

Approved: January 24, 2019

Posted: January 25, 2019



Town Council Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 9, 2019 at 6:00 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

Chairman Rothhaus called the meeting of the Town Council to order at 6:00 p.m. Present at the meeting were Vice Chairman Koenig, Councilor Albert, Councilor Boyd (arrived at 6:05 p.m.), Councilor Harrington, Councilor Healey, Councilor Thornton, Town Manager, Eileen Cabanel, and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Rothhaus led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements

Budget meetings will be conducted by the Town Council on Monday, January 22nd, and 29th at 6:00 p.m. in the Matthew Thornton Room.

Regular meetings of the Town Council will be conducted on Thursday, January 11th, 18th, and 25th at 7:00 p.m. in the Matthew Thornton Room.

Review of Proposed FY19 Budget

Town Manager Cabanel stated the proposed budget has a 0% increase on the tax rate. She and the Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director have identified cuts that could be made should the Council wish to do so.

Community Development

Timothy Thompson, Director, Community Development Department, stated the department's budget is essentially level funded; decrease of about \$19,500, which is due to the one-time expenditure for a new vehicle put into the department last year. Beyond that, changes are related to health insurance and other cost items beyond his control.

Vice Chairman Koenig noted Line Item #01-21-8300-0 - Travel & Meetings (\$1,500), is the same as last year, but up substantially from the year prior. Director Thompson spoke of turnover within the department. With consistent staff for the better part of a year, the expectation is for both the Planning & Zoning Administrator and Assistant Planner to attend additional workshops and training in the coming year. Director Thompson stated the \$1,500 has been a consistent number since before his time in Merrimack.

Vice Chairman Koenig noted 01-21-8359-0 - Other Outside Services; microfilming of plans (\$1,000). Director Thompson responded the State does not allow for optical scanning and retaining PDFs as permanent records.

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Asked about 01-21-8510-0 - Transfer to Other Funds (\$20,000), Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated that expenditure to be related to the GIS system. It is a transfer to the Capital Reserve Fund (CRF). The label will be changed.

Welfare

Patricia Murphy, Administrator, addressed 01-25-8399-0 - Social & Health Services noting the large number of requests received (totaling \$139,180). Proposed is an allocation of \$75,833. There were concerns in bringing the numbers down particularly with the amount of public notice given with the regard to substance misuse, mental health, etc. There were some such as Harbor Homes, which were increased, but not significantly enough to meet the request.

Noted was the largest request (\$66,080) came from the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center, and the recommendation is for level funding. Ms. Murphy remarked for the past three years they have submitted proposals with high numbers. Asked if the numbers are accurate, she stated a review of their budget does not provide specific clarity as to what is and is not funded. For the past few years they have calculated the numbers differently. However, she has not seen the number of Merrimack residents being assisted going up, which concerned her. When possible, she allocates funds towards it, but because she did not see a high increase in numbers, she did not propose additional funding.

Ms. Murphy commented, this year, the ones that were a bit alarming for her were Harbor Homes Shelter for Mental Health (\$10,000 request/\$4,500 proposed allocation) and Keystone - shelter and chemical dependency counseling (\$5,000 request/\$4,000 proposed allocation) because she is aware, they have new services. In order to fund those at the amount she believes needed, the budget would have gone over by \$6,500. Because they have the safe stations, they are getting Merrimack residents and are treating Merrimack residents. Harbor Homes does that safe station section and Keystone does the long-term treatments. These are services that are needed, and she is aware those agencies are not getting everything needed to combat the issues.

01-25-8481-0 - Housing (rent and mortgage payments); proposed is a \$2,000 increase over FY19. She highlighted FY18 actual expenditures (\$42,682) noting a large surge in housing was seen, particularly in rentals, which resulted in increased costs. However, at this point in FY19, she has only expended \$9,544.61 or approx. 32% of the budget. Last year, at this point in the budget season, she had expended 75%.

Asked to provide the reasoning behind the contributions. Mr. Murphy explained all the agencies are considered non-profit. They do receive grants and funding, and that is looked at. However, there are gaps between the amount of funding received and the amount needed to provide the services. Fundraising efforts, including reaching out to municipalities, are a means of addressing those gaps. Each of the agencies serve residents of Merrimack.

When receiving the proposals each year, she requests information on the amount of people being served in Merrimack, budgets, funding sources, what the funds will be used for, etc. There is a good deal of detail that goes into identifying contributions. Councilor Healey asked, and was informed the agencies receive funding from neighboring communities as well.

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Asked for additional information on Lamprey Area Health Center, Ms. Murphy remarked they are a health clinic for individuals not having healthcare, and those who need to bridge the gap between Medicaid, etc. It is for individuals having an indigent need.

Councilor Boyd spoke of Harbor Homes having expended a great amount creating a walk-in medical/dental clinic, and questioned if the funds allocated to Lamprey (\$5,000) would go further if allocated to Harbor Homes. Ms. Murphy stated there to be a difference between the healthcare that Harbor Homes provides; geared more toward the homeless. Lamprey is geared toward the general population. They do much more healthcare; prenatal, children. Harbor Homes deals with different kinds of illnesses related to being homeless. There is more of a different structure in terms of what their approaches in healthcare are. Lamprey's numbers have been consistent. They are serving Merrimack residents.

Asked to provide additional information on the housing line item, Ms. Murphy stated her impression FY18 was a bit of a fluke. There was a correction in the housing market, which she believes was reflected in housing and rents in general; everything just went up. Last year fair market rent was \$1,239/mo. and, in one year, it went up to \$1,437/mo. It was reflective of the growing need and the lack of affordable housing. There was a lot of shifting; a lot of people moved out of Merrimack.

Councilor Boyd stated concern with the potential costs related to the budget, and suggested the need for additional focus. He commented there are other communities that continue to have issues related to welfare budgets.

Ms. Murphy remarked at this point, she feels what has occurred is more of a correction; there were so many people that were caught off guard by the cost of housing and rents that it drove people to not be able to afford what they had currently.

Town Manager Cabanel spoke of the level of experience and data tracking that goes into the budgeting process understanding there could be a single situation that causes expenditures to exceed the budget. Should that happen, and it be known there is going to be a shortfall in that department, it could be covered through savings achieved in other departments or a decision not to purchase another item.

A question raised years ago was related to the County paying the social service agencies, which meant the towns were paying for them twice. Town Manager Cabanel spoke of the need to understand what the County is contributing (whatever the County is contributing, the Town is contributing, by default, 21%). Ms. Murphy stated she has not seen a lot of these agencies receiving funds from the County.

Vice Chairman Koenig questioned 01-25-8352-0 - Education & Training; specifically, if Ms. Murphy was attending the New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) Annual Conference. Ms. Murphy indicated she had been. She did not attend this year because the cost was raised too high (from \$135 to \$175). Asked if she intended to attend this year, she indicated she is planning to. As the President of the New Hampshire Local Welfare Administration Association, this past year she went up only to handle the Annual Meeting elections. Vice Chairman Koenig noted the Town has stopped participating in the NHMA and they have stopped representatives from attending other conferences. Ms. Murphy stated she is still part of an affiliate through the Local Welfare Administration Association.

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Communications

Denise Roy, Chief of Police, stated there to be three changes. Line Item 01-05-8203-0 - Operating Supplies; shows an increase of \$3,000 for the purchase of new batteries (42) for portable radios. Batteries require replacement every 3-5 years (depending on usage). Asked, he indicated a few new portables were purchased for new officers. What is proposed is replacement of batteries for radios that were purchased under the State grant 4-5 years prior. They will also replace batteries on radios in the schools, Town Hall, etc.

Brian Levesque, Deputy Chief, noted \$2,320 added to 01-05-8260-0 - Telephone; radio voting system. The communications upgrade is up in full swing and the department is running on the new network. As part of that, there was a move to a more dependable service from the phone company; E lines, which are data lines as opposed to copper lines. Also included in that increase is additional cell time for the tablets in the vehicles.

Councilor Albert questioned if the department is part of the E-ticket program, and was told it is not. The records management system is antiquated, and does not support the department being able to move in that direction.

01-05-8334-0 Maintenance-Office Equipment; increase of \$13,600. Funds are allocated for the department to maintain its records management system. It is paid to CrimeTRACK to address needs with the system, e.g., if there is the need for different parameters to be set for things sought in the records management system they are called and can provide what is sought for data.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali noted the funds were not included in the prior year's budget in error. The cost was able to be addressed through salary savings.

Asked what a SPOTS terminal is, Deputy Chief Levesque responded it is the connection to the State for State police online telecommunications. It is the way the department runs its criminal, motor vehicle, and driver history. He noted they are looking into the allocation as it is his understanding the Town has not been billed for that for the past two years. However, the State cannot guarantee the next Memorandum of Understanding will not come with a fee. Several years ago, there was a different setup to run driver license queries and now there is a company out of IL that handles it for NH. There were additional user fees previously. Also, they were billing every agency a minimum of \$2,500 for using the two terminals. The Town has not been billed. The State has indicated the possibility the fee will be eliminated completely, but that is not yet confirmed.

Asked about the \$13,600 identified for Computers/RMS, Deputy Chief Levesque stated it to be the annual agreement with CrimeTRACK. The lifeline of the department is the records management system; how they dispatch their calls, track everything. The cost is to ensure their 24/7 availability for assistance.

Asked if the department is the last agency in the State to be on CrimeTRACK, Deputy Chief Levesque stated his belief that is the case. Asked how their service has been, he stated in terms of customer service they have been helpful. However, there are times when it is difficult to perform normal tasks

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such as writing reports. Councilor Albert asked and was told consideration is being given to a change in the system in the future.

Town Manager Cabanel noted the department has funding in the CRF, if needed. That could be done without impacting the tax rate. Councilor Albert suggested that be considered noting benefits that could be gained. Asked for an estimate of the cost, Deputy Chief Levesque suggested it would be \$175,000 - \$200,000. It is the interface from the current system into the new program; cannot lose 20 years of data. Chief Roy stated the department will have a committee consider which product would best suit the needs.

Councilor Healey noted the budget expenditure report includes 01-05-8508-0 - Operating Equipment. When she looks at the line item breakout, it is not there. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated it to be captured under 01-05-8506 0 - Communications Equipment, in the budget book. It is the same line item, it was just that when being brought into the Finance software for the budget it bumped the line to 8508 instead of leaving it at 8506.

Police

01-04-8105-0 Overtime - Supervisory; the \$5,000 increase is intended to cover the cost of ensuring there is a supervisor on shift for oversight of patrol officers. During times of vacations or sickness, they try to fill the shift with a Master Patrolman, if feasible. Unfortunately, the department is down to four Master Patrolmen.

Town Manager Cabanel noted approx. 70% of the budgets (salary increases, health insurance costs, utility costs, etc.) are prepared by the Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director and reviewed by the departments.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali remarked there is one union still in contract (police officers). The increase noted in Line item 01-04-8104-0 Wages - Other Full-Time (\$42,394), is the result of contractual wage increases.

Vice Chairman Koenig noted 6 Master Patrolmen identified in the budget and the remarks made regarding being down to 4. Chief Roy stated there to have been additional changes; few retirements. Detectives, before being transferred to Detectives were Master Patrolmen. There are four Master Patrolmen in the patrol division currently (can supervise a shift). Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated the information was a snapshot in time, and can be reviewed again to see if there are significant savings with the changes that have occurred in recent weeks.

Councilor Healey questioned the number of new officers in the past year, and was told there have been 10. Chief Roy commented the department has been fortunate to hire individuals who are certified and have experience in other communities. Vice Chairman Koenig spoke of the savings achieved when not having to send an officer through the academy (\$20,000). Councilor Harrington spoke of the expense related to supervision of new officers.

01-04-8111-0 Overtime - Other; shows a decrease of \$45,803. Last January the Council implemented a Special Investigation Unit (SIU), which allowed for the hiring of two officers. As training was

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needed and coverage had to continue while training was ongoing, the Council added money to the budget for overtime. Within the breakdown of overtime costs, \$10,000 is allocated to the line for that unit to allow for tracking of overtime expended in that specific unit.

Chief Roy noted a cost not assigned a number; two new officers (\$187,538). The amount was requested by the department; however, not recommended by the Town Manager. She felt it important to start the conversation about new officers. She spoke of the support the department received with the institution of the SIU to address drug activity. What she is shifting towards with officers is the actual officers on the streets who are taking the calls. Currently, on the 2nd shift, there is a supervisor and three officers on duty. If there is an accident, a domestic, and someone's mailbox gets smashed, there simply is not enough manpower to have two officers and a supervisor at a domestic and two officers at an accident scene where they have to direct traffic. There are four sectors, but they don't, and haven't for years, staffed those four sectors all the time. The department can, during busy times of the year, utilize overtime.

They track the number of calls. Although not always staffed, the sector has as many calls as the other three, and calls must be redirected. Chief Roy remarked her concern is not with the workload but with the safety of the officers and citizens.

Although it may not seem as if one additional person could make a difference, they have done the research to determine the staffing level needed to staff four sectors and a supervisor all the time. That number is not something she would feel comfortable asking for, but they are trying to start small with two people and to recognize there are over 1,000 new housing units in the Town that will bring at least 1,000 more people to Town. There are businesses coming into Town. All these things require their attention. At some point, there will need to be a discussion around staffing to ensure the department is able to maintain the level of service it has always provided and to continue to keep the community and officers safe.

Chairman Rothhaus commented when the discussion occurred around new officers for the SIU, it was noted the reason why the Town was experiencing this new problem was because the individuals were being chased away from other communities because of heavier enforcement. He questioned if the situation has improved. Chief Roy noted the department would be before the Council on the 24th of the month to provide an update on the activities of the unit over the past year. It has helped. The problem is still here. The officers are just as busy as they were at the onset, but they have better control over who is doing what. The more they do it the more they know the players. They know who has been run out of Town and who is coming back. Although they have had more arrests than any unit the department would ever be able to put together, they do make a dent in the issues and it is lessening the burden on the patrol officers.

Councilor Albert asked for clarification the second shift is staffed with a supervisor and three patrolmen, and was told that is the case. He commented it was always recognized that is the busiest shift and historically there was a supervisor and four sectors. Chief Roy stated the department still concentrates on the weekends trying to maintain four sectors. They are trying to keep the overtime budget under control. There are two officers who are almost ready to go on the road, one in the academy, and they are preparing to hire another. They are down four and soon to be five in the patrol division.

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Councilor Albert stated the desire for the discussion around new officers to include a review of data relative to the number of part 1 and part 2 crimes being investigated and number of calls for service spread out during the week. Chief Roy stated that information could be provided.

Town Manager Cabanel commented the discussion she and the Chief had was around gaining a sense of what will occur once all the new officers are on board. She felt the request to be a bit premature without having fully assessed the situation with a full complement of officers.

Chief Roy remarked, until those five people are on the street and there is a clear understanding of where the department is at; how it is staffed, where people can be moved to, it is not fair for her to say for certain what is needed. She does believe there is the need to start the conversation. Councilor Albert spoke of 6 Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) coming up, and a concern for the potential that well-deserved raises might not be supported as a result of the budget impact of increased staffing numbers.

Councilor Boyd questioned what the process would be to add the two officers were the Council to approve the requested amount and it became available on July 1st. Chief Roy responded the easy answer is they would go for certified officers. The current opening is advertising for that. Unfortunately, it is a hit or miss in that regard. If that were not an option, they would go through the 3-4-month process of advertising, testing, etc. Once completed, the individual(s) would attend the academy for 16 weeks. From there they do field training for another 12± weeks. Realistically by the time that process was completed it is close to a year before an officer would be out on his/her own to take calls.

Councilor Boyd commented he shares the concern relative to growth in the Town. He questioned if the discussion should be postponed or taking place now. Chairman Rothhaus remarked in order to have the understanding the Chief spoke of, it is important to see how it falls into place with full complement. Councilor Boyd remarked, if the money was appropriated in the FY20 budget it would take a year. He is uncertain additional knowledge could be gained from a review of the data.

Councilor Harrington stated her belief it is appropriate that the issue is brought up for an initial conversation. However, additional data is needed to understand call volume, etc. She agrees expected growth will have an impact, but it will not come about in 5 months. With additional data, the Council will be able to begin to see the trending/impact of some of the new developments, etc.

Chief Roy stated the reason behind the request was a desire not to take a wait and see approach, particularly understanding it will take a year before reaching the point of an officer on the street. Councilor Harrington remarked if the Chief can justify the additional cost to the Council, then she will have an entire Council that will justify the expense to the community.

Councilor Thornton commented that is difficult now as there are five officers coming on board. Once they are on the streets and the data shows the need, the Council will be able to fight it.

Councilor Albert questioned the last time the department was fully staffed, and was informed it has been years. They get close and then someone retires, etc.

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It was noted the five officers coming on board are replacements. Vice Chairman Koenig commented there has been some experience with a more fully staffed department and some concept and ideas of what is needed to be able to cover the different sectors, etc. He spoke of being skeptical of the need for additional data based on incoming officers as they are replacing ones the department has had before. Hopefully we will get some understanding of what the department functions like when close to full. The concern being raised is valid; these future developments are coming along, and each of the developments has to do a fiscal impact study to decide whether or not they will be cost positive or negative to the Town and/or school. That includes police and fire support for the extra load they are putting on the Town. The problem is none of those fiscal impacts imply that police officers aren't going to show up for a year. We must advance think that about a year or so. If we miss it this time around, we're looking at being two years out, from now, before we get these officers in. He offered the option of including half a year's salary for the two positions in the budget. That would provide time to review the data and reach a decision of whether to hire in the December timeframe.

Councilor Harrington questioned how the Council receives the information from the impact study. Vice Chairman Koenig stated the information is available. Town Manager Cabanel commented she went back and looked at the reports for the outlet mall. There were projections for numerous new staff members that never happened. She spoke of being very conservative particularly with hiring of new staff. When there is convincing information to present to the Council, it is provided. She understands the need to consider new projects that are planned for; however, there are times when the planned projects do not come to fruition. She reiterated, based on her conversations with the Chief and Deputy Chief, she does not feel this is the appropriate time to increase staffing.

Chairman Rothhaus stated his belief there is time available. Councilor Harrington stated agreement. Vice Chairman Koenig spoke of some of the projects that are coming to fruition.

01-04-8270-0 Dues & Fees; \$400 increase resulting from the addition of the Deputy Chief position and associated fees for the New Hampshire Police of Chief's Association and other associated costs.

01-04-8300-0 Travel & Meetings; increase of \$2,500. The department is trying to increase the training budget. With that, sometimes comes travel expenses.

01-04-8332-0 Maintenance-Vehicles; increased by \$1,850. A few years back, the department experienced a problem with the Ford Explorers and CO levels inside the cars. The department purchased detectors that sit in the cars. The two-year lifespan is coming to a close. Asked if the problem has been addressed by Ford, Councilor Albert stated it was caused by fit-up. They have to drill holes to install the cages, etc. Those holes were never filled with any type of gasket material thereby allowing exhaust to enter the vehicle. Deputy Chief Levesque commented on the blame that was going around between the upfitters and Ford. He stated his opinion, given the number of hours officers spend in the vehicles doing reports, etc. through the winter months, regardless, it is a great safety tool to have.

Vice Chairman Koenig agreed with the safety provided by the detectors; however, stated the cars should be corrected. Deputy Chief Levesque stated one car was sent back to Ford and the problem was corrected, none of the other vehicles have set off an alarm.

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Councilor Albert commented going forward Ford and the upfitters are aware this is an issue, and have addressed it. He questioned if CO monitors will be in the vehicles forever. Chief Roy stated agreement it should not fall on the Town, but on the flip side of that she also has concern over the officers sitting in the vehicles, particularly during winter months.

Vice Chairman Koenig agreed \$3,000 is short money when it comes to safety, but he would like to be confident the situation has been fixed.

Town Manager Cabanel commented given the fact that officers are spending such a large amount of time in idling vehicles, this safety measure is something that should probably have been in place all along, but only came to our attention when the issue presented itself in a big way.

Vice Chairman Koenig noted the budget identifies \$38,300 but the recommended budget amount is \$35,300. Town Manager Cabanel and Chief Roy indicated the total recommended should be \$38,300.

01-04-8334-0 Maintenance-Office Equipment; decreased by \$9,377 to \$5,000 based on purchasing the additional tablets for vehicles last year. The \$5,000 remaining in the account is for maintenance and/or replacement.

01-04-8335-0 Maintenance-Communications Equipment; additional \$10,209 is for new portable radios. The officers on the street have new portables. The Detectives and administrators do not. There is the desire to transition the Detectives to the new portables as some Detectives are on a tactical team and need to have a newer portable (each at a cost of \$2,500).

01-04-8352-0 Education & Training; requested budget includes an additional \$5,000. Training is extremely important, and costs are increasing. In addition, \$1,000 was added to conferences.

01-04-8503-0 Vehicles; this year four (4) vehicles are requested. The department does a cycle whereby three vehicles are requested for consecutive years and then in the fourth year a fourth vehicle is added. Older vehicles are repurposed. Costs have been rounded to \$35,000/vehicle. There are ancillary costs, e.g., this past year one of the SUVs was repurposed to a Detective's vehicle as it had extensive mileage; had to be painted, lights changed out, etc. Asked what the warranty is when purchasing new, Deputy Chief Levesque stated it to be the typical 3/36,000, power train for 100,000. Councilor Thornton questioned if a fourth vehicle would be needed were the department to purchase the extended warranty on new purchases. Deputy Chief Levesque remarked one year the department did cut back on a vehicle, and the impact of that is being seen now, e.g., all administration vehicles are in the 90,000 miles range.

Chairman Rothhaus remarked when not out on the road patrolling, vehicles last a long time before getting into major problems beyond preventative maintenance. Councilor Albert commented on the idling time adding to the wear and tear of the vehicles, which is not reflected in mileage. Vice Chairman Koenig noted the fourth car is not purchased because they are going to retire a different car early, it is that they are getting ten cars over three years.

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Councilor Healey requested the Council be provided with information relative to the year, make, model, and mileage of the vehicles being repurposed.

Councilor Albert noted the \$5,000 listed under K-9 expenses, and questioned if the cost of a new K-9 has been figured into the budget. Chief Roy spoke of the donation from Crimeline and how that, along with the monies budgeted for the current year, helped defer those costs.

Asked about the cost of gasoline (listed as \$2.58/gal.). Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali acknowledged that is higher than street prices today; however, budget planning is for 12-18 months out, and recent trends show prices increasing.

Councilor Healey questioned the \$2,000 decrease in 01-04-8280-0 General Insurance; property, liability and auto insurance. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated there to be a several pronged approach; police officers, vehicles, jail cells, etc. The insurance provider identifies a Guaranteed Maximum Rate (GMR). That is divided throughout all departments in Town.

Police Detail

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated the hours remain the same with no change in the rate. The Administrative charge has increased, which is where the difference of \$6,000 comes in. The Finance Office does a calculation for the time of the Town Manager, Chief, Finance Department (to process). There was a change in the way some of the administration has occurred. The Finance Department is now doing all billing for outside details.

Fire

Town Manager Cabanel remarked she and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali met with the Chief and Assistant Chiefs and reviewed overtime. From a logic standpoint, it made sense there would be less coverage because there would be less vacation time for newer people.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali noted last year the department hired nine (9) new employees in the month of October. Under station shift coverage (vacation, sick time, etc.) the budget listed the number of hours needed as 4,763. It is believed that line can be reduced to 4,200, which would represent an approx. \$25,000 savings in line item 01-03-8111-0 Overtime - Other.

Also, 01-03-8459-0 Physical Exams, can be reduced by \$15,750. At the start of the budget process (July/August timeframe) discussion was taking place, on a national level, around contaminants firefighters encounter. It was believed there would be a national standard for testing. One has not come forward. At this time, in the absence of national standards, those dollars can be removed from the budget.

01-03-8104-0 Wages - Other Full-Time; shows an increase of \$39,091. That will bring the budget up to reflect a full-year's salary for the 9 firefighters hired last year.

Councilor Boyd questioned if the proposed agreement with the firefighters' union is reflected in the budget, and was informed, if ratified by the Council, that will be put forth as a separate warrant article.

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Michael Currier, Fire Chief, stated there to be an approx. \$9,000 increase associated with wage increases.

Town Manager Cabanel noted most departments don't show any increases for wages unless an unusual circumstance. She had questioned the increase in absence of a contract. A careful review was conducted to identify the increases were associated with wage increases and movement, e.g., an individual moved into a higher paying position, e.g., EMT to Paramedic.

Vice Chairman Koenig questioned the department request under 01-03-8103-0 Wages - Supervisory; \$1,282,726 and the Town Manager recommendation of \$994,508. Chief Currier highlighted the line referencing four new hires (\$417,150). That request was not put into the budget.

Town Manager Cabanel explained the four positions (without benefit cost) were added to the wage request. They subsequently placed the cost of the four positions inclusive of benefit costs (\$417,150) elsewhere. The wage costs should have been removed from the budget.

01-03-8105-0 Overtime - Supervisory; shows an increase of \$6,729. The department now has ability to promote four offices in the ranks that are now Paramedics. Being added to the budget is the training they require to keep their certifications up. Vice Chairman Koenig questioned if the reason the increase is in the overtime line item is because they are paid overtime during training, and was told that is the case.

Town Manager Cabanel asked for clarification the increase was based on hours not because they are at a higher wage, and was told that is the case.

Chief Currier 01-03-8107-0 Wages - Part-Time - the department has emergency medical personnel that cover the ambulance on a part-time service. They are run in 2 shifts/16 hours/day. Currently they are paid \$16/hr. What is being found is the need to cover 5,824 hours/year. It comes up to about 5,824 hours. What is being used is 3,944. We're running short every year about 1,880 hours. Town Manager Cabanel stated the reason to be difficulty in hiring due to the wages offered. Chief Currier added you can't keep them. When they work part-time, they may be in Merrimack, Milford, or AMR, and if Merrimack has an open shift on Monday and then they find out there is an open shift on AMR on Monday they call in sick for us and take the shift that is paying \$20+/hour.

A review of surrounding communities utilizing part-time EMS personnel was conducted to determine wages needed to draw them back and keep them. He stated his belief Merrimack offers a better service and better opportunities. The rates proposed for a part-time Paramedic (Advanced Life Support (ALS)) is \$21/hour, part-time Advanced EMT (ALS) \$19/hour, and part-time EMT (BLS) \$15/hour.

Chairman Rothhaus spoke of the hefty rates charged for the ambulance, and questioned if services are being covered with that revenue, e.g., amount of down time. Each year the Town receives the new Medicare rates and places a surcharge of 50% on top of that. Private companies do Medicare + 250%. Chief Currier remarked if you look at the ambulance alone, without the fire component, it pays for itself, and the positions in the budget would be covered under that. In order to support a community of this size, to have the staffing needed to fight a fire, you combine the fire and ambulance. When there is not a fire you have advanced EMT firefighters, Paramedic firefighters to handle 70% of the calls. It

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keeps them very busy. When you have that fire, they switch over to the role of a firefighter.

Asked if the full rate is charged every time the ambulance goes out, Chief Currier stated that to be the case if they transport. If they do not transport, there is no call. Asked if transport is a fixed rate, he noted it is dependent upon the needs of the patient, e.g., medications, oxygen, etc. The ambulance has Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), and able to prep. the patient for the Cath lab in the ambulance before they get to the hospital; all meds on board. When arriving at the Emergency Department they skip it and go right into the Cath lab.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated insurance is billed. If the bill comes back and is Medicare adjusted, it is contractual, and they don't bill for the additional. If there are Medicare gap plans it will be submitted there. If someone cannot afford an ambulance bill, the Town makes every effort to set up a payment plan. If unable to pay there are protocols where the Welfare Department gets involved, looks at their income, and makes a recommendation to the Finance Department who sends a recommendation as to whether the cost would be written off or a payment plan established.

Chief Currier noted last year the question came up of the on-call Firefighter/EMT lines. Discussed was the revamping and revitalization of that group. A review was done of the demographics. Individuals volunteering to be firefighters is dwindling dramatically. Milford had one of the best volunteer/call divisions in the State (waiting list of 50-100). At this time, the waiting list is gone, and they are having a hard time finding people to cover their shifts. This year, they are looking at putting on 2-4 more career guys during the day.

Being proposed is to advertise for call firefighters. They will change what they do and how they operate within the organization. The Town has a lot of good firefighters that came out of the call division. Chief Currier stated he was one having started in 1983 and spent 20 years in call before going full time.

The intent is to have the call firefighters on a probationary status for one year. During that time, they will not fight fires, but they will be present on scene assisting in some capacity. They will be part of the group, and will have the opportunity to decide whether they wish to fight fires. After that first year, they will be looked to for a decision; do they want to embrace the fire side, the medical side, the emergency management side, or stay on in a support function.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali stated Councilor Thornton's remarks from the last budget cycle were heard, they are looking at revamping the service for volunteers. The request is for \$6,180 for this year to cover the cost of getting the program up and running.

Chief Currier commented when going for grants, if going as a career firefighter department only we're up against Manchester, Nashua, New York; federal grant. If going as a combination fire department/call we are up against Bedford, Milford, Nashua.

Chief Currier stated staffing will increase in the coming years. Right now, the department is operationally maxed and staffed on calls, we are still up on mutual aid (requesting more than using). In the next few years there will be somewhere around 420 single family/condo./townhouse units coming in, about 880 apartments, total of about 1,300 living units. There is the possibility of an

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assisted living/nursing home of 199 beds coming into Harris Pond. There was a combination of proposals some that are approved and some in conceptual stage; the numbers were totaled and identified a potential increase of up to 199 between assisted living and nursing, and the possible hotel by the Merrimack Premium Outlets (90-120 rooms).

Chief Currier commented it would be great to add staffing, but he does not think this is the time. There is the need for investigation as to what will come to fruition.

In order to save on overtime, they are staffing to 9. When someone takes a vacation that 9 is dropped to 8. That is saving on overtime. As times goes on and population increases dropping to the 8 will get tougher.

Councilor Albert asked for a description of a capped shift.

Chief Currier stated there to be 9 personnel/shift. Engine 2 has an officer and 2 firefighters (south end), at Station 1, engine 1 is manned with an officer and 2 firefighters, and ambulance 1 is staffed with a Paramedic and a Firefighter. In total there is 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant, and 7 firefighters on a shift.

Asked what he was looking to discuss, Chief Currier stated it to be the addition of 4 Lieutenants. In the fire service an engine is an operational unit. When you go to an incident you assign that engine to a task. Everybody on that engine becomes a part of that task except for the driver. If you have a three-man engine company and go to a building where you have to search the second floor you abandon that engine and all three search it and you have two firefighters and an officer to control that task. He was looking for four Lieutenants so he could put a Lieutenant on Engine 2 in the South End, a Lieutenant on Engine 1 in Central (Captain becomes Shift Commander), and a Shift Commander. His Shift Commander is not in a car. If there is an incident in the South End that needs a Shift Commander to make decisions or run a command function, he has to send the second engine down, which takes both engines out of service.

At this time, in the absence of Shift Commanders, Chief Currier and another swap off nights and weekends. When the engine company arrives on scene, they are going inside to fight the fire, and there is no one outside to call mutual aid, safety, etc.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali commented he, the Town Manager, and Chief Currier have discussed this request being in the infancy stage at this time. There are other options such as grants. There remains data to be compiled regarding this request.

01-03-8321-0 Maintenance-Buildings & Grounds; \$9,000 increase as a placeholder for plowing of the three stations. Actual cost will be \$2,000.

Councilor Albert spoke of cell phone usage and questioned if that is shopped around. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Micali responded that has not been shopped in a while. Cell phone reimbursement is based on the cell phone policy that identifies a specific amount for data, calls, etc. The phones that are on the ambulance itself are through Verizon. Cell phones are tiered, and an

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emergency cell phone is the top tier. The last time it was shopped some of the other companies did not offer the emergency tier.

Chief Currier noted FirstNet was designed and is contracted through AT&T for emergency responders only. There would have to be a change from Verizon to AT&T. The cost of that will have to be looked at. What they are guaranteeing is that anyone who is a first responder can get on Firstnet on their phones, and when they call, wherever they are calling from, they have priority.

01-03-8332-0 Maintenance-Vehicles; \$18,000 increase due to Engine 4 needing to have body work (paint). The intent is to keep that vehicle for another 8-10 years. Recommendations are the first line pumper is good for 10 years. Every ten years we replace a first line pumper, but we replace it and put it second due for another 10 years. Engines 1 and 2 are the first lines and 3 and 4 are the second due. We can get 20 years out of an engine by taking it offline at the 10-year mark and doing maintenance to keep it in the rotation. The upgrade budgeted for is for engine 4. Data being looked at this year is maintenance per vehicle.

01-03-8502-0 Buildings Infrastructure Upgrades/Installations; increase of \$14,500 for floor tile in the second floor of Station 1, upgrade of safety light systems at both stations, paving the aprons of stations 1, 2, and 3, and signage for station 2.

01-03-8508-0 Operating Equipment; increase of \$2,200. Increases include an ambulance UV emitter (UV light - portable) to kill all bacteria in ambulance after it is cleaned and ladder locator beacons, which is a safety issue. They attach to the tip of all ground ladders that are used in a fire. When the ladder is in the truck, they are off. Once you take the ladder out of a truck and it hits a certain angle they come on, shine light down, and flash green. In a heavy smoke situation, if firefighters are on the roof they can turn back, and they know where the roof edge is or in evacuation scenarios, they can see evacuate points quickly.

Councilor Boyd questioned 01-03-8502-0 Buildings Infrastructure Upgrades/Installations; specifically, what will be done for renovations at Station 3 using funds from the Shed Harris Fund. Chief Currier stated that has been put on hold as there seems to be confusion as to what the fund can be used for. Station 3 has not been renovated for a long time. It is an important station; hazardous materials, equipment, trailers, and other items are stored there. Doors are falling apart, insulation is pretty much gone, there is deterioration to the exterior of the building and windows that need to be replaced. There is a rodent problem in there now because the holes they have dug cannot be blocked. Critter control is coming in next week. Flatley sent an email stating in the spring they will pay for spraying and cleaning up the hose tower because it is unsightly for them.

Asked what remains in the Shed Harris Fund, Town Manager Cabanel stated it to be \$1 million. Asked what the purpose of the fund is, she indicated it was created in 1929. The Will addresses fire protection in the Reeds Ferry area. If the building is being used only as a storage facility, then it isn't providing fire protection. You need to consider if the intent of the Will is being met or is it not relevant any longer because now is the modern age and South Station covers that area. At some point, the Council might consider whether it is an obsolete need and that it might possibly be repurposed by the Court for some other fire need(s). Councilor Boyd questioned if that was ever run by legal counsel. Town Manager Cabanel stated she does not believe it would be a problem to do so. Chairman

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Rothhaus cautioned commenting he was always annoyed that they could just throw away the old Lowell Memorial Library when it was time to move it, and the Wright property is his biggest angst. All those things are quick and easy to run through the Court. When someone gives something to the Town he treads carefully.

Councilor Boyd suggested the issue be revisited at the Council's Retreat. Fire Department infrastructure has been an ongoing discussion since his time on the Council began in 2011. If there is vagueness regarding the purpose of the fund, legal counsel should be asked for an opinion.

Vice Chairman Koenig questioned 01-03-8242-0 - Natural Gas; specifically, \$2,400 allocation for Reed's Ferry Station and \$2,400 for South Station. It was noted the temperature is kept at about 50-52 to keep the pipes from freezing, but it is a very old, drafty building.

Code Enforcement

The budget decreased by \$9,044.

01-06-8321-0 Maintenance-Buildings & Grounds; Vice Chairman Koenig noted \$1,400 identified two years ago to install security door at counter, \$2,300 budgeted for this year and another \$2,300 proposed. Chief Currier stated it was not done last year. The plan is to do it this year and to add a security bar and window. The monies from prior years were not expended.

Councilor Healey questioned 01-03-8203-0 Operating Supplies; specifically, how reimbursement for Narcan occurs. It is a medication replaced on a one for one exchange by the hospital that receives the patient.

Town Manager Cabanel noted a large decrease in the Fire Department's budget for retirement; \$38,000. Within the Police Department there is another \$31,000.

There is a large increase in the Fire Department and a decrease in the Police Department for Workers' Compensation.

Adjourn

MOTION made by Councilor Boyd and seconded by Councilor Thornton to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIED 7-0-0

The January 9, 2019 meeting of the Town Council was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Submitted by Dawn MacMillan