



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Thursday, January 21, 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, Town Manager Eileen Cabanel and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali.

Absent: None

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

Announcements: None

Agenda:

Firefighter Position Review

Paul Micali (Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director) started by explaining that the proposed 2021-2022 budget for the Fire Department includes the addition of four new Firefighters and turned the floor over to Chief Duke to discuss the budget.

Town Manager Cabanel prefaced Chief Duke's presentation with a reminder of the discussions that took place last year regarding the need to hire additional Firefighters. During those discussions other options were examined including the possibility of paying overtime to existing staff to cover the necessary shifts. This option is not ideal because it is difficult for these Firefighters to work overtime due to their taxing schedules and it becomes a safety risk if they are not well rested.

Chief Duke introduced his two Assistant Chiefs that were present at the meeting with him (Harris and Bartell) and announced that Assistant Chief Bartell has been with the department for 20 years and was recently promoted to Assistant Chief, his promotion is effective as of Sunday January 24, 2021. The Council congratulated Assistant Chief Bartell.

Chief Duke began his budget presentation by pointing out that the principal change in the proposed budget is the addition of four new Firefighters (one for each shift). The Chief then reviewed an array of reasons that the department feels additional staff is needed including the growth of the town, and increasing complexity of calls. The Chief also shared a variety of graphs and data that show the increase in calls through the years, how the department performs with **eight versus nine firefighters per shift** and the amount of EMS calls received compared to Fire related calls. He also pointed out that the number of simultaneous calls has increased significantly and although he does not have any hard data to back it up, he knows from experience that there has definitely been an increase in simultaneous calls over the last ten years.

Councilor Woods asked if the department keeps demographic data on their calls. He would be curious to know if the town's population is growing older and therefore is requiring more assistance. Chief Duke apologized and explained that demographic data is not tracked at this time. Councilor Healey asked if there were figures on the number of calls that stem from the hotels in town. Chief Duke stated that he did not have the numbers readily available but would estimate it at about 100 calls per year. He

added that it was a significant problem at one point and the call number spiked but through the efforts of the MPD and the hotel managers, the number of calls has come back down.

Chief Duke continued his presentation by reviewing the new construction that is happening around town and quoted that between 2018 and 2021 the following will be added:

- 180 new single-family homes
- 1,149 units in multi family buildings, 375 of these are located on the third floor or higher.
- 100 new hotel rooms
- 24 new assisted living beds

The addition of these new living spaces will result in the potential of approximately 3,800 new residents in town. Chief Duke indicated that the department used the US Census average of 2.63 people per household to arrive at the new resident figure.

Chairman Koenig stated that he can believe the 2.6 per household number for single-family homes but it hesitant to believe it for the multi-family residents. He suggested that the Community Development Director (Tim Thompson) may have some data to share and Chief Duke indicated that a lot of his data did come from Mr. Thompson.

Chief Duke indicated that approximately 500 of the multi-family units are already complete and have residents occupying them. He then went on to share data that shows how effective the department is with 9 versus 10 employees per shift and pointed out that more Firefighters fighting a fire makes the job faster and more efficient. He also shared the statistic that with nine employees per shift, the department is operationally maxed approximately 32 times a month which equates to at least once per day. Chairman Koenig asked what happens when they become operationally maxed. Chief Duke replied that they try to call in off-duty staff or resort to mutual-aid if needed. The mutual-aid will report to a scene but will not come sit at the station and wait for a call if one of our ambulances is out, this is the same process we follow when offering mutual-aid to other towns. Councilor Albert asked if the department ever uses private ambulance services and Chief Duke indicated that they are part of their mutual-aid plan.

Chief Duke finalized his presentation by sharing the cost of the new Firefighters. The first-year cost is projected at \$40,371 which includes salary, benefits, protective gear and uniforms. If the proposal is approved, the posting will be available in May and they would have the new Firefighters in place by July 1, 2021.

Town Manager Cabanel clarified that Chief Duke's budget proposal is different from what she is proposing. Chief Duke is proposing that the Fire Department remain staffed at 10 at all times so overtime would still be needed to achieve those levels when an employee is off. Her proposal includes the four additional Firefighters but does not factor in overtime so the employee count would drop to nine if someone was off. It also factors in a savings of 90,000 for overtime wages that were paid in this year's budget.

Councilor Albert suggested an option that would help the Fire Department as well as the tax payers, he proposed that they approve the four Firefighters but hold off on hiring them until January 1, 2022. This will cut the amount in half since they will be coming on halfway through the fiscal year. Chief Duke commented that he is concerned with delaying the hiring because his Firefighters have already been filling the gap for a year now and they are going to get burnt out. As it is, his proposal already has them sacrificing for another six months and Councilor Albert's proposal adds another six months to that.

Chairman Koenig explained that he understands the needs of the Fire Department but expressed concerns with the large increase to the budget. He asked if there was any possibility of staggering the start dates for the four new Firefighters. Chief Duke explained that there is always room for flexibility and hiring the new staff for July 1, 2021 is his first choice but if he had to choose a second choice, it would be Councilor Albert's suggestion of hiring them on January 1, 2022. He went on to explain that there is a disruption in their process every time they have to adjust the number of staff available so he would just assume do it all at once.

Chairman Koenig asked Chief Duke if he foresees a problem in hiring four people at once and the Chief indicated that he does not foresee that as being a problem.

Councilor Harrington asked what the tax impact would be to the entire \$460,371 versus half of that figure (\$230,000). She also stated that she believes that the Chief has already demonstrated the need for additional staff and it was very apparent in the slide that was shared last year that depicted the number of times the department was not able to respond to a second call because an ambulance was already deployed. In her mind, it comes down to the tax impact and the council needs to remember that they have done an impeccable job keeping costs down for the last ten years and they are only responsible for 20% of the tax rate. Paul Micali quoted the projected tax impact at 13 cents per 100,000 for the full figure and 7 cents per 100,000 for half of it. There were discussions about the accuracy of the numbers since overtime would still continue to be an issue until the new Firefighters were onboard but they were rough estimates to give everyone an idea of the impact. Councilor Harrington stated that it seems senseless stagger the time between fiscal years because the impact would be felt eventually.

Councilor Healey asked what the ramp up time is for a new Firefighter. Chief Duke responded that their probationary time is typically 6-12 months depending on prior experience. He also added that they are usually able to effectively contribute to the team within 60 days. Councilor Healey asked if he thought it would be challenging to have four new employees at once. Chief Duke stated that there are pros and cons to it but it is ultimately more efficient to do it that way versus one or two at a time.

Councilor Albert asked if the candidates come trained or if they need to still attend the fire academy. Chief Duke indicated that the majority of their candidates are already trained when they apply. Councilor Albert also asked for the overtime budget for 2019-2020 fiscal year. Mr. Micali stated the budget for that year was \$348,235 but they spent \$465,635. Some of this overtime was due to COVID but it is unknown how much but we were reimbursed for it. Chief Duke elaborated on the plan that was put in place during the beginning of the pandemic to explain the need for the overtime.

Chief Duke switched topics briefly to state that his Assistant Chiefs were able to get the number of hotel calls responded to in 2020 and it was 200.

Councilor Rothhaus asked how the Daytime Attendant position is scheduled. Chief Duke explained that they are at the firehouse regularly but they do not have a fixed schedule. The Councilor then asked if an employee is asked to come in on overtime from 8-Midnight, is that in addition to the Daytime Attendant or in place of them? Chief Duke explained that it would be either in place of the Daytime Attendant or another full time employee that has the day off.

Councilor Albert asked if someone is called in for overtime, if it can be broken up into shorter shifts or does it have to be 24 hours. Chief Duke responded that the shifts can be broken up but they always offer the full shift first.

Councilor Harrington asked if they are expected to vote on this tonight or if they are waiting for the final determination. Chairman Koenig responded that they are voting at the final determination meeting. Councilor Harrington also commented that she would appreciate feedback from the residents because in her mind the biggest concern is the tax rate.

Chairman Koenig summarized the conversation by explaining that the Council does understand the need for the additional Firefighters but they are also looking at a significant increase in the budget (1.3 million) and need to be mindful of the tax impact to the residents.

Councilor Boyd added that he also agrees that there is a need for additional Firefighters but like his colleagues is concerned with the tax rate impact.

Councilor Harrington suggested that there may be other costs that can be modified in order to make room in the budget to hire the additional Firefighters, the budget has yet to be finalized and there will be some difficult decisions to be made.

Capital Reserve Fund Review

Paul Micali started by explaining that the DRA has changed the formula for Capital Reserve fund withdrawals. They are no longer in the budget so it looks as if deposits are being made with no withdrawals. The point of the presentation is to discuss the planned withdrawals to give everyone an overall picture of where the town stands with the capital Reserve fund.

Est. Expenditure
2021-22 Proposed
Capital Purchases

Deaprtment	CRF	2021-22 Projects	\$	
General Govt	Computer Equipment	Campus WIFI - town hall	10,000	
		Microsoft 360	46,000	56,000
Assessing	Revaluation CRF	Revaluation		35,000
Library	Library CRF	Carpet Replacement	10,000	
		HVAC	100,000	110,000
Fire	Ambulance	Ambulance		200,000
	Fire Equipment	Boat, Portable Inflatable	12,000	
		Computer Upgrade/ Replacement	20,000	
		SCBA Filling System	99,000	131,000
Highway	Traffic Pre-emption CRF	Opticom repair/replacement		5,000
	Road Infrastructure	Drainage Improvements		250,000
	Highway Equipment CRF	Backhoe/loader H-13	140,000	
		Wood chipper H-15	50,000	
		10 Wheel Dump H-33	195,000	
		Trailer, Roller MN-031	15,000	400,000
Solid Waste	Solid Waste Equipment CRF	100 CY Trailer, live floor T4	70,000	
		Pickup Truck w/ Plow L15	35,000	105,000
	Total General Fund			1,292,000
	Wastewater Fund			
Wastewater	Sewer Infrastructure	Manhole/Sewer Rehabilitation	25,000	
		Caterpillar 910 Loader	100,000	
		Sewer System Assesment Program - Added a year	13,020	
		Pennichick Square Pump Station	50,000	
		Burt Street Pump Station	25,000	
		SCADA Upgrade	75,000	
	Total Wastewater Fund			288,020
	Grand Total CRF Purchases			1,580,020

Mr. Micali reviewed the list of proposed purchases (noted above) with the Council. He also walked through the Capital Reserve budget and reviewed a couple of the line items that correlate with purchases to show the deposits being made. He explained that the benefit of the Capital Reserve Fund is that it allows the town to incrementally save for large purchase which helps to prevent big spikes in the tax rate.

There was some discussion on the Computer equipment purchases, specifically the Office 360 item. Mr. Micali explained that the town is considering upgrading to Microsoft 365 because all of the town computers are operating on different versions and this move would create consistency and increase the ability to share documents effortlessly. Microsoft 365 is also cloud based so one of the benefits would be that we would save money on servers. This upgrade is also necessary because we are using exchange 2003 and it's no longer supported. The initial cost of the upgrade will come from Capital Reserve fund and any ongoing fees after that will be moved to the budget. This software update will be tasked to the new IT employee whenever he/she is hired.

Town Manager Cabanel commented that they received a request to change the name of the Milfoil fund to "Aquatic Invasive Species" and asked Paul what the process would be to change the name. Mr. Micali indicated that it would require a warrant article and a 2/3 vote. It would be a separate process if the purposes of the fund were changing but he believes in this case, it would be just the name. He then

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looked back at warrant article for when the fund was created and found that it was listed as Milfoil/Aquatic Invasive Species. The belief is that everyone has just been shortening the name and just referring to it as Milfoil. He agreed to check the fund to be certain and then let representative Rung know the outcome.

Chairman Koenig asked if there is a spreadsheet that shows the deposits for the CIP and Mr. Micali briefly walked through it and stated he would share it with the Council. He also confirmed that deposits are a separate warrant article and part of the tax rate.

New Business:

Chairman Koenig reminded the council that the next meeting is on January 27, 2021 at 6:30 PM. The goal of that meeting is to finalize the budget so it will be the last time to ask questions of the department heads. He also asked Mr. Micali if he would be putting together a list of anticipated adjustments to the budget. Mr. Micali stated that he would be meeting with Town Manager Cabanel and they will put something together and get it to the council prior to the meeting.

Chairman Koenig also asked about the 2% non-union wage increase. Mr. Micali explained that it will cost approximately \$82-\$83,000 and will have roughly a two cent tax impact. The union employees are all receiving a 2% increase so this will keep the non-union employees in line with the union employees. Councilor Albert expressed concerns that adding pennies here and there to the tax rate eventually add up with the salary increase, we are now approaching a 40 cent increase from last year.

Adjourn:

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:08pm

Respectfully submitted by Rhonda Fleming