

APPROVED
MINUTES FOR THE BOARD OF FINANCE BUDGET DELIBERATIONS MEETING
THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2010

A budget deliberations meeting of the Board of Finance was held on Thursday, April 1, 2010 in at 7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Peter Gomez, Chairman; Jill Bornstein, Vice Chairman; Marty Heiser ; David Ulmer; and Margaret Price Sims

Town Officials: Rudy Marconi, First Selectman; Barbara Manners, Selectwoman; Kevin Redmond, Controller; and Fire Chief Heather Burford; Kevin Tappe, Assistant Chief; Peter Hill, Highway Department; John Roche, Police Chief

A G E N D A

Mr. Gomez called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

FIRE DEPARTMENT DISCUSSION

Mr. Heiser asked Chief Burford how the Fire Department's overtime budget was faring, and she responded: "we are doing excellent on overtime". Mr. Marconi added: "better than you have seen in the last ten years".

Chief Burford said she would like to invite the members of the BOF and their families to visit the Fire Department and hear about the services the Fire Department provides. She introduced Tim Pambianchi who is the chief of the volunteer firemen. There are currently 37 paid fire fighters and 66 volunteer fire fighters. She said the fire department handles all hazard responses; it runs the paramedic program, including cats and dogs, and is adept at taking on new things and meeting the needs of the community. Minimum staffing in the fire department is six paid fire fighters. The Department handles 3,300 calls per year and has the ability to do cross staffing and put a second ambulance on the road. 70% of what the Department does is emergency medical service. Thirty-five of the volunteers fight fires and the others provide support.

Mr. Ulmer asked how many of the thirty-seven paid fire fighters are union members, and Chief Burford responded thirty-five are in the IF and one is in the FEIU. Chief Burford and the Assistant Chief are not union members.

Mr. Heiser asked how the fire fighters responded to last year's request for give backs to relieve the revenue shortfall. Chief Burford responded that givebacks approximated \$91k; e.g. the deferral of a 3.33% raise for six months; giving up uniforms; and a 24-hour furlough day in the labor contract line that they are otherwise entitled to.

Mr. Heiser asked about the Department's decision not to participate in the Memorial Day parade. Chief Burford responded that the fire fighters chose to spend that time with their families, and that she and the Assistant Chief will march in the parade.

Mr. Gomez asked if Chief Burford expected Department overtime to be flat next year. Chief Burford responded that the Department is relatively injury free considering the work is dangerous and conducive to back injuries in particular.

Mr. Ulmer noted the 12% increase in full-time salaries resulting from the diminishing four-year grant money which decreases almost 20% per year, and catch-up on the give backs.

Chief Burford said the four fire fighters who joined the Department under the grant money have made a substantial difference in the Department's performance. Mr. Marconi added that the difference in overtime could not be discounted either. Ms. Sims noted that the addition of the four fire fighters also increased workmen's compensation costs which have not been reimbursed.

Mr. Ulmer: "Here we are looking at a 12% increase for the next couple of years because of the grant."

In response to a query from Mr. Gomez, Chief Burford informed the BOF that the union contract expires June 30, 2011 and that it was extended one year.

Mr. Heiser: "What do we pay the Fire Marshal, and what (revenue) is he bringing in?"

Chief Burford said the fire inspector program (one fire marshal and two fire inspectors) does 1) code enforcement; 2) plan reviews; and 3) fire investigations. The fee-recovery program that started in October 2007 has more than offset the cost of the program. The big dollars are in plan reviews. The Department is required to inspect schools; nursing homes; day-care centers and anything three-family or above. Prior to the fire inspector program the Department was not able to do that. Chief Burford said the inspection work is all done on overtime so the inspectors do not have to be called out on a fire department call.

Mr. Heiser asked for an explanation of ambulance fees and how they are collected. CB said that the Department decided in 2000 to bill insurance companies for ambulance services. The rates are set by the State of Connecticut. The Department contracts with a third party to do the billing and collecting. The third party now charges a 3% fee for the service. The charge to transport an individual from Ridgefield to the Danbury Hospital is between \$600/\$900 depending on the level of service required. The collection rate is 92%. Mr. Marconi said the Department uses soft-service collection methods to help people who cannot pay. Chief Burford said there is an 11% refusal rate on the ambulance service. Mr. Gomez asked if Ridgefield gets paid when it renders mutual aid to another municipality on a State road, and Chief Burford responded affirmatively.

Mr. Ulmer asked about training time, noting that it was up slightly, and asked if there were any potential savings there. Chief Burford responded by saying that training needs to be supported. She said the federal government recognizes the problem and there is grant money available which the Department has applied for.

Mr. Gomez asked about vehicle fuel, noting a 28.6% cost increase.

Mr. Ulmer asked about vehicle count. Chief Burford said the Department currently has three ambulances.

Mr. Heiser asked how many men (only volunteer fire fighters drive tanker 10) could drive tanker #10 which has a nine-speed manual transmission. Mr. Gomez asked about the cost of installing a cistern as an alternative to a tanker. Chief Burford responded that a cistern holds about 10k gallons (or three tankers full) of water which is not enough for a large fire. She said: "You still need tankers." Ms. Bornstein asked Chief Burford to prioritize between Tanker #10 and Engine #1. Chief Burford said her priority was Tanker #10. Ms. Sims asked for the life expectancy of a replacement tanker and Chief Burford responded "easily twenty years".

Mr. Gomez called for a short recess at 8:45 p.m. and called the meeting back to order at 8:55 p.m.

POLICE DEPARTMENT DISCUSSION

Chief Roche said there is authorization for forty-two police officers. The Police Department currently has thirty-eight officers. Two positions are currently frozen with one officer suffering from a serious injury and another officer servicing in Afghanistan. The Department also has two traffic persons; an animal control officer; and a part-time bookkeeper. There is no police matron for female prisoners. The garage roof leaks and the woman's locker room is in a closet. The Department has twelve marked vehicles: 9 Ford Crown Victoria's; 2 Ford Explorers; and 1 Expedition; one unmarked vehicle; two detective cars; two administrator's cars; and one incident command vehicle. Ridgefield has been rated the safest town in Connecticut since 1992. Chief Roche said the Town receives \$13k from traffic-ticket revenue. Mr. Gomez said the BOF does not recommend issuing more traffic tickets as a means of raising revenue.

Mr. Heiser asked about the Department's relationship with the high school population and Chief Roche responded saying "we have an excellent relationship". He noted that police departments are generally considered to be the paternal arm of public safety, while fire departments are thought to be the maternal arm.

Mr. Gomez asked about the "outdated computer system" at police headquarters. Chief Roche responded that the in-house computer system is good, and the department is doing an upgrade now that will be finished in May. He said there have been three major failures in the Department's radio systems from lightning strikes.

The idea of using hybrid vehicles in the Department's fleet was dismissed without much discussion. The assumed cost benefits of trading in vehicles every three years rather than every four years were discussed.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT DISCUSSION

Mr. Hill explained that the Department is responsible for:

- ❖ Road resurfacing
- ❖ Drainage
- ❖ Road sweeping
- ❖ Brush Cutting
- ❖ Catch Basin Cleaning

Maintenance of 667 miles of roads, 857 miles if you include private roads. The Highway Department currently has sixteen employees. It had twenty-one employees when Mr. Hill started working for the Department. Town road aid from the State has decreased.

Private contractors are hired for snow plowing. The Department has changed the product it uses to melt ice and has learned how to use it efficiently.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Ms. Bornstein and seconded by Mr. Ulmer to adjourn the meeting at 10:03 p.m.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Rodgers, Recording Secretary