



Finance Committee and Town Council Meeting

May 17, 2022, 9:00 AM

Virtual Meeting

Minutes

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting was conducted via remote means.

1. Call to order, Review Agenda

Members participating remotely: Steinberg; Griesemer; Schoen; Miller; Walker; non-voting members: Hegner; Holloway; Kubiak

Members absent: none

Others participating remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman; Town Councilor Ana Devlin Gauthier; Town Councilor Mandi Jo Hanneke; Town Councilor Ana Devlin Gauthier; Town Councilor Jennifer Taub; Town Councilor Dorothy Pam; Town Councilor Pam Rooney; Finance Director Sean Mangano; Comptroller Sonia Aldrich; Senior Services Director Haley Bolton; Police Chief Scott Livingstone; Police Captain Gabriel Ting; Police Captain Ron Young; Dispatch Supervisor Michael Curtin; Public Health Director Jennifer Brown; CRESS Director Earl Miller; Assistant Fire Chief Jeff Olmstead; Veteran's Services Director Steve Connor; Fire Chief Tim Nelson; Clerk of the Council Athena O'Keeffe; Minute Taker W. Kaizen

Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 9:03 am, confirmed all participants can hear and be heard, and announced audio and video recording

Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum of the Town Council, called the meeting to order at 9:05 am, and confirmed Councilors could hear and be heard.

2. FY23 Budget Review: Overall Budget Review

Steinberg briefly reviewed the budget review process.

3. FY23 Budget Review: Public Safety

Livingstone reviewed the pages on public safety in the budget book starting with animal welfare; in response to a question from Schoen, he said that Animal Welfare Director Carol Hepburn works directly with health department staff; Livingstone and Curtin reviewed the dispatch and communication center budgets

In response to questions from Schoen, Curtin said:

- call trends have been down due to COVID

- business line calls are non 911 calls
- emergency medical dispatches are phone instructions given to callers before onsite help arrives
- they're making final the decisions about CRESS calls
- two retirements are coming up and they're already working to recruit replacements

Kubiak asked about employee assistance protocols and UMASS calls; Curtain said they do wellness training, peer counseling, have a chaplain; he also said that there aren't many dual responses between UMASS and the town; he said that 95% of noise complaints are generated by student activity

Pam asked about the career path for people into the dispatch job; Curtain said that having a career ladder would be very useful

Hanneke asked about the town being a regional hazmat dispatch center; Curtain said we are no longer going to be a hazmat center because MEMA is taking over

Griesemer said that the town needs to implement an evaluation system that will tell us how CRESS is doing as soon as possible; Livingstone said that they don't currently always have enough data; their system is 30 years old and they're looking for a new system to cover all aspects of data collection, and it will be expensive; Curtain said they can currently gather raw numbers; Mangano said that ARPA and DPA grants can help cover costs for this upgrade

M. Miller asked why the anticipated CRESS response numbers are 10% lower than previously anticipated; Livingstone said that there are more calls that will require police response; E. Miller said that they need to build confidence in the CRESS department for first year and figure out how not to replicate existing services

Walker asked about noise complaints and how CRESS will fit with CSWG goals. Miller said he has met with homeless people in town, most are people of color and it's important to be a lifeline. He's working in the apartment complexes already. His intention is to meet all aspects of the CSWG report. Parallel responses with the police should fulfill the CSGW report not contradict it. Livingstone said CRESS might be able to respond to noise complaints but they won't be able to write violations or testify in court. Parallel response will likely be necessary for many responses especially in year one of CRESS. Walker stressed that CSWG called for CRESS to be distinguished from the police. Miller said that the people who will work for CRESS have different training and background from the police and they won't have weapons. Curtain said that on parallel calls officers will be told if CRESS is primary and police is backup or vice versa.

Hegner said that CRESS will likely have many unanticipated costs and that the Finance Committee should get updates on those

Livingstone spoke to the staffing budget. Post-pandemic calls volumes are returning to normal. He answered Schoen's questions:

- they don't have the ability to track whether or not noise calls are responding to UMASS student; most are but they don't have hard data
- the majority of motor vehicle-related violations are not related to students; they do track these numbers and only 27% are UMASS students
- nuisance house violations are not tracked re. students/non-students
- mental health calls are up substantially, a trend which is continuing; both police and fire often respond; Cooley Dickenson is main resource for these calls, but Cooley isn't setup to handle these calls
- COVID protocols have eased, making things less stressful; a dozen or more officers contracted COVID
- re. loss of two officers: they lost their downtown liaison officer and regional crime officer; only three officers are on patrol at any given time, one each in north, center and south Amherst, which leads to much forced overtime
- he's very unhappy about UMASS changing graduation time; he's concerned about the return of big house parties in May

Schoen wants UMass to contribute more to town budget given the needs of police/EMS during the school year; she wants to quantify the data; Livingstone said that there are issues with collaborating with UMass due to the limits of the authority of UMass police

Holloway wanted to know how many calls are for the primary/secondary schools; Livingstone said not many.

Rooney asked about overtime vs. positions with benefits. Livingstone said that the overtime budget isn't effected drastically by being up or down by two or three positions; having another two officers won't reduce the overtime budget

Taub asked if the police department could track which noise complaints were made on houses with students living in them because more residential houses are being converted from single family into student housing. Livingstone agrees that houses are being converted, and that these turn over to new groups of students every year. He said that they do try to track certain houses, and they could do more tracking.

Kubiak asked how much court time impacts the police department. Livingstone said that during COVID, court attendance was way down. Amherst is part of restorative justice so officers don't go to criminal court often, and the DA doesn't take as many cases to trial so hours in court are down substantially in general.

Hegner asked if the town is monitoring hate crimes; Livingstone said that they are mandated by law to track them; Young said that the numbers have stayed the same in Amherst over the past decade or so; they're required to track and report the numbers to the state; Amherst is on the lower end of the state numbers

Hanneke asked if CRESS will be able to handle mental health calls in the future and about staffing re. supervisors vs. regular staff?; Livingstone said every shift has at least one supervisor, some have two because of litigation issues regarding failure to supervise

Walker asked about detail work; Livingstone said officers can only work detail in their time off and only for limited hours; the Town makes money from detail work, it doesn't cost the Town money, the contractor pays.

Nelson reviewed the pages in the budget book on the Fire Department

Schoen asked about the nine staff slots being empty due to injury; Nelson said that the injury rate has remained the same over the years although there's been an uptick in illness, COVID and otherwise. Schoen asked if filling the four positions helped with staffing; Nelson said yes but it takes at least a year to get new employees trained. Bockelman said that the four new positions are 10% of the budget, they still have two more slots to fill, and there's a lot of turnover in the department. Nelson said kudos to the town for the four new positions and we still need four to six more

Schoen asked about the billing private insurance for things like lift and assist; Olmstead said COVID forced places like the Arbors and Applewood to do lift and assist on their own, reducing the need for town help. Olmstead said they don't offer mobile integrated home care yet, although they are looking toward doing this in the future which might also include partnership with CRESS.

Schoen asked how much EMS service is provided to UMass; Nelson said that while UMass does grow slowly, town related calls grow much faster

Miller asked about the increase in motor vehicle calls; Olmstead said the increase is partially due to the change in how things are reported and sending more vehicles (an ambulance and a firetruck) on calls helps with patient outcome. Hanneke asked whether other towns send replacement vehicles and if this causes more wear on vehicles. Nelson said yes, there will be more wear on vehicles, but money will be saved on not having as many employee injuries and they will have better patient outcomes. Olmstead said that Amherst's policy follows Northampton and Easthampton, and that back injuries cost about \$60,000 each.

Olmstead described the change that they are making toward community paramedicine, which is a way to help prevent taking people to hospitals by providing onsite aid for things like wound care, substance abuse, etc.; this is happening statewide and so they are beginning to plan for it. Griesemer asked how reimbursement insurance will work with something like community paramedics and fewer trips to the hospital. Olmstead said that this shift is happening nationally to keep health care costs down; they're not getting reimbursed well or at all from Medicare/Medicare for example.

E. Miller reviewed the pages in the budget book on CRESS and said that he is directly involved with the primary and secondary schools.

Hanneke asked if CRESS services are reimbursable by Medicare/Medicare and if the regional school budget will cover CRESS services. Miller said that they are working to figure

out state-related billing reimbursement. Bockelman said CRESS is third leg of public safety so we don't charge schools.

Rooney asked about training costs and training in general. Miller said that they are working with the Wildflower Alliance and the Community Conflict Resolution Group for training, as well as doing non-violent communication and public safety training.

Kubiak asked if their operating expenses are enough and how much is grant funded and about case management. Miller said that they do have access to grant money; they should be able to do short-term case management and hand off to long-term services. Mangano said DPA and ARPA grants are going to be used to help cover startup costs and mental health services

M. Miller asked how recruiting community responders is going; E. Miller said we're getting a small number of good candidates, including people from Amherst.

Steinberg noted that members of the public have made comments that the budget for CRESS is too small and the police too high, and that this may need to be addressed in the Finance Committee's report to the Council.

4. FY23 Budget Review: Community Services

Pushed to a later meeting

5. Public Comment

None

6. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in advance

None

7. Announcements and next agenda preview

Next meeting: 5/19/22

8. Adjourn

Steinberg declared the meeting adjourned at 12:11 am

Minutes prepared by W. Kaizen

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented:

05-17-2022 Town Council and Finance Committee Agenda