

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes from March 7, 2024

Members Present:

Chair- Kurt Fraczkowski

Vice Chair- Andrew Sealey

Clerk- Eric Sechman

Member- Jin Hong

Member- Bob France

Also in attendance:

Police Department Chief-Brian Gill

Police Dept Deputy Chief- Jennifer Bigelow

Town Manager- Robert Pontbriand

Finance Manager- Barbara Tierney

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm.

The first item on the agenda to approve the meeting minutes from the February 15 meeting was postponed to the next meeting as the minutes were not available.

Chairman: Next item on the agenda will be a presentation by the Police Chief Brian Gill and Deputy Chief Jennifer Bigelow for the Fire Department's FY25 budget. Presentation is attached to the end of these minutes and can be found online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhyZ6I7Up68&list=PLA1de-WrXlOMZAa15CyEpSL4TD09kbpO&index=1>.

Chief Gill described the organization of the department and highlighted the 2 Sergeants out on long-term injury and 3 patrol officer positions currently vacant. The Chief said that there are definite labor shortages in the police field and he does not see that changing in the near future. The department does have 2 recruit officers in training. One will be graduating in April and the second just started their training.

The department has recently started a civilian traffic control unit (TCU). These personnel do not cost the town/department. Rather than forcing patrol officers working extra shifts, the TCU can handle those duties. The contractor pays for the traffic control.

The number of motor vehicle stops was significantly down last year. This was a direct result of not having the proper amount of staffing. Arrests were also down. If an officer makes a stop that results in an arrest or a tow, that officer is now tied up for multiple hours. Question from Bob France: Who monitors the state roads that run through town. Answer from the Chief- the Ayer PD. That state department mainly handles the highways. Question from Bob- What is the shortage of staff due to. Answer from the Chief- General struggles that most businesses and services are seeing, and also due to the public sentiment towards officers. The profession saw a significant loss of human capital in 2020 and 2021. It is not specific to Ayer.

Chief Gill then discussed a breakdown of the budget for the main department, ex animal control officer, etc. The proposed wages line includes the wages of the three patrol officer positions that are not all filled. If the remaining positions are filled during the fiscal year, that would not negatively impact the budget or cause a need to request additional funds.

Question from Kurt- Is the Police Dept returning money each year to the town based on not having the proper staffing? Answer from Chief Gill and Robert Pontbriand- Yes.

OT funding requests are level from last year.

Question from Pauline Conley. Are the presentation materials available online. Answer from Kurt, yes they will be available online. Also would like to have the presentations posted online for those attending the meeting remotely. Lastly, is the money returned to the town encumbered or returned to the general fund. Answer- they are returned to the general fund.

Question from Jin- What is the expectation that the state 911 grant will continue in the future/ Can we depend on that. Answer from Chief Gill- We can depend on it every year. The State calls it a grant, but all you have to do is apply for it and you will receive the funds.

Question from Bob- why are the wages in the overall town budget different from what is being shown in their presentation. Answer from Chief Gill- the presentation is more up to date and the overall budget draft is from December.

Question from Eric- Regarding the dispatch budget. Is Shirley assessed their portion of the budget for other areas besides the wages. Answer from Chief Gill- that is simply a bookkeeping annotation. The assessment to Shirley encompasses the entire dispatch budget and not simply the wages.

Budget process update

We have received the assessments and certified budgets for the ASRSD and NVTHS. Upcoming schedule of meetings.

Outside committee updates-

Next select board mtg will be on March 19th where water and sewer rate public hearing will be held. March 21, 2024 Fin Com meeting where Dan the Dept Chair of the DPW will present. March 27, joint meeting with the Select Board. March 29th warrant draft will be discussed. Tuesday April 2, joint meeting with the Select Board to discuss warrants for Town Meeting. April 4 and April 18th additional Fin Com meetings.

Next item is to schedule the next meeting. This has already been scheduled for March 21st.

Kurt opened the meeting to public comment.

Pauline Conley- Applauds the committee for the effort and care being put into the meetings.

Motion: Bob France made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andrew Sealey seconded. Unanimous approval.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:29pm.

4/18/2024
Approved
Kurt
KURT FRACZKOWSKI
Fin Com Chairman

RECEIVED
APR 25 2024

TOWN OF AYER
TOWN CLERK

[Signature]