

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting Held June 11, 2013

Town Hall, 1st Floor Meeting Room

Present: R. Hargraves, M. Flynn, J. Crowley, S. Webber, G. Green, J. Prager (Chair), P. DuFresne (Town Accountant, Recording),

Absent: P. DiFranco

Guests: Don Palma, Police Chief; Joe Bosselait, Fire Chief; Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Peter Cunningham, Selectman

Documents available at the meeting: Police Department Overtime Analysis Spreadsheet
Fire Department Equipment Repair Projections

Police Wage Reserve Fund Transfer Request – Chief Palma distributed an FY13 Overtime analysis. He explained that the Police Department would need a transfer from the Reserve Fund to cover wages through the end FY2013. The police officers have been unusually busy with breaking and entering cases, emergency plans and an overhaul of the school safety plan. Specific unbudgeted and unanticipated events that led to overtime usage included the Boston Marathon bombing, the January blizzard, and the Sandy Hook school shooting. Mr. Prager would prefer to see a spreadsheet listing each unforeseen event with a detail of the associated costs. Mr. Haddad noted that Chief Palma had originally budgeted \$17,000 per officer for overtime costs, however, this was cut back during the FY13 budget setting process to \$14,000 per officer. In retrospect, this budget cut should not have been made. He suggested that an adjustment be made at the Fall Town Meeting for the FY14 budget. Mr. Webber asked Chief Palma whether he had been surprised by any of the data that he had listed on the overtime spreadsheet just presented. Chief Palma replied that both sick leave and paternity leave were higher than he had expected to see. Mr. Webber wondered why the additional officer hired last year has not reduced the overtime expense. Chief Palma said that while he tries not to fill every vacant shift, Groton is a large area for which to provide adequate patrols. There are 3 officers working most shifts, and he believes this is a necessary minimum. He mentioned that the recent dramatic increase in investigative work has also stressed the budget. Mr. Cunningham wondered whether shift coverage could be reduced at the end of the year as the budget gets tight. Chief Palma replied that he feels it is necessary to fill shifts on the weekends, and could possibly cut back during the week. However, risk management always comes down to an educated guess. Mr. Haddad added that the Chief and Lieutenant take shifts whenever possible to keep costs down; however, the labor union frowns on that tactic if it is overused. Mr. Webber suggested that the Police Department budget be handled differently in the future. An emphasis should be placed on planning for contingencies so that the end result is realistic.

On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Hargraves, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to transfer \$88,000 from the Reserve Fund to the Police FY13 Wage Appropriation. The Vote: 5-1-0

Fire Department Expense Reserve Fund Transfer Request – Chief Bosselait distributed a memo projecting equipment repair expenses through the end of the year. He explained that because these were unanticipated repairs, he was asking for a Reserve Fund transfer of \$20,000. Chief Bosselait described the nature of the repairs that were needed, and the group briefly discussed the methodology behind choosing particular vendors to work on Fire Department equipment. He noted that most of the equipment was too specialized for the DPW mechanics to handle. It is also necessary to choose vendors who are willing to prioritize jobs involving emergency vehicles. Mr. Webber suggested that future Fire Department budgets include a realistic projection for unanticipated repair costs. He added that as the balance in the Reserve Fund is unusually low this year, he would prefer to transfer only the value of the current repair bills (\$11,500).

On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Crowley, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to transfer the sum of \$11,500 from the Reserve Fund to the Fire Department FY13 General Expenses. The Vote: 6-0-0

Council on Aging Wage Reserve Fund Transfer Request – Ms. Dufresne asked that a transfer of \$7,000 be approved from the Reserve Fund to support the Council on Aging wage appropriation for FY13. This amount was needed to fund the vacation pay-out for the previous Council on Aging Director who retired earlier than was expected in April of 2013.

On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Green, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to transfer the sum of \$7,000 from the Reserve Fund to the Council on Aging FY13 Wage appropriation.

Assistant Treasurer-In-Training Program – Mr. Haddad informed the group that he would like to establish an Assistant Treasurer-In-Training Program to begin in July. The current Assistant Treasurer holds a key position and is planning to retire in April of 2014. This plan would allow for a smooth transition period. He would like to model the program after the Accountant-in-Training Program which was successfully completed last September. Similar to that program, this one would be offered only to internal candidates and would require that the chosen candidate continue to fulfill their current job duties while training to be the Assistant Treasurer. Mr. Haddad is planning to seek funding for this program at the Fall Town Meeting, and projects the cost to be between \$15,000 and \$20,000. Because the program participant will be asked to assume additional responsibilities over the 10-month term of the program, he feels it is reasonable to offer an increase to their rate of pay. There will likely be some overtime incurred as well as additional expenses relating to an unavoidable overlapping of salaries for a short period of time. Several of the members felt that 10 months was too long a term for this program. Mr. Haddad emphasized the key nature of this position and the widely divergent knowledge base that was a crucial factor to ensuring success in this position. Mr. Crowley asked about the salary rate for the incoming Assistant Treasurer. Mr. Haddad replied that the employee promoting from the Training Program to the Assistant Treasurer position would be paid at the lower end of the Grade 9 range and would therefore be earning less than the retiring incumbent. Mr. Haddad further noted that the Board of Selectmen had already given their approval to the plan at their meeting on June 10th.

Approval of Meeting Minutes –

On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Hargraves, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve the meeting minutes of April 1, 2013 as drafted. The Vote: 6-0-0

On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Hargraves, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the meeting minutes of April 22, 2013 as drafted. The Vote: 5-0-1

On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Hargraves, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the meeting minutes of March 26, 2013 as drafted. The Vote: 5-0-1

Reorganization of the Finance Committee -

Mr. Hargraves moved to nominate Mr. Prager for the position of Chairman for Fiscal Year 2014. Mr. Webber seconded and the vote carried by majority. The Vote: 5-1-0

Mr. Webber moved to nominate Mr. Green for the position of Vice Chairman for Fiscal Year 2014. Mr. Hargraves seconded and the vote carried unanimously. The Vote: 6-0-0

General Discussion Regarding Budget Tracking – Mr. Prager would like to see a better procedure put in place for tracking the various department budgets so as to identify potential problems earlier in the year. Mr. Webber suggested that the Town Accountant provide for the Finance Committee quarterly reports of budget-to-actual results. This would allow the Committee to identify trends and keep a closer eye on the larger budgets such as Police, Fire, and DPW. He noted that the effort to tighten up budgeting over the last few years has resulted in a great deal more pressure on the Reserve Fund. Perhaps contingencies should be built in to reflect reality. In November, he would like to see an emphasis on accurate budgeting rather than merely tight budgeting. Mr. Prager would like to see information presented with the new budgets to indicate which line items required support in the form of line item transfers or Reserve Fund transfers in the previous year. Mr. Webber agreed it would be helpful if the budget spreadsheets had columns detailing the previous year's original appropriation for each budget line plus another column for line item transfers and another for Reserve Fund Transfers.

Televising Future Finance Committee Meetings – Mr. Prager requested feedback on the idea of televising future Finance Committee meetings. The other members were generally in favor of this proposal. Mr. Webber mentioned that the Cable Committee would have to find someone on staff that would be available to provide this service.

Mr. Hargraves moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. Mr. Crowley seconded and the motion carried by unanimous vote. The Vote: 6-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Dufresne, Recording Secretary