. He also would like to purchase a forest truck. These items are all included in the Capital Plan.

Chairman DiFazio asked for clarification -if staffing level of 4/1 were maintained for the full year, it would cost an additional \$100,000. He also asked if the signs posted in front of the stations about engines out of service is correlated to the complaints and will the proposed budget reinforce the position. The Chief responded that this would be a question for the Administration.

Ms. Hackett came to the table and responded that in order to run at a 4/1 level, it requires 20 personnel, which includes the fire alarm operator and deputy chief. Current status is that staffing is 3/2, which requires 18 people. If 19 people come in, then overtime is hired to staff 4/1. At 3/2 is when you see the “engine out of service” sign at the station on Broad Street. At 4/1, the sign is then at Park Ave, which says “Ladder 5 out of service.” If it were in service, level 4/2 would be maintained. The position is actually in signage, 4/2 not 4/1.

Chairman DiFazio asked when the signage will end. The proposed budget doesn't bode well for the town. Ms. Hackett noted that the Mayor is not aware that any improper posting of signs was done. It is a freedom of speech issue. The signs are on private property, or on private vehicles. According to the Town Solicitor, they are within their legal rights. All parties are in agreement; the ideal is 4/2, but with the budget as presented, and once all hiring is complete, there will be 25 assigned per shift, to run consistently at 4/1. She also noted that 70% of the time this year, the level of 4/1 has been met; 30% were at the 3/2. He should be able to maintain 4/1 on a regular basis once the 25 per shift is met. Minimum staffing will remain at 3/2 but if staffing goes to 19, one person will be hired to bring it to 20. If 18 or less report for a shift; however, overtime is only used to bring the shift to 18. Chairman DiFazio asked if the Chief is the decision maker who decides whether overtime is authorized on a shift; the Chief responded that there is a policy in place reflecting the Mayor's decision, and the deputy chiefs are aware of it. Ms. Hackett further noted that the Mayor's standard is 5 pieces of apparatus are used per shift; 4 engines and 1 ladder or 3 engines and 1 ladder, and the staffing level determines which.

Councilor Leary asked for clarification on vehicles scheduled for purchase, and what the forest truck is used for.

Ms. Hackett clarified the question of the \$100,000 in overtime costs. She noted that it does not mean \$100,000 above what is budgeted for overtime in FY07, but represents \$100,000 above what was expended in FY06.

Councilor Molisse asked for clarification of \$600,000 for the purchase of a ladder truck. The Chief responded that this is for the purchase of a new, not used, vehicle.

Councilor Mathews asked for a timetable for the hiring to training of new firefighters, and what programs are available for training. The Chief noted that a program is available through the Mass Academy but has a 1.5 year wait list. Quincy runs one, but it is running currently, and another won't be available until next year. Boston Fire Academy runs 3 recruit programs per year, which will most likely be the choice. The only problem is their program runs 17 weeks, so it will not be until December until training is completed. Weymouth can run its own program, and run it with other towns. There are options, but all have time constraints.

Councilor DiFazio noted that there may be construction activity on the NAS during FY07. He asked what the department's responsibility will be and whether the budget as presented can sustain service to the base. The Chief deferred to the Administration on the timetable. He did

note that service will be provided but that the South Weymouth station would need to be looked at; response times can be long in that end of town. The ideal will be to coincide additional fire protection to the town with construction on the base.

Ms. Hackett noted that the town is in negotiations with TriTown, for all types of municipal services. Any additional charges for services will be borne by TriTown.

Councilor Smart noted that from what has been reported to the Council, demolition will be the development in FY07, and possibly roadway and utility construction, but not vertical development. He asked the Chief if demolition will be by permit, and will TriTown pay overtime for officers to be on detail. Ms. Hackett noted that prior to any activity begun by LNR, from demolition to road improvements, the frame-works; Regulatory Guideline must be completed, presented in public hearing process, and adopted by the town. The community in which the land lies will receive preferential treatment in bidding on the RFP (Request For Proposal) process. However, the town is required under federal law to provide fire protection service to the Naval Air Station, without reimbursement from the federal government. The town will not be in a position to receive revenue on this until the land has been turned over to TriTown and ultimately LNR.

Mr. Swanson asked if mutual aid was a billable service, and the Chief responded that mutual aid is provided under agreement and that each town pays for its own service.

Councilor Whitaker noted the 3- 5 positions which will eventually be filled. He also noted that the Chief mentioned purchasing turnout gear during the budget cycle, and asked if there are losses in personnel expected during the year. The Chief responded that not all losses in personnel were or can be predicted, and generally, he prefers to have 3-4 people at a time through an academy, for cohesion. Councilor Whitaker asked if the Chief has any heightened concerns about upcoming retirements during the next year, and also if he was aware of any returns to duty expected by firefighters overseas. The Chief responded that retirements are evenly distributed at about 5-6 per year. There are no personnel overseas at present. The few who did serve are no longer serving in the military. There is one, Lieutenant Buzz Smith in the Air Force Reserve who expects to be activated for a 9-month tour to Iraq in August. There are two other reservists in the department now, who have already done their tours and do not wish to go back. If Lieutenant Smith is activated, his job is specialized-the question was posed if there is any who can fill the position. The Chief responded that there isn't someone right now, and he is also planning on retirement in a year and a half. The Chief is hopeful that someone can be trained as the loss will be tremendous. Someone will need to be brought up and trained before then, and if he is activated, time will be lost, because someone won't be able to train.

The Chairman thanked the Chief for appearing. There being no further business, at 7:16 PM, Councilor Leary made a MOTION to adjourn and was seconded by Councilor Molisse.
UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

