



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Wednesday, January 13, 2021, at 6:30 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

Call to Order: Chairman Koenig called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Present at the meeting: Chairman Koenig, Vice Chair Boyd, Councilor Harrington, Councilor Rothhaus, Councilor Albert, Councilor Healey, Councilor Woods and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali.

Absent: Town Manager Eileen Cabanel

Pledge of Allegiance: Chairman Koenig led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements: Chairman Koenig announced the dates of the upcoming meetings.

- Thursday, January 14, 2021, 7:00 PM - Regular meeting
- Wednesday January 20, 2021, 6:30 PM – Budget Meeting
- Thursday, January 21, 2021, 6:30 PM – Budget Meeting
- Thursday, January 28, 2021, 7:00 PM - Regular meeting

The Town Council held a public meeting to review the 2021/22 budget, to include the following departments:

Community Development:

Tim Thompson (Community Development Director) walked through the Community Development organizational chart and Paul Micali (Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director) provided a brief overview of the budget changes explaining that the majority of the increase to the budget is due to the 53rd week of payroll (like all other departments), and increase in retirement. Mr. Thompson began his presentation by reiterating Mr. Micali's statement that the majority of his 3% budget increase is due to the 53rd week of payroll and increase in retirement. The budget is \$16,030 over what it was last year and \$15,073 of that increase is personnel costs. The \$957.00 difference is due to increased postage and legal notices, last year the Council requested that we post the legal notices in an additional newspaper so that has doubled our cost.

Mr. Thompson wrapped up his presentation by providing a summary of the department's accomplishments over the last year.

Councilor Woods asked about the deposit in the Capital Reserve Fund for GIS. Mr. Thompson explained that we spent approximately \$7,000 in GIS fees this year. Mr. Micali interjected to explain the big expense for GIS is fly overs and the last time we had one conducted was 14 years ago but we would like to have more accurate data so we would like to plan to do it more often (every 4-5 years). The fly over costs approximately \$68,000 but it is the most important part of the GIS so the Capital Reserve Fund allows us to save for that. Mr. Thompson also added that the deposit was reduced from \$20,000 to \$15,000 a couple of years ago and Mr. Micali stated the current balance in the account is \$123,000.

Councilor Boyd asked if the NRPC continues to add value to the Community Development department. Mr. Thompson stated that the work that they do specifically with their transportation technical advisory committee has been extremely valuable to our community. Without it we would not

have gotten the grant funding for the town center trail projects or the sidewalk projects that the Town Council is looking to promote and construct within the next several years. We do not utilize as many of the services that smaller towns without staff use but the membership is still a value to us. Councilor Boyd indicated that he is the liaison to the NRPC and has heard that the executive board has hinted at increasing the membership fees so he wanted to provide the town with a heads up.

Chairman Koenig asked about the legal notice fees because last year's budget was decreased from the previous year. Mr. Thompson explained that although we have had fewer meetings, we have had more cases per meeting and we are now noticing in two newspapers. He then asked about the postage costs because that too was decreased in the previous year's budget and is now going up again. Mr. Thompson explained that it is all dependent on the amount of abutters a case has, a case with a lot of abutters is going to drive up the cost. He also reminded the Council that both the legal fees and postage are offset by application fees paid by the applicants. The department did increase the legal notice fee for Zoning Board applications and did not receive any negative feedback from the development community or residents.

Welfare

Patricia Murphy (Welfare Administrator) was in attendance to present the Welfare budget to the council. She began by stating that her budget is only increasing by \$201 from last year as she was able to adjust some line items based on actual expenses incurred. She spoke about the effects of COVID on the department and indicated that they had about \$3,000 in direct costs related to COVID and it was mostly due to people that were homeless. The past year was a terrible year for homelessness, the Welfare Department normally sees roughly 5 homeless cases per year and the past year yielded 32. The beginning of the pandemic was especially hard because most of the shelters were closed. Ms. Murphy went on to explain that the number of hardship cases due to evictions was down this past year and that was due to all of the moratoriums that were put in place. She also explained that the homelessness situation is not due to COVID but rather the housing market. Housing costs have skyrocketed and the fair market rent has gone up by approximately \$200 per bedroom, these costs are being seen across the country and not just in Merrimack,

Councilor Albert asked if the homeless cases in Merrimack are individuals that once had a residence in town but lost it. Mr. Murphy explained that the way the welfare laws work is that the person seeking help only has to be in the town they are applying for help in. In other words, if someone takes up residence at one of the inexpensive hotels in town and then runs out of money, they can then come to our Welfare Department for assistance. She also explained that one of the ways she assists a homeless individual is by looking for shelters for them. Out of the 32 cases that the town managed, we only financially assisted with four of them. She was happy to announce that two new facilities are opening soon in Nashua that will increase the options available for shelters.

Council Albert asked about a request from Greater Nashua Mental Health (line item 8399) for \$33,000 with a recommendation from the Town Manager of \$13,000. He wanted to know if the requested amount came from them. Ms. Murphy explained that a few years ago they changed the methodology in determining the cost for municipalities based on the number of people in the community and the number of people not insured. The number changed substantially but the number of people in town did not change so she was not sure how the number was factored. They are an excellent resource to the town and we do utilize them frequently but could not justify the huge increase.

Councilor Albert also asked about the line item for Lamprey Health Care. He recalled that this charity came up a couple years ago and no one was sure who they were and what they did but now he sees that there is \$5,000 in the budget for them. Ms. Murphy explained that Lamprey Health Care is an organization that helps to assist low-income families with insurance costs (high deductibles and copays). They missed the timeframe to submit a proposal during the last budget season but has submitted one for the coming year.

Councilor Albert asked why the Meals on Wheels budget went down by \$1,000. Ms. Murphy stated she is not sure why, they just requested less than previous years.

Councilor Rothhaus asked if Lamprey Health missed the deadline two years in a row because they are missing two years of data. Ms. Murphy indicated that it was only one and she has a type in her spreadsheet. He then asked when she receives a homeless case if she investigates where the person (or people) originated from. Ms. Murphy responded that she does...even though the law required the town to assist then regardless of where they came from, she likes to contact their local welfare office to see if any assistance was offered. In some instances, she learned that the welfare office in their town offered to look for shelters for them and the person refused. She added that in cases with kids, she likes to get the family back to their hometown so the children can stay in school.

Councilor Healey asked Mr. Micali if we could get reimbursed under the CARES act for the money we spent when the shelters were closed. Mr. Micali confirmed that we have been reimbursed already.

Councilor Boyd asked if Harbor Care used to be Harbor Homes. Ms. Murphy confirmed that it is the same organization and they changed their name last fall. Harbor Care has three agencies under their umbrella and they did one proposal for the upcoming budget and the proposal was less than what was previously spent on the three independently.

Councilor Boyd then asked about transportation and the comment that indicates they are running at 50%...are they still servicing 225 riders but only running 50% of the time? Ms. Murphy explained that they still have the same number of people registered but due to COVID people are not going out as frequently. She also added that there was a period of time during the beginning of the pandemic where they were shut down and not offering services at all. Councilor Boyd also asked if they gave any indication as to why the cost went up by \$5.00 an hour. Ms. Murphy indicated that the increase was due to personnel costs. Councilor Albert asked for clarification on the 225 number, is that 225 rides given or 225 people that have requested rides. Ms. Murphy explained that it is 225 people registered to get the service. 225 residents from Merrimack have registered to receive rides if needed. Chairman Koenig asked if the fee that we pay them is a one-time fee or per ride. Ms. Murphy explained that there is a 50% cost match for this program so the organization determines the number by estimating the cost by the number of people registered and then they request 50% of that rate from us. Chairman Koenig questioned why they are requesting the same amount of money from us if the number of rides seem to be down. Ms. Murphy explained that they had to do a lot of PPE changes to their vehicles so some of that cost could be factored in.

Ms. Murphy concluded her presentation by mentioning a ride share study that the NRPC is conducting and they are looking for our support with. She is going to discuss it in detail at the January 28th meeting but wanted to give everyone an advance warning now.

Library

Mr. Micali prefaced the Library presentation by explaining the library budget is different than any other department budget because they have their own Board of Trustees. Any changes that the council suggests for this budget would need to be reviewed and approved by the library Board of Trustees.

Debra Covell (Chair of the Library Board of Trustees) and Janet Krupp (Library Board of Trustees Treasurer) were in attendance to present the budget to the council. Ms. Covell explained that the library budget is down from last year due to the fact that the library was fortunate enough to have trust funds bequeathed to the Library for the trustees to spend, so they are able to add 12,000 to the bottom line.

Chairman Koenig asked if there were any changes to the budget that they should be aware of. Ms. Krupp explained that there was a decrease of \$20,000 in wages because they eliminated a full-time position but brought in a part time employee to assist at the reference desk. The other major change was an increase of \$8,000 to increase expand their digital offerings (e-books, audio books, etc.).

Chairman Koenig asked how things have been going since the onset of COVID, the library was closed for a period of time and is not back open with visitation limits. Ms. Covell responded that the Library Director (Yvette Couser) and her staff have done a great job keeping statistics to identify where funds should be spent and keep an ear open for the needs of the residents. They determined that WIFI access was needed by people in the community so they got hot spots and when they saw the demand was rising for electronic media, they increased their digital offerings. Director Couser spoke briefly about the reference services they have been able to offer since the pandemic and spoke a bit about the two-hour limit that is currently in place. She does not foresee any immediate big changes but is hopeful they can open up fully in the coming months.

Councilor Albert asked where the \$77,000 came from in the budget. Mr. Micali advised that it is a \$75,000 Capital Reserve transfer for building maintenance and another \$2,000 for office equipment. Everything comes out of the capital reserve fund. Next year they are looking at an HVAC study and some elevator repairs.

Parks and Recreation

Mr. Micali briefly discussed the org chart which consists of two full time employees and one part time employee that is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings at Wasserman Park. During the summer, the employee grows due to the operation of the day camp. As for the budget, besides the increases due to the 53rd week of payroll, the budget is pretty much the same as it was last year, with the exception of a decrease in utilities based on a three-year average. The only other notable changes are a slight increase in the part time employee budget for an additional lifeguard, an infrastructure increase of \$4,200 for the waterfront project and increases for both the MYA and the Adult Community Center. Both of those facilities requested an additional \$5,000 due to higher operating expenses.

Matthew Casparius (Director of Parks and Recreation) presented the Parks and Recreation budget to the Council. Mr. Casparius started his presentation by expressing that Parks and Rec had a difficult year because they are a department built on socialization and more than half of their activities were cancelled due to COVID. The most difficult of all the cancellations was the loss of the summer camp. He briefly recapped the summer events and the issues at Watson Park and Wildcat Falls that occurred

as well as the socially distanced Fall and Winter activities. The department is preparing for the winter carnival right now and it will be run similar to the Halloween event, time ticketed entry, a limited number of tickets sold and social distancing. Mr. Casparius wrapped up his overview by stating he is hopeful that the COVID vaccines will be mostly administered by the summer so that they can move forward with summer camp.

Mr. Casparius turned his attention to the budget and explained that they have spent the last two summers working on the permits for the beach renovation project at Wasserman park. The permit process with DES was challenging because they were working remotely and they would not accept applications electronically. They worked through it and finally got their permits in December so they are ready to begin the project in the spring. Mr. Casparius then shared his proposal for expanding lifeguard coverage at Wasserman Park. The beach saw an increase in usage last year, especially on the weekends and the department feels that it would be beneficial to bring lifeguards in to cover the weekends. The plan is to hire one park attendant and one lifeguard. The camp lifeguard could help cover some of the daytime hours during the week and the additional lifeguard could cover late day until 7pm and weekends. The beach has not had weekend lifeguard coverage for about 10 years but the number of visitors climbed from an average of 100 a day to 300 last summer so they would like to add more coverage. Additionally, the Waterfront Director's position was re-classified last year due to added responsibilities so the increase in wages reflects that change as well.

Mr. Casparius continued his presentation by reviewing the plans for two projects in the infrastructure category that have been on the docket for several years. The first of the two is the replacement of the docks at Wasserman Park. The current docks are constructed of wood with a foam substructure and they are at the end of their life. They are both 29 years old and the department spends a great deal of time maintain them. They live in the water full time largely in part to the fact that they are afraid they will break if they try to pull them out. They also incurred a lot of damage this past summer because people were pulling off the side foam rails to get underneath the dock. The current docks are an "H" shape configuration and would cost \$46,000 to replace with modern day materials however, the "H" shape impairs the lifeguards line of sight across the water, so they are proposing to replace the docks with 2 straight- line docks supported by posts in the water. Aside from improving the line of sight for the lifeguards, this proposal also cuts the cost almost in half (\$26,400). Each dock will be 50 feet in length with a 10-foot ramp leading into it. With the beach renovation project beginning in the spring, it would be a good time to upgrade the docks as well.

The second project under the infrastructure umbrella is upgrades to the Parks and Rec office (\$14,800). The building is rather old but is in decent condition however the roof is at the end of its lifespan. The roofs on all of the buildings at Wasserman Park were inspected two years ago and the office is due for a replacement this year. The roof replacement only accounts for \$4,800 of the projected \$14,800 and the rest is for the addition of an ADA compliant access ramp. The Parks and Rec office is a public building and should therefore be ADA accessible.

Chairman Koenig asked if there is a need for the public to access the Parks and Rec office. Mr. Casparius responded that the public does visit the office to register for events and activities. He also added that in addition to the ramp being missing, the steps leading into the office are not compliant as they are because the top step is too steep. The idea of moving the office to the function hall (which is ADA accessible) was discussed previously but the problem with the function hall is getting to it in the winter. When a large snowstorm hits, it can take days to clear the path to the function hall because it is not a priority. Chairman Koenig stated he did not realize the office was used for registration too.

Councilor Albert expressed concerns regarding spending \$14,800 on such an old building. In his opinion the basement of the function hall makes more logical sense for the department office and they can make accommodations to have the path plowed and salted during snowstorms. He asked Mr. Micali to weigh in on the condition of the building. Mr. Micali stated that the building department recently assessed all of the buildings at Wasserman Park and the office was deemed to be in decent shape. It has its problems, the chimney does not work (but it is not used anyway), the basement had to be sealed off and the roof needs to be replaced but overall, it is not in as bad of shape as some of the cabins are. Mr. Casparius also added that the basement of the function hall was cleared out over 10 years ago after a flood and was never finished. He has it in the CIP for 2025-2026 but it is going to cost roughly 70,000 to finish the basement due to its size (3,000 square feet).

Councilor Albert then asked about the line item under maintenance for the wash out of town beach (\$2,000) and questioned if that money is needed because of the beach project. Mr. Casparius explained that the line item is not just for the wash out of the beach, it includes the maintenance of flower beds and one or two other things). The money is not spent every year but, in some years, they do use it all.

Councilor Albert questioned whether or not the project to run water to the dog park has been started. Mr. Casparius explained that it has not started because the water pressure is not sufficient to get the water up to the park. Some sort of water pump is needed and they have not figured it all out yet so it has not started.

The last question posed by Councilor Albert was regarding the \$5,000 line item for town parks and whether it was a savings for a future park or something else. Mr. Micali responded that the line item is for any maintenance needed at the parks (such as the lights at Martel field and the netting at Twardosky).

Councilor Boyd asked Mr. Casparius if he is open to moving his office to a new location. Mr. Micali interjected and explained that a couple of years ago, they tried moving the Parks and Rec Director office to the town hall but they found that it opened up the park to vandalism. For some reason when there is a car in the parking lot (indicating someone is in the office) the vandalism decreases. Councilor Boyd explained that the reason behind his question is that he has the same concerns as Councilor Albert did about spending \$14,800 on an old building, and is curious if we have a ballpark figure of how much longer the building will last. Mr. Micali replied that much like a car, it is difficult to tell but some of the fixes they have done will help prolong the life. Sealing up the basement made the building more sound and less drafty and he is certain that adding a new roof will prolong the life even more. Mr. Casparius added that 95% of what he does happens at Wasserman Park and he would waste a lot of time driving back and forth if he was at another location. He also spoke about the setup when the office was at town hall, they were located in the attic which isn't accessible to the public so when someone would come in to register for an event, they would be called down to the Town Manager's office and would have to process the transaction wherever they could find space.

Chairman Koenig asked about the increase for MYA and the Adult Community Center. Mr. Micali offered to speak to this increase and explained that the Adult Community Center generates revenue by renting the facility for functions and at the onset of COVID, they were forced to close and still have not re-opened. They are requesting assistance to help cover operational costs. They are trying to open soon but as of right now, Meals on Wheels is the only one using the facility. Councilor Harrington is the liaison for the Community Center and spoke to some of the changes that have happened since COVID to justify the request for funds. She also touched on the MYA request by explaining that all of the sports they offer have had to establish new protocols for PPE and disinfecting the equipment. Councilor Healey added a clarification for the listening audience that the town provides money to the

MYA to help cover the cost of the maintenance and upkeep of the building. She then asked about the MYA line item for electricity (\$687 per month) which seems high for a building that is not used 24 hours a day. Mr. Micali explained that the amount includes the ballfield lights which is the bulk of the fees. She then questioned a couple other line items under MYA that were addressed by Mr. Micali.

Councilor Harrington added to the MYA discussion by announcing that they had a positive audit this past week and she expressed appreciation on behalf of the Council for all of the hard work they put into getting to this point.

Councilor Albert asked if some of the expenses related to the athletic fields (electricity, lighting, etc.) could be off-set by the fees we are charging to the leagues. Mr. Casparius explained that any team that has 80% of its players as residents are not charged and that makes up the majority of the rentals. There are a few other leagues that we do collect fees from but the revenue would not make a dent in the cost because the fees we charge are low and there are not enough paid rentals. The discussion continued about the revenue tournaments generate for the town and the cost of the electricity different when the lights are turned on prior to 8:00 PM. Mr. Casparius ultimately committed to having the Parks and Rec committee look into increasing the rental fees.

Summer Day Camp (i.e., Revolving Fund)

Mr. Micali provided a brief overview of the different items that are included in this fund and explained that it is self-funded and all of the money in the budget is derived from fees, no tax payer dollars go into this fund. He then turned the floor over to Mr. Casparius to discuss the specifics of this fund.

Mr. Casparius began by explaining his salary and the salary of the Program Coordinator come out of this budget, they take all of their major programs that are run by Parks and Rec and allocate a percentage of those funds to pay the costs of the wages. The largest income generator of all of the programs is summer camp so of course, it has the highest allocation (70%). With summer camp being cancelled last year they were left in a pickle that they are going to try and avoid this year. Camp registration traditionally opens by the last weekend in January but the 2021 camp regulations have yet to be released and it looks as though they will not be until March. The concern with waiting until the regulations are released to open registration is that we may lose campers to other camps in the area that do open registration now. The Town Manager gave the ok to open the posting for camp employees last week so we would not lose good candidates to other camps and Mr. Casparius is hoping to get approval from the Council to open registration too to avoid losing campers. He also mentioned that the camp accreditation is up for renewal (\$1,500) and he was able to get an extension it but it is due by the end of January.

Councilor Harrington stated that the request seems reasonable as long as there is a caveat that camp opening is dependent upon the final determination of the Council. She also questioned if they need \$1,500 to pay for the accreditation renewal. Mr. Micali confirmed that there is enough money in the Revolving Fund to cover the \$1,500. The Council unanimously agreed that Parks and Rec could open with registration with the caveat that the final decision will be made by the Town Council.

Chairman Koenig asked why there was not a 2019-2020 budget for the Revolving Fund page in the Budget book because they did approve one last year. Mr. Micali explained that because it is a revolving fund, the budget was zeroed out when camp was cancelled because that is what generate the funds. Chairman Koenig expressed that he felt it should still be included in the book so Mr. Micali committed to adding it back in.

Chairman Koenig commended Mr. Casparius on a job well done.

Communications

Mr. Micali explained that the communication department falls under the police umbrella and includes the dispatchers and office staff. The majority of the changes are attributed to a 2% increase for union employees, the 53rd week of payroll (like all other departments), and increase in retirement. The only other significant increase is \$20,756 for line item #8334. This increase is due to the maintenance for the new records management system (RMS). The maintenance fees for the new system are going to cost roughly \$35,000. He then turned the presentation over to Police Chief Leveque to discuss the specifics of the changes.

Chief Levesque began by discussing the records management system. The current system the town is using is old and outdated and needs to be updated. The annual cost of maintenance for the new system will run roughly \$35,000 (for Police and Fire) compared to the \$14,000 that is being paid now. They have not committed to anything yet but would like to move forward with the new company.

Chairman Koenig asked why if it is all falls under the Police budget if it is Fire and Police combined. Chief Leveque stated that it was a package price and that they can work on determining what the Fire Department share is and separate it out. He then asked if Chief Levesque could explain the benefits of the new system so the listening audience could understand what the additional cost covers. Chief Levesque explained that the major benefit is to be able to interface with the state on things like drivers' licenses, e-tickets, court warrants, etc. The current system is not able to do this. In addition to the state interface, ease of use and better reporting capabilities are other benefits. Councilor Harrington asked how Fire uses it. Chief Levesque stated he did not want to speak for Chief Duke but knows the Fire Department is coming to the end of life with their current system. Having Police and Fire on two different systems has also caused communication problems that migrating to one system will solve.

Councilor Albert (who is a retired Police officer) spoke in support of the new system stating that the one that is being used today (Crime Track) is 22 years old and is very outdated. The issue with Fire being on a completely different system causes problems and he believes the new system will be more efficient.

Chairman Koenig asked if we are saving anything by switching to this system. Chief Levesque indicated that the benefits are efficiencies, ease of work and reporting. He also added that they set up a records management committee that looked at other products and some of them were subscription based that required a five-year subscription at the cost of \$118,000 per year. Chairman Koenig asked if any actual financial savings could be attributed back to the new system. Chief Leveque indicated that he is not sure of the actual impact on man hours until it is fully operational but it will defiantly speed up any data entry work because information is carried over into applicable fields so that it does not have to be re-entered and when an officer scans a license for say a traffic accident, all of that information is transcribed into the report.

Rothhaus asked what the cost if for the Fire Department's current system because if this is a combined cost of \$35,000, it would be nice to be able to factor that in to see what the actual difference in cost is. Mr. Micali did not have the information readily available but indicated that he will get it and share it with the Council.

Councilor Boyd asked if the system is approved and purchased what the ramp up time would be to get everyone trained and using it. Chief Levesque said that they are projecting to be fully operational by late summer/early fall.

Councilor Albert asked if the town gets any money back from the state for criminal record checks and Chief Levesque confirmed that we do not. He then stated the General Government spends approximately \$12,000 in criminal record checks for newly hired employees and was curious if there was a way to loop that into the new system to eliminate that cost. Chief Levesque responded that unfortunately that is not an option because any criminal record checks printed by the Police must stay at the Police Station.

Chief Levesque continued his presentation by sharing that line item #8352 (Education and Training) has an increase of \$2,000. This is because the APCO certification the dispatchers receive is now requiring 24 hours of annual training.

Councilor Rothhaus asked for clarification on what is gained from the additional training because he assumed that it was the type of position that once you are trained, you're trained. Chief Levesque explained that they train on things like de-escalation of calls and they run through scenarios that don't come up that often in certain areas.

Police

Paul Micali began with a brief overview of the budget changes for the Police Department. He explained that they have the 53rd week of payroll (like all other departments), an increase in retirement, two unions that are both receiving a 2% increase and a new position for a part time Conservation Officer. He noted that the amount of the increase is only the salary of the Conservation Officer and does not include any uniforms or vehicles he/she may need. There was a decrease in operating supplies of \$15,000 due to some discounts they received on buying bulk ammunition and a typo in the budget under telephones. The \$10,100 listed in this line should be under dues and is a \$3,000 increase from last year. Before wrapping up, Mr. Micali also called out a \$19,500 decrease to the vehicle line because they will be purchasing 3 new vehicles this year instead of 4. He then turned the presentation over to Police Chief Levesque to discuss the specifics of the changes.

Chief Levesque began his discussion with the \$10,000 increase in Police overtime (line item #8111). He explained that this money is earmarked for Police training. Following the death of George Floyd last year NH formed a commission on law enforcement accountability and they've made several recommendations that all Police Departments should follow. It's a tiered approach that will result in all Police Officers needing 24 hours of training annually by 2024 (currently they are required to have only 8). He stated some of the officers do get 24 hours annual now but this ensures all officers will. Chairman Koenig asked what type of training is recommended. Chief Levesque stated it can be any training but some courses are being recommended such as implicit bias and de-escalation of techniques. The overtime will be to back-fill officers when others are in week long trainings. Councilor Healey asked if there is other training that the officers get that these new trainings can be put in place of. Chief Levesque responded that the only other training they conduct right now is training that is required by the Police Standards and Training Council. He then discussed in detail some of the other trainings that are offered and some of the in-house training that he is going to focus on this year.

Councilor Harrington commented that we have been fortunate here in Merrimack but we still need to be prepared. Chief Levesque agreed,

Councilor Albert expressed his support for additional training for Police Officers.

Chief Levesque also addressed a \$5,000 increase to line item #8352. This increase is to cover the cost of trainings that are not offered by the Police Standards and Training Council. Councilor Rothhaus asked what the combined increases are for training and Chief Levesque stated it is \$10,000 in overtime and \$5,000 in training so the total increase is \$15,000.

Chief Levesque then directed everyone's attention to the proposal for a part-time Conservation Officer (line item #8136 for \$34,600). The town of Merrimack has 1,600 acres of conservation land and having a Conservation Officer would help with enforcement and education. The Conservation Officer would be a certified Police Officer with enforcement powers for conservation laws, other laws and make arrests as well. Additional discussions are still needed with the Conservation Committee but adding it to the budget is just the first step. Councilor Albert stated that although he does believe the position is needed (especially since it was his idea) he is questioning whether or not it should be put off for another year because all of the other increases the town is facing (such as the request to add four additional Firefighters). Councilor Healey expressed concerns in the hidden costs because as Mr. Micali stated, the \$34,600 only covers the officer's salary and does not include training, or a vehicle. Councilor Harrington asked if any other towns have this type of position and was told that Londonderry does. She then asked if it has been successful in Londonderry and Chief Levesque explained that it is too soon to tell. It's a new position and because of COVID the officer has not been able to complete the job as designed so Londonderry is not ready to share a verdict yet. Other Councilor's shared their opinions on the matter before the Chief moved on with the presentation.

Councilor Albert asked what line item #8204 – No special duty means. Chief Levesque explained that it means that someone did not join a special unit (ex, bike squad) so they do not get an additional contractual clothing allowance. These officers just get the basic uniform.

A few other increases were discussed for leads online and dues and fees before discussing a \$4,000 increase for line item #8334 (Maintenance-Office Equipment). This increase is for the purchase of software called Power DMS which is a program that will house all of job specific documents (Standard Operating Procedures, training, general orders, etc.). This is a share account with Fire so they are paying \$4,000 and Police is paying \$4,000. Chairman Koenig asked if new laptops are purchased when we get new vehicles. Chief Levesque responded that they try to re-use as much as possible but if Ford changes the dimensions of the car then they may require new laptops to fit them. The conversation then turned to the \$5,000 line item for laptops and the frequency in which the patrol cars are replaced. Mr. Micali clarified that the \$5,000 budgeted for laptops is not necessarily for the purchase of new laptops, it is also the repair of damaged ones.

Councilor Rothhaus asked about line item #8460, specifically the \$650 for K9 insurance. The Chief explained that they insure their dogs because they spend a lot of money on their dogs so they want to make sure they are taken care of

Chief Levesque moved on to discuss #8503 which is the purchase of 3 patrol vehicles. Councilor Albert asked if the cost includes upfitting it. Chief Levesque explained that there are some additional costs associated with upfitting them. He also asked for clarification on if four cars are being purchased or three. Mr. Micali confirmed that it is in fact three, the four in the printed proposed budget is a typo that will be fixed.

Chief Albert asked about the \$38,300 under line item #8332 for upfitting the crime scene vehicle. The Chief responded that Mr. Micali will be zeroing out that line because it was taken care of this year.

Chief Levesque briefly discussed the current positions being filled within the department and the recruitment and training process.

Councilor Healey asked about the \$7,000 line item for computers (#8504) and asked if it is for computer replacement. The Chief explained that they work with IT to determine which computers need to be replaced. She also asked if we ever rebuild computers to re-use them. Mr. Micali answered that IT does rebuild computers whenever they can but some of them are so old because they have been reused from other departments.

Police Detail

Mr. Micali provided a brief overview of the budget changes explaining that the majority of the \$50,000 increase to the budget is due to the 53rd week of payroll (like all other departments), and the wage and retirement increases. This is the fee we charge when a police detail is requested and is 100% reimbursed to the town. Chief Levesque gave a few examples of details and clarified that it is an overtime rate for the officers but reiterated that it is charged back to the customer requesting the detail. Mr. Micali confirmed that the customer is charged the fully loaded rate (with benefits, retirement, etc.) for details.

New Business:

Mr. Micali followed up on a question from a previous meeting regarding why the costs of the 2020 elections were so much higher. He indicated the cost was increased due to the plexiglass needed due to the pandemic.

Mr. Micali also reviewed some upcoming agenda items for the DPW budget meeting and the Council discussed the dates for the upcoming meetings.

Adjourn:

**MOTION made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Healey to adjourn the meeting.
To MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0**

The meeting adjourned at 10:02pm

Respectfully submitted by Rhonda Fleming