

## Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday March 20, 2019 held at 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room, Town Hall

Members Present: Dorsey, Sullivan, Titcomb, Goldman, Hilario, Rosenberg

Members Absent: McNerney, Fletcher

Others Present: Mendes (minutes taker & Asst Town Administrator); Chief Kevin Breen (Fire Chief).

Called to order 7:02pm

Acting Chair Dorsey called the meeting to order at 7:02pm and welcomed Fire Chief (and new grandfather) Kevin Breen to the meeting.

Chief Breen proceeded to explain that the issue of 2 years' worth of salary increases are rolled into the FY2020 proposal because the FY2019 Adopted amounts reflect salary levels prior to the adoption of the most recent collective bargaining agreement. Ms. Sullivan asked about the age distribution of the work force in the Fire Dept. Chief Breen explained that the work force is getting younger as many personnel have retired over the past several years, with only 3 more retirements (including the Chief himself) expected within the next few years.

On the non-personnel side, the Chief explained that departments were asked to present a budget with a 5% reduction. The Chief explained that he reduced office supplies, protective clothing and training. He explained that he is essentially caught up with a planned replacement of protective clothing for firefighters, such that he can absorb a short-term reduction in this line item. Lynn Dispatch is up 5.9% per the contract with the City of Lynn to provide dispatch services.

Ms. Sullivan asked for some clarification on the reduction on the training line item. The Chief explained that the new CBA is providing a training stipend as part of their salary instead of being reimbursed as an expense reimbursement, so this is really a reclassification from non-salary to salary. The Chief also explained that there was a reduction in the budgeted amount for Holiday Pay due to experience from prior year actuals. This discrepancy is the result of CBA language that allows firefighters to take holidays off rather than being paid holiday pay. There is a risk in this approach if firefighters do not elect to take as many holidays off. Also, when Firefighters take the holiday off as a vacation day instead of taking holiday pay, this could impact overtime as a result of minimum staffing requirements in the CBA. The Chief explained that according to his calculations, the overtime budget gets hit at about 78% of the time when workers take time off.

There was then some discussion about training requirements and the Chief explained that there is no legally imposed training requirement; notwithstanding the lack of a formal requirement the new CBA expands training opportunities and Swampscott Fire often provides staff with training, including paid training stipends to encourage staff taking advantage of training opportunities.

There was then some discussion about the sick leave buy back benefit that was negotiated in the new CBA. The change was that staff previously were able to amass large sick time banks that would present a liability on the part of the town when staff notify us of their retirement. Under the new CBA staff are now able to purchase back sick time in limited increments each year in order to prevent the amassing of large sick banks.

There was then some discussion on the particulars of the provisions of the CBA, including annual sick leave buy backs, recent retirements and the resultant cost to the Town. Ms. Hilario asked if there was a provision in the CBA on light duty for staff out on injury leave. The Chief explained that there is none for this CBA largely because there are no duties in the Fire Dept that would be considered "light" duty, except perhaps working in fire prevention, which is office work that is another staff person's job.


Ms. Rosenberg asked about whether engines vs. other vehicles can be dispatched to medical calls. The answer was that staff on a medical call not in an engine would need to go back to the station to get the engine were there to be another call while out on the medical call. The Chief then explained in more detail the process for responding to medical calls. The Chief did mention that while we have a private ambulance service at no charge because the ambulance service bills directly to insurance to cover its costs; he can foresee the private ambulance company charging a subsidy at some point in the future.

Ms. Titcomb asked the Chief about the coordination between the Fire Dept.'s boat and the Police Dept.'s Harbormaster. The Chief explained that through the use of certain gear, the Fire Dept. has been able to expand the portion of the year they are able to be out on the water.

Mr. Mendes asked the Chief to explain his views on the "Combined" Fire Dept. utilized in Lynnfield because of the report to the Article VI committee on the issue of potentially employing a "combined" Fire Dept. in Swampscott. The Chief explained that there are a number of issues that are problematic with employing part-time/call/volunteer firefighters. Essentially, there are fewer training requirements, there tends to be a problem with attracting and retaining qualified staff, and there is often a lack of staffing available at certain times (middle of the night/during storms). There are often longer delays in responding to calls. Part-time/call firefighters will often seek full-time employment in other communities after paying to send the part-time/call firefighter to the academy resulting in a "combined" department paying for training for firefighters to leave for employment in another community once they are trained.

Mr. Dorsey asked the Chief to expound on the process for selecting a new Fire Chief, since Chief Breen has already announced his impending retirement within the next year. The Chief explained the concept of an assessment center and the process for selecting a new Chief under Civil Service.

Meeting Adjourned 8:50 pm.

  
Thomas Dorsey  
Chair