

NEWINGTON BUDGET COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes
January 28, 2004

Present: Budget Committee Members: Alfred Smith (Chairman), Dennis Acton, Jack Anderson, Kay Akerley, Leslie Brock, Candice Cantaloupo, Laura Coleman, Wil Gilbert, Gail Pare, Richard Spinney
Board of Selectmen Representative Jack O'Reilly, AA Gillespie, Fire Chief Roy Greenleaf, Board of Fire Engineers Steven Sabine, Residents Ruth and George Fletcher, Resident John Klanchester

The Budget Committee Chairman Alfred Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The purpose of this meeting was to review the budget of the Fire Department.

Selectman, Jack O'Reilly made the motion to accept the minutes of the January 21, 2004 meeting. The motion was seconded by Budget Committee member, Gail Pare. Motion carried with none opposed.

Fire Department

Gail Pare made the motion to accept the Fire Department Budget in the amount of \$771,078. The motion was seconded by Budget Committee member, Denis Acton.

Chairman Smith noted that the budget under review includes the addition of two additional personnel. Gail Pare asked how many personnel the Fire Department will have with the additional people. Chief Greenleaf answered ten, (eight firefighters, an assistant chief and the chief). Budget Committee member, Kay Akerley asked if the salary line reflected half a year, which would mean an increase next year. Chief Greenleaf said that was correct. Chief Greenleaf added that these two new billets will allow the firefighters to work 42 hours a week, as opposed to their current 53 hour work week. During the past year, two fire fighters were lost to lateral transfers (one to Portsmouth, the other to Dover) and one was deployed to serve in Iraq for eighteen months. He stressed that the lateral transfers are hard to compete with, because other towns in the area are offering better salaries, incentives and less hours.

Budget Committee member, Laura Coleman asked why two more people were needed when two were trained last year. Chief responded that another shift had to be added to keep the hours down. He also stated that the Fire Department will not be receiving a cost of living raise this year. Instead, the hours will be decreased. The department will keep the same yearly base pay which will upgrade their hourly rate. By lowering the hours, the department's starting salary, which is \$12.05 (the lowest in the area), would be increased to \$15.21. Laura Coleman asked about overtime. Chief Greenleaf stated that the overtime was up last year because one firefighter was out on medical leave for a month, another firefighter was injured in an automobile accident and one took a lateral transfer to Portsmouth. He stated that there must be a minimum of two people at the Fire Station at all times. When someone leaves or is out sick or on vacation, another firefighter must take their place, therefore there was an increase in overtime hours.

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Kay Akerley noted that in the Department's "Five Year Plan" it states that the Department will try to comply with OSHA and NFPA standards. She asked when the Fire Department would get past the "trying to comply" and actually comply. Chief Greenleaf pointed out that the Five Year Plan for the Fire Department explains how this will happen. He stressed that this is just a plan and there may be changes, however the plan is something to guide the department to obtain its goals. If all goes well, by 2008 there should be no personnel issues. He added that by that time, the plan is projecting three firefights per shift. There must be enough personnel to be able to have firefighters both inside and outside a burning building which will cover the "Two In, Two Out" rule.

Budget Committee member, Richard Spinney asked if the Fire Chief has asked the personnel if they want fewer hours. Fire Engineer and Budget Committee member, Leslie Brock replied that the personnel were asked and they told the Board of Fire Engineers that they would forgo the cost of living raise if they had fewer hours. Chief Greenleaf also stated that the 42 hour work week will do away with the need for "K Days".

Selectman O'Reilly clarified by stating that basically the plan is to provide better coverage and cut the hours by adding two additional people. Chief Greenleaf confirmed.

Laura Coleman asked how many call people the department has and why doesn't the Town hire the call people on as full time. Chief answered that currently there are two active call personnel and neither lives in Newington. Also, neither of the two would be able to upgrade to full time because they did not have the qualifications. They need to take the state test. Gail Pare asked if there was a need for call fire fighters. Chief Greenleaf stated that in 2003 call personnel positions were advertised and there was no response. He added that it takes about a year to be qualified, and 9 months to be an EMT and then there is a recertification every 2 years. Chief Greenleaf stressed that Newington is not an entry level fire department because of the profile of the town. There are over 27 million gallons of LPG sitting in the tanks, 84 million gallons of aviation fuel and 21million gallons of home heating fuel stored in Newington's industrial area.

Chairman Smith said that with the changes in the laws that allow lateral transfers, there should be precautionary measures put in place when hiring new firefighters. There should be a probation period that if the person leaves before a year's time, that person would owe the fire department for any training expenses. He recommended having any new personnel sign a contract agreeing to this. Chief Greenleaf agreed.

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Chairman Smith asked if there was money in the budget to pay for benefits for the firefighter that was deployed to Iraq. Chief explained that the Fire Department will be carrying the deployed firefighter's dental and health insurance. He said that the department and the Board of Fire Engineers feel that it is the Town's responsibility to take care of Ken's family so he does not have to worry while he's away. Also, Ken's wife will not have to change her doctor or the pediatrician for the new baby. Selectman O'Reilly asked the Board to read the executive order from the Governor that encourages local governments to continue to carry the benefits of those being deployed to Iraq.

Chairman Smith asked why the retirement line has decreased. Chief Greenleaf answered that losing higher salaried people and replacing them with lower salary people has caused this decrease.

Budget Committee member, Jack Anderson asked for clarification of how many personnel are currently in the department. Chief Greenleaf said there are currently six firefighters plus the assistant chief and the chief, totaling eight. He added this allows for three shifts. Jack Anderson referred to the last paragraph on page two of the Five Year Plan. He asked how many people the plan will make accumulatively. Chief Greenleaf answered 10 firefighters plus the assistant chief and the chief. He added that this will allow for a fourth shift.

Budget Committee member, Candice Cantaloupo asked what is not being done now that will be done if the Town adds the additional people. Chief Greenleaf answered that the additional people will help to comply with the OSHA standards. Leslie Brock explained that with the additional people, if there is a fire call, three firefighters can respond to that call. Two firefighters can go into the building and one can "man" the hose and truck. Candice Cantaloupo asked what is done now. Chief Greenleaf said "we pray". Jack Anderson asked if the Town is being negligent in its responsibilities in hiring enough people to make the job save. Leslie Brock explained that if there is a fire call now and the department knows that there is no one in the building, the men on that call wait outside the building for mutual aid to arrive.

Kay Akerley asked for a report of how many calls were received between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. Chief Greenleaf said he would get that information to her.

Selectmen O'Reilly asked who normally responds to mutual aid. Chief Greenleaf said normally it's Pease and Portsmouth. Greenland is only a volunteer department.

Gail Pare pointed out that the budgeted amount on Alarm Maintenance last year was \$1,900 however, there was \$2,583 spent. She asked what was purchased. Chief Greenleaf stated that there were some alarm boxes in town that needed to be replaced. Also alarm cable has gotten more expensive. Ms Pare pointed out that the Department is asking for the same budget amount of \$1,900. Chief Greenleaf said that he is hoping to balance out the expense with a warrant article that will set up a Special Revenue account for this purpose.

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Kay Akerley noted that the secretary's pay has increased by 10%. Chief Greenleaf explained that he gave the secretary a raise of \$1.00 per hour which puts her at \$11 per hour. This is still less than other clerks in Town.

Candice Cantaloupo noted that the line item for physicals has increased. Chief Greenleaf explained that all employees are required to have a pre-employment physical. Also, every couple of years personnel must get a physical. He added that this year five of the men in the department are scheduled for physicals.

Denis Acton asked why last year \$5,000 was budgeted for computers and only half of that was used, but this year the Fire Department is asking for \$7,000. Chief Greenleaf responded that four of the department's computers are now being leased. He added that with technology changing as fast as it is, it is less expensive to lease. On a lease basis, if something goes wrong, the leasing company fixes the computer at no expense. He added that this year the Department needs to upgrade its software, due to a change in the reports that go to the State. There was discussion on the possibility of all the Departments in the Town being linked into one centralized computer network, under one centralized lease program. All agreed it would be a good idea to investigate before future computer considerations.

Chief Greenleaf stated that the Fire Department has brought in approximately \$236,000 in the last two years, between ambulance fees, fire alarm fees, fines for false alarms and grants.

Denis Acton asked if the Department gets paid for mutual aid. The Chief answered, "No". He added that the Town also does not pay other towns for mutual aid. Denis Acton asked if Towns could take advantage of this situation and save money by not hiring enough people and just rely on mutual aid. Chief Greenleaf explained that the Mutual Aid Society monitors this type of activity very closely. It would be very difficult for any Town to get away with it for very long.

Chairman Smith pointed out that the increase in this budget is directly related to the new personnel. He noted that the discretionary funding of the budget is actually down a bit. He advised that in the past the Budget Committee recommended warrant articles to address changes in personnel, because of the long term commitment being made by the Town. However, he pointed out that the Town's profile is changing and it is reasonable to expect that all the departments will be changing and growing.

Selectmen O'Reilly stated that when the Fire Department met with the Board of Selectmen, there was discussion on why the last two people left. Basically it was because they could make more money, with fewer hours somewhere else. He added that the question was what does it cost to keep having a turnover of people and bringing on new people, with training and overtime and equipment cost. Basically the issue is to try to keep the people we have.

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Chairman Smith commended the Department for continually working the 53 hour shifts. He recognized how demanding and taxing the schedule can be.

Chairman Smith called for a vote to accept the Fire Department Budget in the amount of \$771,078. Those in favor-Denis Acton, Jack Anderson, Leslie Brock, Candice Cantaloupo, Laura Coleman, Wil Gilbert, Jack O'Reilly, Gail Pare, Richard Spinney-**9 Yes**. Those opposed-Kay Akerley-**1 No**. Motion Carried.

Chairman Smith lead a review of the balances and histories of the Department's Capital Reserve Funds. After review of the Fire Vehicle Capital Reserve Fund he recommended that this Fund be re-addressed and possibly adjusted in order to keep in step with the Department's CIP. Selectman O'Reilly stated that the Board of Selectmen would re-address this issue at the next Selectmen's meeting.

There was discussion on the upcoming Warrant Articles. It was recommended that the Special Revenue Fund Articles be placed at the beginning of the Warrant, so that the Town's people will have a better understanding of what is being asked for.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 9:14 p.m. by Selectman O'Reilly. The motion was seconded by Gail Pare. Meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cynthia L. Gillespie
Administrative Assistant