

BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING

BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY

130 RIVER STREET

BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201

JANUARY 6, 2018

MINUTES

SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Thomas Jacobs-Chair (left at 10:30am); Donald Campbell-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeannie Jenkins; Chad Gordon; Carson Thurber and Jeanne Conner.

SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Zoning Administrator and Assistant Town Manager; Michele Johnson-Human Resources and Contracts Administrator; Melissa Currier-Finance Director; Forest Weyen-Bennington Rescue Squad Executive Director; Brian Peat-Bennington Rescue Squad Board of Directors Chair; William LaTour-Asst. Fire Chief; Steve Crawford-Bennington Fire Department Chief; Paul Doucette-Chief of Police; R.J. Joly-Highway Superintendent; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

At 8:06am, Thomas Jacobs called the meeting to order.

1. F.Y. 19 BUDGET WORK SESSION

A. FIRE BUDGET

The overall Fire Budget increased by 5% from last year and Fire Chief Steve Crawford, with occasional input from Police Chief Paul Doucette, presented the following highlights on those increases:

- Fire fighters gear - helmets, gloves, coats, pants and boots - have a useful life of 10 years. To outfit all firefighters with safe gear has increased that line item to \$24,620. This amount may decrease somewhat next year since we are now tracking the gear by each person. There are 64 total members with 40 active members.
- Fire Building - the building is 20 years old and the kitchen cabinets are sagging and need to be supported. The purchase of 2 hand dryers for the rest rooms to help "go green" and cut back on janitorial supplies due to the increased use of the multi-purpose room are requested. There is a fee for the use of the room but it is free for any event open to the public. The hand dryers are \$1,000/each which is an increase of \$2,100 to this line item.
- Building Improvements - The 20-year old apron where the fire trucks leave the building is heaving and unsafe to walk on. This will be replaced - half this year and half next year - at \$11,500 each year. The apron is 70' from the road, and Mr. Hurd added that the hope is to tie it into the repaving of River Street this year and to do more than half if we get a good price from the paving contractor.
- Lease Payment - this is the first year of our lease payment for the new fire truck when we replaced two trucks with one. This is the only truck payment in the amount of \$45,910.
- Lease Payment - the lease payment for upgrading the air packs is increased by \$7,000 to \$24,000. The lease agreement is for 20 air packs for 6 years instead of 10 years. The useful life for an air pack is 10 years so, by purchasing them all at once, everyone is using the same grade of air pack that are within the NFPA standards even though they will all need to be replaced in 10 years instead of staggering the replacement of them.

- Tire Purchase - tires are purchased from a Goodyear distributor in Albany for savings of “hundreds of dollars per tire” if bought from local vendors. Mr. Wassick stores and mounts the tires for us and has stated that he can’t buy them for the price that we are getting them for. “We have been doing this for years.”
- Transfer to Reserve - if we stay within budget, these are dollars that are set aside to purchase future fire trucks and radio communication. Ms. Currier explained that it isn’t visible on the information that the Board is looking at but there were balance sheet journal entries done each year to the fund balance which is now at \$300,000. A better presentation will be given to the Board in the future.

Board questions:

- Ms. Conner asked: What had to be cut from your wish list, and Chief Crawford answered really nothing from a ‘Wish List’ but there were reductions of 1 set of gear, 2 pagers and operational supplies. Ms. Conner would like to tour the fire facility, and Chief Doucette suggested coming when they are doing their New Experience Camp.
- Mr. Carson asked: What year are they planning on purchasing the new ladder truck for \$1.2M, and Chief Crawford answered “the ballot in March” because it takes a year to build the truck and payment doesn’t start until after delivery which would make the first payment due in FY21. The Board will discuss this at a later date as they were unaware of this intent.
- Mr. Carroll asked: Does the fire department apply for grants, and Chief Doucette answered that the last successful application was three years ago, however, grant dollars are not as available as they used to be for what we would be qualified for. Mr. Carroll reiterated his hope that tax dollars are being spent locally whenever possible.
- Mr. Campbell asked: What makes up the two \$5,000 decreases in the building budget, and Chief Crawford answered that one was for the floor machine purchased last year, and the other was to upgrade the air compressor.
- Mr. Campbell asked: What was the \$2,000 increase in communications, and Chief Crawford responded that that was for the improved radio communications. The cost will fluctuate year-to-year between the radio communication line item and the pager line item. Mr. Campbell stated his appreciation that even at a 5% budget increase, the actual dollar increase is only \$17,000, and the Town reaps a substantial benefit for these monies.
- Mr. Jacobs asked: About the workers compensation insurance, and Mr. Hurd explained that those dollars reflect that purchase of insurance for volunteers and we have had a “good run” of no injuries. Mr. Jacobs thanked the fire department for all that they do.
- Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Gordon: Had no questions but thanked Chief Crawford for a well thought out budget and the work that they do.

B. POLICE BUDGET

The overall Police Budget increased by 1.8% from last year and Police Chief Paul Doucette presented the following highlights on those increases:

- Salaries - decreased \$10,000 due to younger officers having the “step system in the Union”, two officers going to the Vermont State Police, and the cutting of the SRO position.
- Benefits - increased \$13,000 due to ad hoc court scheduling, Union driven overtime plus increasing holiday hours to 88 (Martin Luther King Day) instead of 80. This has made us not allowed us to keep the SRO position and remain fiscally responsible. We may be asking to reinstate it in another

year. 4120 details are now being run at the CDC, the high school, and one of the elementary schools.

- Worker Compensation - increased by \$42,180 because we belong to the League of Cities and Towns insurance fund pool and we have had a few injuries over the last couple of years that are not major but have required an "injury buyout" because the individual - even though they are able to continue to work for us - will never be the same. Workers comp looks at a three-year window so we will eventually cycle out of this higher rate. Now that the police have begun carrying electronic control devices - Tasers, there has been a decrease in physical confrontations. The Tasers have never been discharged.
- Line Item 210 - the bicycle helmet program is no longer so this line item has increased from \$1,000 to \$2,000 to help add to the weekly donations made by the officers to fund the 'Bicycle Rodeo' at the Walmart parking lot this spring, as well as, other community events that they participate in.
- Canine Unit - \$4,000 to fund the canine unit that is up and running. We have also received a \$2,000 grant to get our German Shepard, Gracie, her own vest.
- Tracking Maintenance - increase of \$1,740 for maintenance agreement on our electronic finger printing unit that was purchased with Homeland Security funds.
- Electricity and Fuel - the increase in electricity is offset by the decrease in fuel.
- Building Security - increase of \$6,500 to increase the security on the front of the building.
- Machinery and Equipment - increase of \$19,000 to replace two vehicles with 115,000 miles on them and ancillary equipment. We will purchase Ford all-wheel drive sedans from Carbone as it is not cost effective to buy in Burlington. The next two years one vehicle will be purchased with a request for two vehicles in three years.
- Heat and Air Conditioning - Mr. Hurd explained that the roof system on the police building is intended to push warm air down in the winter and cool air down in the summer. The unit has never functioned as well as expected and an upgrade is being considered. We are currently discussing the two-phase project with a consultant and it is expected to cost ~\$350,000 from our capital reserve funds. Mr. Hurd will present this to the Board at a future meeting as it would be a capital expenditure and not part of the annual budget review. A geo-thermal system had been looked into years ago for the police facility and town office, and Mr. Carroll requested that Mr. Hurd look into it again for all town facilities.

Chief Doucette stated that the Vermont State Police are looking to get out of the dispatch business. It costs us \$395,268 to run the 24/7 dispatch service with the capability to serve other towns. Some money comes in from the Bennington Rescue Squad (BRS) and Pownal. For example, the BRS pays \$18,000/year when they are 35% of the dispatch use, or \$138,000 of the cost, and occasionally, if they are not available, we are potentially dispatching for other towns including some in New York. It is not feasible to outsource dispatching because we have too many obligations here.

Board questions:

- Mr. Thurber asked: How often do other ambulances need to be called in, and Chief Doucette did not have an actual number. Mr. Thurber would also like to further consider to outsource dispatching in the future, and if are going to be taking on more towns, this could be a revenue driver.
- Ms. Conner asked: When is the State Police going to stop dispatching for others, and Chief Doucette said that a date has not been given.

- Mr. Jacobs noted: This is good information going forward in considering that the Bennington taxpayers would be supporting these services to other towns and how to financially remedy that.
- Mr. Jacobs asked: Do the police have a fitness program, and Chief Doucette answered that all town staff have free access to the Rec Center and several officers also frequent the private workout businesses in town. It would be convenient if the town could have an arrangement with the local fitness centers since it is often not convenient for the officers to go to the Rec Center when it is open.
- Ms. Conner asked: Is the workers comp premium age related, and Chief Doucette responded that it is not.
- Ms. Jenkins asked: How can the department be down two officers and not increase overtime because of it, and Chief Doucette answered that they are just not as proactive as he would like to be. We move people around and always maintain the minimum of three officers on each shift.
- Mr. Campbell asked: What the decrease of \$25,000 was, and Mr. Hurd stated that there were two bonds when the Police Department went into the building. One has been paid off that had a \$25,000 payment, and the other one with a payment of \$20,000 will be paid off on 6/30/19.
- Ms. Jenkins thanked Chief Doucette for a good budget and good presentation.
- Mr. Gordon has concerns about cutting the SRO in the school stating that the presence of the same officer all the time is beneficial. Chief Doucette spoke to the importance of the police presence in the schools, and Mr. Hurd added that the SRO position will be requested in next year's budget "if not sooner".

C. HIGHWAY BUDGET

Superintendent Joly noted the improvements of having the Highway and Water Departments under one roof. Mr. Hurd added that the first bond payment of \$252,000 is part of this year's budget with the offset being a reduction in project costs. The bond payment will decrease each year for 20 years with the first five years having the highest interest amounts. After 5 years, the payment will decrease enough so we can include projects within those budgets. Also, any revenue generated from the two previous facilities will go into the Highway Fund.

Mr. Joly stated that the PFOA project has been beneficial this year because it has enabled us to put a hold on much of our paving projects. The end result will be the same amount of work being done without affecting the budget.

Board questions:

- Ms. Jenkins remembers that the savings from consolidating into one building was enough to cover the new building, and was surprised to hear that there may be services that are not provided to cover the cost. She would like to hear more on this at a later time.
- Ms. Conner asked if other areas could be cut beside the projects, and Mr. Joly answered no.
- Mr. Campbell noted the decrease in the sidewalk budget, and agreed with Ms. Jenkins that this needs to be discussed again. Mr. Hurd added that the sidewalk projects have not been decreased. The lower amount is a better understanding of the actual costs to do them.

The overall Highway Budget increased by 2.25% from last year and Superintendent Joly presented the following highlights on those increases:

- Salaries and Benefits - increase of \$42,000 due to changes of responsibility will be more than offset with \$50,000 from the Water and Sewer Department.
- Workers Compensation - Mr. Hurd stated that this has increased due to a rate increase in the League of Cities and Towns pool. We can go to a private insurer where the premiums may be lower to begin with, but the pool rate will eventually level out. There are other benefits to belonging to it such as the return of a portion of premium to us annually whereas a private insurer would not do that. Mr. Campbell recommended that we do a cost comparison in the future.
- Health Insurance - increase of 24%. There will be a cost analysis done next year comparing Blue Cross Blue Shield, MVP and/or fewer benefits with each.
- School Street/Pleasant Street Enhancement Project - our portion of the grant is \$67,000 with construction hopefully starting this summer. The project is new pavement, new sidewalks, new street lighting, pole relocation and some landscaping. The State is also now requiring that a Clerk of the Works be present during the project.
- Traffic Control - level funded and will be upgrading the crosswalk signals as needed.
- Buildings - increase of \$15,600 is to hire a part time cleaning person for the new and larger building.
- Electricity - an estimated amount for a building that is an acre large that will house all of our equipment.
- Covered Bridges - the roof will be replaced on the Silk Road Bridge bringing all of the covered bridges up to par in FY19. Mr. Hurd recommends that this same amount of money be put into a bridge reserve account after FY19. Mr. Joly added that the Peppermill Bridge and the bridge by Rite Aid are on "the radar".
- Truck Replacements - to replace one 2008 1-ton dump truck, a 25-30 year old 20-ton trailer that can be sold for \$3,000, and an 8-year old tandem axle dump truck that can be traded for \$40,000-\$60,000.

Board questions:

- Mr. Thurber asked: Do we currently employ a mechanic, and Mr. Joly answered that we do not. We also need to purchase a lift and will eventually have all departments fuel up at the one location. "I've been told this will save us thousands." Mr. Hurd added that now that we have the one facility, we will take another look at the cost of employing a mechanic to include working on the police vehicles, as well.
- Mr. Carroll asked: Where do you buy your vehicles, and Mr. Joly stated that we buy all of our smaller vehicles locally and our larger tires from a Vermont vendor an hour away who delivers, mounts and services the tires. This saves us 50%, or \$1,800 on one bucket loader tire.
- Ms. Conner asked: Is it a State Law that every road be striped, and Mr. Joly responded that the State requires that all roads be striped. They provide the equipment and paint to stripe the Class 2 roads. Shoulder striping only has to be done every 4 or 5 years due to less traffic on them. We will be striping in the spring this year instead of the fall.
- Mr. Campbell asked: If the DPW line item would remain at \$0.00, and Mr. Hurd answered that this amount is not ever budgeted but comes from the reserves.
- Mr. Campbell asked Mr. Joly to explain the logic in choosing the roads to pave. Mr. Joly stated that it is recommended to pave your best roads first (uses less pavement - 3/4" - and lasts longer - 15 years) and then the worst ones or gravel roads because they use much more pavement - 4" - and don't last as

long - 3-4 years. Even though the State paves Class 1 roads, such as South Street, we are still required to do work on the manhole cover depths, etc.

D. IF TIME ALLOWS - RECREATION BUDGET AND REMAINDER OF ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGETS

These will be discussed at the January 13, 2018 meeting.

2. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Personnel

At 11:07am, Jim Carroll moved and Chad Gordon seconded finding that an Executive Session be held on Personnel as premature general public knowledge would place a person involved in the subject matter at a substantial disadvantage. The motion carried unanimously.