

**FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
Meeting of March 6, 2008

CALL TO ORDER

The Meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. in the First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Marilyn Blaustein, Alice Carlozzi, Kay Moran (Acting Chair), Douglas Slaughter, Andrew Steinberg.

OTHERS PRESENT

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director John Musante, Fire Chief Keith Hoyle, Assistant Fire Chief Mike Zlogar, Police Chief Charles Scherpa, Police Captain Mike Kent, Communications Director Rita Burke, members of the public.

AGENDA

1. Budget Review
  - a. Police
  - b. Animal Welfare
  - c. Communications Center
  - d. Fire / EMS
2. Member Reports
3. Minutes
4. Next Meeting and Agenda
5. Miscellaneous

DISCUSSION

**1. Budget Review**

**a)Police**

Scherpa reported that FY08 will be the first year that he will be over budget. He stated that he simply did not have the staff to get the job done. For FY09 the civilian assistant to the chief position is restored to a full time position from the half time position in the current fiscal year. Due to the workload some tasks had to be transferred to the finance department for completion (and some are not being completed in a timely manner). Scherpa thanked the finance department for their aid in helping resolve some of the most urgent needs. Blaustein asked about the extent to which the department can go paperless. Scherpa replied that they are pursuing as many options in that area as are possible (e.g., online requests for accident reports for insurance reporting) but that many of their duties require paper documentation. Regarding police staffing, Scherpa stated that he felt funding for 50 officers is essential. Forty eight are in the budget with two at the top of the Town Manager's restoration list. Scherpa stated that he thought the 2 on the restore list should be part of the budget. He described his department as over-stressed, with sick leave up, and morale down.

**b)Animal Welfare**

Scherpa reported no significant budget changes. No changes to staffing levels or operating expenses.

**c)Communications Center**

Burke stated that although the department is not currently fully staffed due to recent departures, the increase in funding for new staff for FY08 has helped retain current staff and lower the stress of the department. The hiring of new staff will help to keep the staffing budget lines lower due to the lower pay grades for them. She noted the increase in operating expenses was due to a new radio maintenance contract. Last year the radios were under warrantee and did not require a maintenance contract. Steinberg asked about regionalization of the communications center with UMass. Scherpa stated that we are looking at it as a revenue source where UMass saves money and we receive money for the service. Burke said that a study group is currently under way, but it will take a while to get to any answers due to the complexity of the process. Issues of equipment, staff, location/space and protocols for operation are examples of items to be worked out. Musante pointed out that regionalization is definitely coming in many areas of government but a lot of associated issues must be addressed (e.g., capital costs and funding) in each circumstance.

#### **d)Fire/EMS**

Hoyle stated that the changes in the FY09 budget from FY08 are almost exclusively due to inflation. The staffing is very lean relative to the number of calls that department handles (exceeding 5000 for the first time in FY07). It is possible to do this primarily due to the Call Force and Volunteer firefighters (they can go on fire calls and do coverage at the firehouse but are not trained to go on EMS calls). Call force staffing is unable to cover daytime needs (employers are less willing to let them go to cover the firehouse) so the department is using fulltime firefighters to cover daytime staffing circumstances and paying the overtime out of operating expenses. He reported that the number of situations where the number of career firefighters on duty is too low (7 versus 10) is a concern as is the amount we expect of these non-career fire fighters. Those firefighters funded by the SAFER grant have helped tremendously and as the grant support for those staff has declined increasing Ambulance receipts have covered their cost. The National Fire Prevention Association standard for a response to a fire is that 13 people be on the scene in 8 minutes. Hoyle stated that it is rare when we could actually meet that standard; we still need more staff. Blaustein asked if we didn't service other towns (due to reimbursement rates less than our expenses) would that reduce our staffing needs. Zlogar responded that we are still compelled to help cover those towns if they are in a situation of need beyond their capability. Thus, it would not completely mitigate our staffing needs. Moran asked if new agreements had been reached with surrounding towns. Hoyle responded that with the exception of Hadley that we had. Steinberg asked if other towns have cross-trained staff (Fire and EMS). Hoyle replied that we set the standard by doing it first and that he knows of no other department that is not cross-trained. Zlogar mentioned that we also have staff trained in other areas as well (e.g., building collapse and tactical situations) and that some apparatus are maintained by staff which also reduces operating costs. Moran asked if the department was a part of the new inspections software initiative (Munis). Zlogar responded that they were and that it would not reduce the work, but that it would allow them to do it better, more proactively, and in concert with the other town inspectors. He also stated that it would aid them as they try to keep pace with the new fire code inspection demands created by the state.

## **2. Member Reports**

Slaughter reported on capital requests made to JCPC by the Town and Elementary School's IT departments with their largest requests for replacement of current equipment. Carlozzi and Steinberg passed out copies of the Superintendent's executive budget packets for the Elementary and Regional schools. Carlozzi noted the inclusion of revenues in the Regional schools documents for the first time. Carlozzi stated that the budget is based on a 3% assessment increase for Amherst and that health care costs were estimated as increasing at 8% (lower than originally forecast but accounting for recent expectations). Also, she noted that the increase in Special Education costs were for known students who would be entering the Regional schools. A contingency fund for emergencies was added to the budget at the request of the school budget auditor. Not in the budget was the change in transportation costs due to the transfer of those costs to the elementary schools. Carlozzi stated that the change in transportation

funding will reduce the cost to Amherst by about \$35,000. Steinberg noted that the Elementary schools budget also does not have the corresponding changes relative to the transportation costs. He stated that the budget presented is a 5.2% increase over last year's budget (down from the 8.4% increase originally forecast). Steinberg noted that the insurance costs for the Elementary schools were also estimated at 8%. He stated that the Superintendent said that the tipping point to meet the needs of the elementary schools is \$600,000. Musante distributed an updated budget gap projection worksheet (which included the revised 5.2% Elementary Budget) that shows the current budget shortfall at \$814,759. Steinberg reported that the BCG is working on achieving a Community Process for budget and revenue priorities through a five scenarios (do nothing, level services, small improvements/additions, larger improvements/additions, and ideal target). The goal is to get feedback in time to inform the FY10 budget process.

**3. Minutes: None considered.**

**4. Next Meeting and Agenda**

On the agenda for the March 13 meeting is the Elementary Schools Budget.

**5. Miscellaneous:**

Musante mentioned that a rough draft of non-financial articles for Spring Town Meeting would be developed soon as well a schedule for meeting with the article sponsors. Also, he mentioned Stan Rosenberg's Municipal Conference would be held April 5<sup>th</sup>. Moran distributed a memo that she sent to the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director regarding Employee health insurance.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Submitted by Doug Slaughter, Acting Clerk