

Town Council Finance Sub-Committee Meeting Notes

VIA ZOOM

January 13th, 2021 – 3:00PM

Members Attendance: Janice De Lima (Finance Committee Chair), Jay Trickett (Town Council), Ted Asherman (Town Council)

Others in Attendance: Amy Kuhn (Town Council Chair), Hope Cahan (Town Council), Pete LaFond (Town Council)

Nathan Poore (Town Manager), Peter McHugh (Finance Director), Amy Lamontagne (Assistant Town Manager), Susan Gibney (Assistant Finance Director), Maggie Fleming (Administrative Analyst), John Kilbride (Police Chief), Howard Rice (Fire Chief).

The meeting was called to order @ 3:00PM

- **Approve minutes of December 16, 2020 Finance Committee Meeting**
 - a. **Councilor Asherman made a motion to approve the minutes, Councilor Trickett seconded. The minutes were approved.**
- **Fire Chief Rice presented a Fire Department status update.**
 - a. **The Chief explained the hiring process and status of the 14 Budgeted full-time Firefighter/EMS positions.**
 - i. **9 positions budgeted for July 1 were hired by August 3, the remaining 5 are in process with 2 hired in December 2020 and the remaining 3 will be on board by February 7, 2021.**
 - ii. **Councilor De Lima asked if there is a shortage of qualified applicants? Chief Rice responded that they had over 60 applicants for the positions and offered Per Diem positions to applicants that were not hired. There were enough qualified applicants.**
 - b. **The Chief presented a PowerPoint beginning with the current Department challenges:**
 - i. **Call Volume has Increased significantly**
 - ii. **Availability of Call Members has Decreased**
 - iii. **Adequate Number of Members are Needed to Respond**
 - iv. **EMS Protocols have changed**
 - v. **On-duty Staff Perform many other Important Duties**
 - c. **The staff additions have improved response times, response rates and average number of responders per call.**
 - d. **7 of the full-time hires were previously active Per Diem Firefighters causing difficulty in filling needed Per Diem shifts for Ambulance 2 and Engine 4.**
 - e. **Active Call staff has declined from 96 to 78 as members have taken other jobs or relocated out of state.**
 - f. **Chief Rice finished the presentation with 2 examples of how important staff availability is for serious incidents. Both incidents had very favorable outcomes due to the quick arrival of adequate numbers of responders.**
 - g. **The group then discussed the current status and Councilors asked the following questions:**

- i. **Councilor Asherman – If Ambulance 2 is staffed 24x7, is Ambulance 1 staffed as well? Chief responded that Ambulance 2 is the only one staffed and that the Crew of Engine 2 cross-staffs Ambulance 3.**
- ii. **Councilor Trickett – Are there any full-time staff at Station 4? Chief responded that only Per Diem and volunteers staff that station.**
 - 1. **Where did the applications for the new positions come from? Chief responded that there were many sources: New Firefighters (just graduated), members of the UMaine ambulance staff, out of state individuals and call Firefighters from other Towns in Maine.**
 - 2. **Is the Per Diem issue short-term, and are there not enough qualified people in the area? Chief responded that more and more Towns are hiring Per Diem Firefighters so that the number of available qualified candidates continues to shrink.**
 - 3. **Are all full-time Firefighters qualified paramedics? Chief replied that all are a minimum of Firefighter/EMT and that roughly half are paramedics.**
 - 4. **Amy Lamontagne mentioned that some of the problem with candidate availability is due to Maine's aging population.**
- iii. **Councilor Cahan – Is the department doing outreach to immigrant communities about opportunities in firefighter careers? Chief replied that SMCC currently has immigrant students training in the field. Chief Rice trains students across the state and makes a point to mention the Falmouth opportunities. The department has not directly reached out to immigrant organizations.**
 - 1. **Councilor De Lima said that we should reach out to immigrant organizations going forward.**
- iv. **Councilor Trickett – If we had one Fire Station with reasonable response times would staffing change? Chief responded that it would not, the staffing analysis that was performed last year looked at many station location alternatives and staffing came out the same due to the fact that you always need a second truck.**
 - 1. **Councilor Trickett asked what % of calls need a second truck? Chief responded that he thinks it is the majority of non-EMS calls but will check that. The issue with EMS calls is multiple calls at once.**
 - 2. **Councilor Trickett asked if there have been a significant number of bad outcomes because of inadequate response? Chief replied: nothing jumps out at me other than we had some significant fires in West Falmouth that were total losses due to the time it takes us to get there and put water on the fire. Had we gotten there quicker could we have done more? Possibly, but I'm not sure. 2 or 3 choking patients come to mind that died from choking. One at the tavern and 1 at Huggs. For these calls could we have had a better outcome with a quicker response or by having more qualified EMS arrive in minutes? Maybe yes but tough to quantify.**

- v. Councilor Kuhn – Have all Fire/EMS staff received COVID vaccines? Chief replied that all EMS staff that wanted a vaccine have received it. Firefighters have not yet.
 - h. Councilor De Lima asked Chief Kilbride if there have been any demands of the Police Department due to possible threats?
 - i. Chief Kilbride responded that there have been no demands thus far but that plans are in place for extra staffing on inauguration day next Wednesday.
 - i. Councilor De Lima reminded the group that there was a study done on Fire Department staffing and that increases in staffing was appropriate.
- Finance Director Pete McHugh and Nathan Poore presented the proposed FY22 Capital Improvement (CIP), and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Budget Plans covering spending over the period FY2021–FY2030
 - a. The FY22 CIP Budget was presented including a proposal to use \$322K of unassigned fund balance to reduce the tax impact of the CIP plan. This use of fund balance was \$124K larger than anticipated in the FY21 Budget for FY22.
 - i. The group reviewed overall spending for CIP during the entire period versus last year's projection for that period, a complete list of proposed spending for FY22, projected CIP Fund balances and proposed Appropriations for each year in the period.
 - ii. Nathan Poore noted that staff is preparing two Budget scenarios as things currently stand, one based on needed spending and one with a 10% or less tax mil rate increase based on Finance Committee feedback from the December meeting.
 - iii. The group discussed the FY22 CIP spending list in detail and had the following questions/comments.
 - 1. Councilor De Lima asked if it made sense for Councilors to weigh in on items they felt could be cut and Nathan replied that it would be very helpful.
 - 2. Councilor Asherman – The Bike/Ped improvements/sidewalks from the Falmouth Road trailhead would benefit the Schools. Why is the cost not shared with the school even though in the end the money may come from the same place? Nathan replied that these types of project have always been funded through the Town.
 - 3. Councilor Kuhn felt that the Community Center Gym floor and Locker upgrades could be deferred.
 - 4. Councilor Asherman felt that the Town Hall Generator could be deferred as it has been well-maintained. Nathan and Amy Lamontagne agreed that that project could be deferred 1 or 2 years.
 - 5. Councilor Kuhn asked if staff looked at including the Route 88 intersection project in the plan. Nathan replied that staff is currently looking at that project and will add it in once cost estimates can be prepared.
 - a. Why was Falmouth Corners removed from the plan? The group discussed this and found that it

had been moved to the Route One South TIF in FY24 and had funding estimates of \$750K in Town matching funds with DOT for a total cost of \$1.5 million.

6. Councilor De Lima stated that the Underwood Park project had been deferred from FY21 and should not be removed.
 7. Councilor Asherman stated that Town-wide road improvements of \$230K seems low. Pete McHugh replied that there was additional funds in the TIF for road improvements. In addition, TIFs include major road projects, this project covers smaller paving projects.
 8. Councilor Trickett stated that most of the capital plan spending is for replacement of existing equipment and seemed bare-boned. He noted that the Council should factor in increases in capital spending resulting from acquisitions and other initiatives as they evaluate them. He felt that Open Space acquisition was deferrable.
 9. Councilor Asherman asked if the Ambulance replacement could be pushed back. Nathan responded that ambulance replacement had already been extended to 12 years versus 10 and should not be extended further.
 10. Councilor Kuhn stated that Open Space funding should be cut before other projects and that Community Center spending could also be cut.
 11. Councilor Asherman stated that he does not agree with cutting Open Space.
- iv. Nathan suggested that it might be a good idea to have the CIP tax impact schedule rise to \$.85 and then be held there through use of fund balance for the remainder of the plan period.
1. Nathan requested staff to include a bar graph of the CIP tax rate for the public hearing presentation.

b. The FY22 TIF Budget plan was presented.

- i. The group reviewed the overall spending in TIF Districts for the fiscal years 2021–2030, a complete list of proposed spending for FY22 and a summary of the major categories of spending included in TIFs including infrastructure spending, economic development and staff support.
 1. Councilor Asherman asked what the jump in Route One South spending was in FY24?
 - a. Pete McHugh responded that it was due to the Falmouth Crossing project.
 2. It was discovered that the Falmouth Trail Bike/Ped sidewalk project was also in the Oceanview TIF and could be removed from the CIP plan.
 3. Councilor Asherman asked for details on what was included in economic development spending. Staff will follow up with the Economic Development Director to get that detail.
 - a. Which road is being re-paved in the I-295 to Falmouth Road project? Staff will follow up on that.

4. Councilor Kuhn asked if the Route 88 project could be put in one of the TIFs? Nathan replied that staff would look into whether that is an approved use of TIF funding.
 5. Councilor De Lima asked if the Brown property parking project is in the spending plan? If not, she would like staff to look into it and add to the plan. Nathan stated that staff will look into that.
- Councilor De Lima stated that the meeting had gone well beyond the scheduled time and requested that the remainder of the presentation should be presented at a later time.
 - a. Nathan reminded the group that a second Finance Committee meeting had been included in the schedule for Wednesday January 27 and could include the remainder of the presentation (Special Revenue Funds and Wastewater capital plan, Senior tax relief) and include an updated operating expense spreadsheet and the Lien Foreclosure report that was deferred in November 2020.
 - Adjourn
 - a. Councilor Asherman moved to adjourn and Councilor De Lima seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 5:49PM.

Respectfully submitted by Peter McHugh