

Final Meeting Minutes of Finance Committee General Government Sub Committee

Discussion 2024 Preliminary Budgets for IT and Police Department

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

Attended by:

Hossan Behery – Member of Sub Committee

Larry Forshner – Member of Sub Committee

Patti Sciarra – Member of Sub Committee

Phil Rooney – Chairperson of Sub Committee

James Hicks – Police Chief

Leo Fitzpatrick – Operations Lieutenant Natick Police Department

Marylee Watkins – Executive Assistant to Chief of Police

Robert LaFrancois I – Director of Information Technology

John Townsend – Deputy Town Administrator/Finance Director

Absent:

David Coffey – Member of Sub Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00.

The references to the discussions in these minutes are a summary of our meeting discussions and the written responses to questions previously submitted prior to the meeting by subcommittee members.

Information Technology

Bob described his budget dollars as being 80 to 90 percent consisting of support spending for systems.

This includes spending for internet, switches, network security, anti-virus technology, etc. The anti-virus/malware contract will be going out to bid for a new four year contract.

The population for his department is 4 individuals. He has one position open (Deputy IT Director) and is working to fill it. It is in the 2024B.

Bob informed us the two big cloud migration projects for the ERP system and phone system are the 2023 focus. The ERP System upgrade was completed in March. The initial planning and configuration phase of the phone system cloud migration will start in a couple of weeks with deployment scheduled over the summer. Due to the extent of the phone upgrade project, the deployment schedule will be determined after we meet with the Facilities and School IT Department to work in tandem with their summer schedules. These upgrades won't reduce hardware costs since most of our storage usage is from our file servers but it will reduce the number of physical phone switches and related equipment

that we have to support and with the ERP system in the cloud it'll substantially reduce the number of remote VPN users we have to support.

Bob stated Cyber Training for all Town staff took place over the last calendar year and was part of a state Cyber Training grant. This calendar year, we're going to use a vendor called Wizer to have more control over the cyber training campaigns, phishing testing and reporting.

Amazon Web Services is still hosting our two large systems (ERP Vendor and OpenGov).

The significant increases in Help Desk tickets for the last half of calendar year 2022 were due to the upgrade of the ERP System. The assistance was related to training for the upgrades.

Web Development costs for 2024 are budgeted in the Communication Directors Budget contained in the Town Administration Budget.

The significant increases in spending 2024B versus 2023B are as follows

Increases consist of vendor cost increases and services coverage expansion

- 38K increase for annual vendor support (see comment above)
- 35K for new software applications. (see comment above)
- 80K for support renewal of existing anti-virus/anti-malware/containment and remediation software. (see comment above)

Police Department

Chief Hicks covered the three departments budgeted as Public Safety under his control. These departments are Emergency Management, Parking Enforcement, and Police.

Emergency Management

The department receives approximately \$9,500 in an annual for grants for Emergency Management. These funds are usually used for special projects and not part of our operations. In the 2024B this will be a part of our operations budget and we have asked for an additional \$7,000 in addition to a reallocation in costs specifically related to the police and fire radios system. Several years ago the police budget absorbed the cost of the maintenance of the fire radio system as well as the police system. In FY2023 we took on a project (capital funded in Fall 2022) to update/replace both systems. In doing so there will be additional monthly/annual costs (internet service). In addition, while planning the project logistics we discovered that the DPW also has radio communication issues some sites of which are shared. As such, the DPW system's maintenance will be included under a single vendor with public safety. Moving forward, Emergency Management will maintain all the systems for efficiency and consistency needed for an emergency scenario.

Parking Enforcement

In FY24 our contractual agreement for collection services with our current vendor expires. As a result, we went out for RFQ and had one bidder. The new annual contractual costs are slightly higher than our previous contract. While beginning the implementation process with the new vendor we discovered that there were other costs for the parking program (cellular service, Gateway Fees, bank transaction fees, etc.) that were being paid by other departments (in Town Administration) or line items. We have now

consolidated all costs for operating the parking program under the Parking Enforcement budget to be able to document and evaluate actual costs. This budget is sufficient at this time.

Police

The new Deputy Police Chief is in board. The position was filled internally.

There were three retirement so far for 2023. Four more individuals are eligible to retire, but have not indicated they plan to at this time.

The department has 7 open positions. The positions were filled and the new hires were going through the academy for training in February and April. This bring staffing to full complement of 60 sworn officers plus administration. Recently two of the new hires left the academy. They will have to be replaced.

There is no dedicated officer for traffic enforcement. Due to staffing there is only a supervisor doing traffic part-time.

Due to staffing shortage investigators had to be temporarily reassigned.

The recovery from Covid has caused an increase in traffic. The result is an increase in crashes and complaints from the public concerning neighborhood traffic concerns.

The Chief informed us the crime that continues to be of concern is the larceny of property. This continues to rise. The reason in most cases are theft from unlocked motor vehicles. We have to continue to educate the public on the importance of locking vehicles overnight. This simple act will reduce statistics in this area dramatically. This is not a budgetary action to fix – more of a communications action for the entire community (not just the police department or the Town to address. The more educated the public the better.

Fraud cases are increasing specifically around identity fraud. We have seen increases of fraudsters opening up banking accounts and making unemployment claims. These are becoming very complex because now it is usually done via online schemes which local police simply cannot solve due to resources and skills needed. We will do our best to educate the community to these acts.

Liquor law violations, although not a dramatic number increase, is the result of more inspections of licensed establishments. We work through the Select Board to better educate these license holders to their responsibilities. Arson is not a concern of ours at this time as this number remains low.

The grants that provide funding for the Dispatch Center totaling approximately \$194K will expire at end of fiscal year. They are guaranteed grants as long as the state allows the funding to be distributed to certified dispatch centers. The state gets the funding from the surcharge on all of our phone bills so the money is always there. The amount may fluctuate on an annual basis.

The School Violence Prevention Program Grant expire in September 2024. To continue to cover the cost of the program activity we partnered with the School Dept. During FY24 we will be evaluating the impact the grant has had and if there is value to request town funds to maintain the position.

The department is still evaluating the performance of the hybrid police cruisers. They are in their third year of use.

The costs of the social worker on call to the department have been covered through a grant. It expires this year. The costs are included in the Town Administration Budget to fund the position.

The 2024B spending varies versus 2023B as follows;

The approximately 6% (\$75K) decrease in Supervisory Salaries is the result of the retirement of a supervisor at a higher rate of pay than the replacement.

The reasons for the approximately 66% (\$50K) decrease in Salaries Management OT is the result of a resignation of a lieutenant at a much higher rate than the replacement.

The reasons for the approximately 36% (\$90K) decrease in Salaries Supervisors OT is the reduction in hourly rate of pay for replacement officers.

The reasons for the approximately 32% (\$185K) decrease in Salaries Operational OT is due to replacements and resignation of long serving officers. They are replaced by officers and the lowest payroll rate.

The reasons for the approximately 4% (\$38K) increase in Salaries Additional Compensation Operations is directly related to the agreed upon Quinn Bill for all officers.

The Supplies Public Safety 2024B increased by 32% (\$8K). This is part of scheduled replacement that will continue to be the regular replacement of approximately 4 laptops per year. This cost was in Capital in the past but due to life cycle and cost it was moved to operational budget in FY24.

2024 is a promotional process year. This is our every other year process that we budget for every other year. The approximately \$29K increase in the Assessment Process in the 24B is an educated guess. For Sergeant there are 35 eligible to take part in the process and for Lieutenant there are 9. We estimate that 75% will participate at each level.

Our meeting adjourned at 8:14.