

Thursday, February 6, 2020 – 6:30 PM

Meeting Minutes

Prudential Committee Meeting Room

144 Newton Street

South Hadley, MA 01075

In Attendance: PC Chair Bruce Perron, PC Clerk Kevin Taugher, PC member John Wojciechowski, Interim Clerk/Treasurer Ira Brezinsky, Chief Robert Authier, Captain Kurt Schenker, Assistant Treasurer Kari Scytkowski, Water Superintendent Jeff Cyr, Mike Harrowfield, Tom Fusari, Terie Fleury

CALL TO ORDER

Perron called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Taugher moved and Perron seconded to approve the minutes of December 19, 2019. Motion carried 2-0 (Wojciechowski abstained)

APPROVAL OF ANNUAL ELECTION WARRANT

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to approve the Annual Election warrant as presented. Motion carried 3-0.

Cyr asked if there has been discussion about the start date for terms of successful candidates in the upcoming election.

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to direct Brezinsky to ask District Counsel for guidance on when new electees assume their office. Motion carried 3-0.

CONTINUING FY21 BUDGET DISCUSSION

Taugher would like to see a budget without the 4 additional FTE's that would show an "apples to apples comparison" of the FY20 budget to FY21. He would then like to see the budget including the additional FTE request. He would also like to see other alternatives such as additional use of overtime or an increase less than the full complement of 4 FTE's.

Authier commented that his request is a result of increased activity and need throughout the District. Taugher asked if staff is held over at the time of shift change. Authier responded affirmatively. He further explained that he tries to manage callbacks and tone-outs in a way that doesn't result in more overtime cost than necessary. He reasserted that times have changed and the days where all or most staff are regularly available to respond to callbacks are gone. Priorities and family requirements have changed, leaving less flexibility in the department. Taugher made a comparison to District 2 and commented that the perception is that staffing in District 2 "seems to work" with one fulltime person on staff at a time, supplemented by Call firefighters. Authier asserted that scenario does not work effectively and that District 2 is struggling with how best to provide emergency service. Wojciechowski asked if District 1 is subsidizing District 2. Authier responded that District 1 is not subsidizing District 2 due to lack of District 2 staffing, but that District 1 is responsible for responding to or intercepting District 2 ambulance calls that require paramedic (ALS) level service. District 2 is only certified at the

basic (BLS) level. District 1 is reimbursed \$325 by District 2 (or any other department or ambulance service) for each intercept call.

Taugher would like to see a more cohesive report justifying the requested increase, not simply "raw data". He would also like to see any other alternatives presented that could satisfy the increased need.

Perron felt the PC is not questioning the need, but agrees that the Chief needs to "prove the need".

Taugher would like to see an analysis of the calls, i.e. false alarms, nursing homes, residences, businesses, etc. What is being done to counsel those individuals who are precipitating perpetual false alarms or ambulance calls that don't result in any service needed. Authier responded that he, the Fire Inspector and other staff conduct routine follow-up and training when these situations arise. Wojciechowski agreed that increased scrutiny of this issue is warranted. Taugher also questioned how much of the increased need/activity is a result of growth in mutual aid and/or out of District ambulance calls.

Cyr commented that health insurance costs for active employees are not going to increase again next year. This is a result of excess reserve funds and a positive investment market. An additional factor that has allowed for no increase is that copays have increased for active and retired employees. Costs will go up in the future. Brezinsky added that costs for retired employees are calculated on a calendar year basis (rather than fiscal year) and that he has retained a 2% increase in the budget in anticipation of an increase for retirees beginning January 2021. The exact number will not be known until next Fall.

Brezinsky provided an historical tax recap and tax levy document from FY2012 to FY2020. The average total tax increase over those 8 years is 3.18%. This includes FY19 when there was a 7.0% increase due to the purchase of the new ladder truck.

Changes from the previous budget draft include a decrease in health insurance cost from a 5% increase to a 2% increase, and a slight decrease in retirement cost based on final numbers provided by the Hampshire Retirement Board. Increases to fund OPEB have been adjusted up by \$165,000 to a total of \$403,000. This reflects the transfer of funds approved at the previous meeting plus \$165,000 to be funded by taxation.

Regarding revenue, the current estimate for ambulance revenue used to help fund the budget is \$1,000,000. The exact recommended amount needs to be determined by the PC and the budget document will be adjusted accordingly. Brezinsky is also recommending an increase in the use of Free Cash to \$400,000. He has also increased the Local Revenue amount. Historically, the District has only shown Payment in Lieu of Taxes under Local Revenue (approximately \$5700). Other sources of local revenue are Return on Investment (interest) from the general fund, interest on delinquent taxes, and permit fees. Those 3 items account for well in excess of \$100,000 in additional revenue. The plan is to show a much larger number, but still well under the historical amount collected. The current budget has conservatively increased this number to \$35,000. He has also included the \$20,000 gift from Mount Holyoke. This is the amount the college has offered to pay on an ongoing basis (10 years) in recognition of the District's purchase of a new ladder truck. Brezinsky noted that increases in use of Free Cash and

FIRE DISTRICT #1 PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING

Local Receipts to balance the budget will result in a reduced Free Cash number next year, absent any other changes.

Cyr asked what vehicles will need to be purchased or replaced in the next 5 years. Authier responded that a pumper will be needed in about 5-7 years at a cost of \$600,000. Cyr commented that the current balance in the General Stabilization Account is only \$84,816. He suggested that additional funds be appropriated to both of these accounts.

Schenker stated that the \$15,000 that was appropriated in FY17 to fund the Infusion Pump account be transferred to a "New Equipment Account". The money that had been set aside in anticipation of use in a new State program. Unfortunately, that program has never come to fruition and the funds should be used elsewhere.

Brezinsky stated that an article will be necessary to fund the new Clerk/Treasurer transition plan. The current interim C/T contract runs until May 1 and the newly elected C/T will take office prior to that date. There will be a need for some overlap to facilitate training. He will provide an estimate of cost at the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS UNFORESEEN

Perron notified the PC that the union has given notice of its desire to open negotiations. He asked for the union to provide some dates in March to begin the process.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is planned for February 26 at 6:30 PM the Water Department meeting room.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Taugher moved and Wojciechowski seconded to adjourn at 7:35 PM. Motion carried ³⁻⁰ 20. *KT*

Respectfully submitted,

A true copy, attest:

Ira Brezinsky
District #1, Interim Clerk Treasurer

Kevin E. Taugher

Kevin Taugher, Prudential Committee Clerk

