

TOWN OF EPSOM
BUDGET COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Attendees: Marylou Keane, Chairman; Joni Kitson, Vice Chairman; Gary Kitson, Water District Representative; Meadow Wysocki, Selectmen's Representative; Joyce Heck; Floyd Graham; Len Gilman; Linda Hodgdon; Penny Graham; Michael Muise, School Board Representative; Mary Frambach; Nancy Wheeler

Not in Attendance:

Other Attendees: Police Chief Brian Michael; Fire Chief Stewart Yeaton; Robin Sweeney Blaise; Cheryl Gilpatrick; Virginia Drew

Marylou opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Police Department

Chief Michael reviewed the proposed budget. The Court and Motor Vehicle Hearings Line was cut by \$1,500.00 due to a staff shortage.

Currently there are 4 officers with one graduating from the Police Academy tomorrow and one to begin the Police Academy in January.

Chief Michael noted the overtime amount which is used for overtime and holiday pay.

Computer Expense Line was increased by \$1,500. They are not using Metrocast as the state would not send confidential information to that address. The new system has additional costs moving to a .gov system.

Dispatch has increased by \$10,000 which he has no control over. Chief Michael did some checking and found that Rockingham County Dispatch does not charge a fee to departments it serves. Chief Michael was told the increase is due to software and equipment upgrades. He noted the cost was based on the number of calls. Floyd asked if the Chief knew if other towns had increases; the Chief did not know. There are also unit costs with all fees being increased by same percentage. Epsom is one of the busiest towns in Merrimack County. He was told the costs may be lower next year.

Linda asked about the Court and Motor Vehicle Hearings. Chief Michael discussed the reasons this line is used for. The court system is changing as they are returning to the old system. He has to have funds to pay the officers for attending courts.

The Printing Line was increased by \$900; they have a new copier with a contract costing \$70/month.

The Vehicle Line was \$37,000 in 2023. The cost in 2024 will be \$47,000 Chief Michael discussed the replacement costs and that he will use detail funds for outfitting the vehicle. If he is able, he may purchase a vehicle at the end of the year; but it could not be considered a purchase until after January 1st.

The Electricity and Heat Lines have been reduced.

Chief Michael noted there were changes in the IT company charges of an additional \$100/month. He was not aware of the cost when he created the budget. He needs to have the budget increased by \$1,200. Asking for a motion from the Committee for the need to increase budget by \$1,200, Virginia noted there may be revisions that she will check on. The Committee will wait to make a motion until they have her information.

Mary asked about the evidence room in basement; Chief Michaels noted it is set.

Joni questioned the purchase of tasers. The department will purchase new ones out of the 2023 budget. Chief Michael noted there was only 1 brand of tasers. The last time they were purchased they were under warranty for 3 years. He discussed what covered with new tasers. They do not have an expiration date and should last about 5 years.

Fire Department

Chief Yeaton reviewed budget for the Fire Department.

He noted there are 5 full time personnel. There is an opening for a full time Firefighter Paramedic. There is a possible candidate in the works Floyd asked about the salary; it is projected to be \$22.50/hour but may be negotiated.

Chief Yeaton noted the years of service for the full-time personnel:

Joel French, Captain - 20 yrs.

Danielle Byrne, Paramedic - 5 years

Matthew Tremblay, Fulltime Firefighter, EMT – 2 years

Nathan Ducharme, Fulltime Firefighter, AEMT – 1 year

David Jude, Fulltime Firefighter, AEMT– 6 months

Most of the employees are local with about 20 volunteers. The department had an open house on October 21 with a good attendance.

The Overtime Line also uses money from the stipend line. There is a need for 24/7 coverage. The call volume was noted.

Chief Yeaton discussed his stipend noting if he does not have a person to fill in, he will do the shift. He stays available for some calls. He completed a study that showed his stipend should be \$60,000.

The Telephone Line was increased for additional I-pads, etc. He will put one in the Command Vehicle. Much of the training is completed inhouse.

There is a new computer system with more information coming over that line.

The Equipment Repairs Line will be spent near the end of the year for air packs and ladder inspections

Concord Hospital gives the department some of the disposable supplies but not all of them.

The Gas Line was increased by \$500.

The Vehicle Repairs Line is remaining at \$14,000. It will be over spent this year. Chief Yeaton discussed items completed on the backup ambulance.

Operating Supplies was cut by \$500.

The Uniforms Line was increased by 10%; if there is a need for something, they purchase it.

Forest Fire Roads Line was cut by \$500, there is a need to have funding in this line.

The department has bay lights that an electrician needs to install. The bathrooms will be redone in 2025.

There are drainage issues on east side of building that he will be taking care of.

Conservation Commission

Robyn Sweeney Blaise reviewed the budget noting most lines were reduced.

Penny asked about funds that are not included in the budget. Ms. Sweeney Blaise did not have information on the 3 funds.

The various conservation funds and the amounts were discussed

Floyd verified the signs would be purchased under the Mapping and Trails Line.

Meadow noted lines were reduced to \$1.00 as they have not used for several years. Meadow discussed working with students attending conservation camp.

Gary motioned to increase the Youth Conservation Svc Award to \$400; Len seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The funds were discussed.

Meadow discussed that the Fire & Police Departments had warrant articles for additional personnel in 2023 and they are now allowed to encumber the funds to pay the new hires for first 6 months of the year. She noted they could reduce the wage lines and other costs could come out of the 2024 budget but would increase in 2025. The total amount would be \$ 98,000. The Selectmen have talked to the Chiefs of the departments. The reduction would reduce the budget increase to 4.8% from \$281,695 to \$183,695.

Linda discussed the IT costs; they will be included in all future budgets.

Linda handed out a sheet with increases she had determined. The top four lines with increases are wages, health insurance, retirement and payroll taxes. She asked if the Selectmen look at the total costs for employees and consider various health care plans in the future.

Meadow noted they are not offering anything different for health insurance. Linda recommended the Selectmen look at health care options. Nancy noted when she left town employment two or three different plans were offered.

Virginia clarified the Selectmen have not decided to encumber the funds. Joni noted we could look at cutting some of the funds, but not all of it if it was encumbered.

It was discussed reducing the wages and payroll taxes also. The increases in dispatches and IT costs were discussed.

Len noted if wages and benefits were reduced, it will be harder to hire staff. Meadow discussed the warrant articles passed and the Selectmen could encumber the funds to pay the person hired. They could use the encumbered funds to pay the person for the first 6 months. It was discussed if the Selectmen do not encumber the funds, they could use the money to offset the 2025 taxes.

Minutes

The minutes of November 7, 2023 were reviewed and amended. Due to the number of amendments Marylou would like a second draft before approving.

Marylou will be meeting with Mr. Finley this week. She noted they would probably not get the school binders until December 14. She asked if members would like to change this meeting to Tuesday December 19.

Meadow discussed getting something to indicate what happens to the school surplus. She asked if at the end of the year the funds are a surplus and it is not seen by the public. She noted it has been asked for in the past. Mike asked for an e-mail for the request so he could forward to the SAU.

Linda noted she had met with Mr. Curley regarding the BCEP budget and she had better information and understanding now.

Marylou asked if there was any other information wanted from the SAU. She noted she would request from the SAU an updated budget when the School Board receives it. The audit of the school budget from the past and current were discussed.

Penny asked what was happening with the teacher contract, Mike noted they are working on it.

Linda motioned to adjourn; Mary seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Marylou adjourned the meeting at 9:22 P.M.

Respectfully,

Betsy Bosiak
Recording Secretary