

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL
Budget/Management Committee
Town Hall Council Chambers
May 10, 2010 - Monday**

Present: Kenneth DiFazio, Chairman
Patrick O'Connor, Vice Chairperson
Arthur Mathews
Michael Smart

Not Present: Michael Molisse

Also Present: James Wilson, Chief Financial Officer
Robert Leary, Chief, Weymouth Fire Department
Michael Gallagher, Director, IT and Administrative Services

Recording Secretary: Mary Briggs

Chairman DiFazio called the meeting to order at 6:45 PM.

10 020 M- Fire Department

Chief Leary noted he did not receive any questions to review as in previous years. Chief Leary read the following statement into the record:

“Due primarily to a significant reduction in local aid, the Weymouth Fire Department has been forced to reduce its FY 2011 operating budget request by \$350,000, a 4.5% reduction from FY 2010. Keeping in mind that the FY 2009 budget was 5.4% less than that of FY 2008, these staggering figures have led to significant reductions in staffing, apparatus being removed from service and the closing of a fire station.

HISTORY – 1981 – Present

In 1981, just prior to the implementation of Proposition 2 ½, the Weymouth Fire Department staffed 4 stations with 5 engines, 3 ladders, 1 squad, 1 fire alarm operator and 1 shift commander. The number of uniformed firefighters was 137 and the minimum number of firefighters on duty each shift was 30.

An inability to recover from the severity of the cuts under 2 ½ led to the number of uniformed members eventually being reduced to 88 by 1993 with the department operating with only 3 engines and 1 ladder out of 3 fire stations.

Between 1993 and 2000, Chief Madden fought strongly for and achieved a restoration of 29 uniformed positions staffing 4 engines and 2 ladders.

But at the start of FY 2003, the department again began experiencing budget reductions

that eliminated 12 positions and the 2nd ladder truck. In July 2008, 8 more positions were eliminated which led to the 4th engine being disbanded and Station #2 closed. At that point the department had again been diminished to the 1993 staffing level of 3 engines and 1 ladder, operating from 3 fire stations with 93 uniformed positions.

The FY 2011 budget reductions will once again cut the number of uniformed firefighters to 89.

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Not including capital budget items or special article funding, the general budget of the Weymouth Fire Department for FY10 was \$7,527,032. Of that amount, 96.7% was for personnel costs (salaries, overtime and uniform expenses). The remaining 3.3% paid for expenses, such as utilities, equipment and maintenance.

Of those personnel costs:

Fire Suppression (including Fire Alarm Operators) accounts for 92% of those costs; Fire Administration (Fire Chief, Confidential Secretary and Senior Clerk) accounts for 4%;

Fire Training (one Captain) accounts for 1.2%;

Fire Prevention (one Firefighter) accounts for 1.06%.

Through these figures you can see that by far the greatest emphasis is placed on fire suppression.

FY 2011

Although it was suggested that every department examines ways to combine tasks and services with other Town agencies, given the complex job specifications, Civil Service law and collective bargaining restrictions, it is not possible for any firefighter of the Weymouth Fire Department to share responsibilities with employees of other town departments or for employees of other town departments to perform any task within the fire department.

With this in mind, the only way that the Weymouth Fire Department will be able to meet the given budget reduction requirements will be to reduce personnel costs through the elimination of uniformed firefighting positions.

Since Firefighting is a labor-intensive profession with members working together in “companies”, it is truly impractical to reduce the number of personnel who work within each company. Just as the military maintains standards for the number of soldiers in a squad, the fire service and its governing bodies should not be quick to relax staffing minimums just to keep trucks on the road. After all, firefighters put out fires, not apparatus.

The National Fire Protection Association (Standard 1710), the Insurance Services Organization, OSHA (2-In, 2-Out rule), and most recently, the National Institute of Standards and Technology firmly support a minimum of 4 firefighters on every engine

and ladder truck. I agree with that minimum and will continue to seek the same staffing of 4 members for our ladder companies.

Without sacrificing the safety of our firefighters through a reduction in apparatus staffing, the only way to meet the required goal of reducing the FY 2011 budget of the Weymouth Fire Department by \$250,000 will be to: a) eliminate all vacant positions, b) eliminate the retirement replacement allowance from the salary account, c) eliminate requested funding for an Administrative Officer position, d) eliminate requested funding for a Fire Prevention Inspector position, e) eliminate partial salaries of 2 firefighters whose retirements are pending, and f) reduce overtime spending by placing a monetary cap on weekly overtime use.

These reductions will directly impact the services that the Weymouth Fire Department will be able to deliver. The most critical impact will be that of further reducing our current minimum shift staffing of 17 fire suppression personnel to 15. This is half of what was required in 1980 and will result in the intermittent shutting of one of our 3 remaining engines. At these times, I anticipate operating with only 2 engines and 2 ladder, one each from Station #1 in North Weymouth and Station #5 in South Weymouth.

As has been the case since October 2002, I will be unable to add staffing to the fire Prevention Division. Having only one Fire Prevention Inspector for a community of 54,000 residents is below what is found in other communities. Comparable communities have between 3 and 5 certified fire inspectors; for example: Medford has 3 inspectors, Framingham has 4, Everett has 4, Brookline has 4 and Quincy has 5. Internal administration will remain without an administrative officer to consistently oversee day-to-day functions. The possibility of reopening Station #2 will be more distant than ever.

Vision

In order to provide the level of life safety and fire protection services that the residents of Weymouth requires, the fire department can no longer be reduced in size and structure with every passing year. The responsibilities that have been added over the past decade are enough to warrant not only an increase in the size of the fire suppression force, but make the Fire Prevention and Training Divisions that much more critical. Understaffing may save money, but it will never save property or lives.

In my tenure as Fire Chief, I have been frustrated in my attempts to provide sufficient fire protection to meet the ever-growing and ever-changing demands for our service, fully staffed, 24 hours a day. And with the development of the South Weymouth Naval Air Station on the horizon, a 5th engine should be added before the first shovel hits the ground. Revenue figures prove that our residents are committed to a strong quality of life and they should not be short-changed in their need for public safety services. Our residents should not be held hostage by reductions in the State government's lack of support for general government functions through local aid.

The members of the Weymouth Fire Department will always give their best efforts in times of need, but their lives must not be placed in jeopardy due to budgetary constraints.

Yet that is what they face whenever they put on the uniform. The reason that NFPA 1710, OSHA 2-In, 2-Out and the NIST study affirm a minimum number of firefighters is that short staffing leads to a greater number of injuries, higher property losses and the potential for more loss of life. Firefighters will never wait for more help when they have a chance to make a difference, even if it means putting their own safety in peril.

Thank you for your time and for providing me with an opportunity to give you an overview of our past and future. “

The committee then reviewed the Executive Summary of the Budget with the chief and CFO. Four vacancies were eliminated; these are a result of retirements in FY10. No additional unemployment compensation or health insurance payments are required, as there are no layoffs expected. Two firefighters are retiring; one is in process and one will be during FY11. Total staffing with the elimination of 6 positions will result in 89 remaining positions.

The chief will implement “circuit breaker” overtime system, with a weekly allotment for use. Minimum staffing numbers will be reduced from 17 to 15 per shift, which will also reduce apparatus from 3 engines with 1 ladder to 2 engines with 1 ladder. Manpower coverage per vehicle is determined contractually and will not change. The force follows OSHA 2 in-2 out guidelines; that mandates the 15 firefighters per shift. The shift includes no non-firefighting personnel. Fire Inspector and Administrative officer positions which were requested but not filled over the past several years are being eliminated.

Training expense is being reduced by \$12,000. A grant that was applied for to replace turnout gear (at a cost of \$2,000 per set) was denied; the department needs to begin replacing the older sets.

Chairman DiFazio asked the status of non-union personnel pay raises. Chief Leary noted the only increases included are steps; there is no COLA. The union contract has gone to arbitration; the impact is unknown at this time, but will need to be met within this budget. Currently FY08-FY10 is before the arbiter.

Chairman DiFazio asked why Station 2 is open if still not in use and what the future use plan is. The chief responded that the building needed a large amount of maintenance to make the building waterproof and keep from further disrepair. It was funded in FY08. The inside still requires a lot of work. If the station should ever reopen, the minor renovations that were done will allow for use. It lacks female facilities and will require further renovation in order to use it as a station. The chief noted that response time is lost throughout the town with the station out of service. Dispatch, training, fire prevention, fire alarm, shift commanders, dispatch, the chief, his secretary and senior clerk are currently housed in Station 2.

Councilor O'Connor asked about any other retirements projected in FY11, whether any are delayed pending contract negotiations or pension reform legislation. The chief responded that his is unaware of any others. Councilor O'Connor noted the increase in

opiate use problems in town which is affecting the number of calls. He is disheartened as well with the budget positions. Giving up unfunded positions will have a huge impact on a budget that is already at a critical stage.

Councilor Mathews asked the status of the engine ordered last year. The chief responded that the replacement is in the process of being built and will not be ready until June. The chief does not agree with buying commercial vehicles as firefighting vehicles, because they don't meet rollover protection specifications. The bid agreement took a few months. The previous purchases were stock units which were already at the dealer in Attleboro. One could not be ordered off the lot at this time, due to economic conditions.

Councilor Mathews asked if the renovations are completed at Station 2. He would like to see any further interior renovations held off until the economy is better, and is cautious about investing money in the building if there is no vision of it opening as a fully functioning station. The chief noted that he is not sure if there is funding remaining and referred Councilor Mathews to the Steering Committee, which has oversight of the funding. Mr. Wilson noted nothing has been spent on the building since last February.

Councilor Smart also supports the repair to get the building watertight and cited what happened at the Fogg Library. He asked how many false alarms the town responds to on an average. He thinks the town should charge a premium to building owners who are repeat offenders because of the risk to the force answering these calls. The chief responded that he has discussed this option with the mayor and she has approved some changes to the ordinances and an appropriate penalty in order to address this.

Chairman DiFazio asked about the duty of the fire prevention officer. The chief responded that he is responsible for education, inspections, sprinkler reviews. The shift crew does smoke and carbon detector inspections; the chief would like to bring these under the umbrella of the fire prevention officer. The fire alarm superintendent now maintains the internal systems attached to the fire department and manages the dispatchers. The vehicle staffing is contractually obligated.

Councilor Smart asked about the fire alarm maintenance increase in the budget. The chief responded that it represents operating funds for maintenance of the computer system for the new repeater system installed in 2009. Councilor Smart asked if it's possible to perform this function in-house. Mr. Gallagher responded that this is licensed by the manufacturer and cannot be done in-house.

Councilor O'Connor asked about the contractual agreements and noted that funding for these will come from within the department. The chief reviewed the possible costs and the further impact to the department staffing.

Councilor Mathews as a point of order cautioned the committee with regard to discussing a contract that is in arbitration.

Councilor O'Connor asked what items would be addressed in a future recession. The

chief responded that the town explores fire-based EMS, and money generating items such as permits, which are currently maxed out. He noted the department is a service provider but not a revenue generator. Chairman DiFazio asked about the wear and tear on vehicles that are not designed to make EMS calls. The department is a first responder, and must respond to all priority calls, although they are not self-dispatched any longer. The calls are triaged by Fallon, and in turn WFD is contacted by Fallon.

Councilor Mathew noted his support of Councilor O'Connor's suggestion several years ago for generating funds via EMS services provided by the department. It will take some upfront funding to purchase appropriate vehicles, but is something to consider when funding should become available.

The chairman thanked the chief for his presentation.

Councilor O'Connor asked if there has been some issues with changeover to the GIC in the Fire Department with regard to disability insurance under 111F. Mr. Gallagher noted that the provider for the policy is Nationwide. All claims are denied automatically, as are the appeals. Multiple meetings with Nationwide and Hartford Insurance have not resolved these issues. Regardless of what happens with the provider, the town is still responsible and there may be costs associated with resolution.

Councilor Smart asked if the budget book for the school department will be submitted to the Budget/ Management committee before the May 17, 2010 Annual Town Meeting. Chairman DiFazio noted the school department has always been given some leeway in getting their figures to the committee. The school department is not scheduled for a public hearing until after the annual town meeting, so the Budget/Management Committee will not have it in time for the meeting.

On consensus by the committee, Chairman DiFazio will have an inquiry sent to the school department, for an update on when the committee will have the information.

Chairman DiFazio asked if there is a possibility that legislation is underway seeking to extend the period for unfunded liability for retirement boards up to forty years. Mr. Wilson noted the legislation has not yet passed, but that there are caveats if adopted, including an actuarial study.

At 8:10 PM, there being no further business, a MOTION to Adjourn was made by Councilor O'Connor and seconded by Councilor Smart. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Briggs as Recording Secretary

Approved by Chairman Kenneth DiFazio