**Minutes of the Finance Committee March 21, 2019**

Members attending: Mr. Fenton (Chairman), Ms. Herron, Ms. Lennon, Mr. Linton, Mr. Love, Mr. Peters, and Mr. Runstrom.

Members not attending: None.

Additional Attendees: Carol Riches (Town Administrator), Peter Bogren (Selectman),   
Jay Conte (Fire Chief), Michael Pingitore (Ast. Fire Chief),   
Jeff Kent (Capital Improvement Committee), Robert Pelczarski,   
Neil Bagdis.

Meeting called to order at 7:32pm.

### Minutes

**Motion** to approve the minutes of the March 06, 2019 meeting made by Ms. Herron, seconded by   
Ms. Lennon. **Approved unanimously**.

**Motion** to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2019 meeting made by Ms. Herron, seconded by   
Ms. Lennon. **Approved unanimously**.

### Jay Conte (Fire Chief) Mike Pingetore (EMS)

Chief Conte presented information to the committee on the current status of the Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services, as well as the requested FY2020 budget for Fire and EMS.  
**Fire Department:**

* As you can see fire calls are up, and we expect the trend to continue. We expect it to be about 250 this year.
* Hopefully there won’t be a brush fire season this year.
* The Fire Department is operating without a front line ladder truck, due to frame corrosion we had to take it out of service.
* We are down to 2 main pumpers, so if we lose one, we’ll be down to one.
* Next year, I increased the training in expectation of OSHA requirements. We used to do 12-15 calls and that got us through, now I need to double that. There are 15 trainings just for OSHA requirements. We are training 2x per month and hoping we get enough attendance.
* OSHA requirements started in February, we knew it was coming, but we didn’t have the budget to do as much as we should. We’re trying to come into compliance for next year.
* If training is up, why isn’t training stipend increased?   
  That is a stipend for attending 85% of training. The people that attend 85% of training split this stipend.
* What is the hourly rate for training and calls?   
  Varies from $15/hr to $20/hr.
* What is the difference between firefighter 1 and 2?   
  Firefighter 2 is a driver/operator, Firefighter 1 is not. That‘s the only difference.
* Purchased services did not change.
* Equipment budget… increased because we are trying to equip all firefighters with 2 sets of gear, so after using one, you can wash it and have another one ready to go. This is the first installment – phase in over 3-4 years.
* Question about protective clothing… you mentioned that it’s nice to have two sets, but can you explain why it’s important?   
  When you’re exposed to smoke, it gets into your gear and contains a lot of carcinogens. When they are done, they get sprayed down, decontaminated and the gear goes right into a back and through the washer/extractor. It takes an hour to wash and 8 hours to dry. Often guys get called out again in that time. Otherwise it’s putting us out of service. To wash 20 sets is approximately 40 hours.
* What does protective clothing include.   
  Helmet, pants, coat, boots and gloves. Also need forest fire gear, because you can’t wear structure fire gear to a forestry fire because you wear it out. All of that equipment is approximately $5,000. We’re getting behind because as we hire new recruits we need to equip them.
* So we’re going to see $35k per year for gear going forward?   
  Yes, for the foreseeable future as we upgrade the equipment.
* Where do the SCBA tanks and gear fit into the budget?   
  They don’t, they’re a capital item. We bought a set of them in 2012, and we replace them every 10 years.
* Portable radios/pagers. What is the lifespan of a pager?   
  Depends who has the pager sometimes.
* We’re looking at all new radios from the grant for regional dispatch. We will own them, but will need to maintain it.
* So, regional dispatch is a done deal?   
  Yes, as long as the grant gets approved. It will be at least a year before we proceed.

**EMS Budget:**

* What is the lease shortfall… why increased so much?   
  That is because of Ambulance-2, it’s a lemon, we know that, the AC, etc. We want to replace it. Part of this is paid from Holden Hospital funds. It’s possible that the amount will decrease if Holden Hospital funds increase (based on interest income)
* Will be $25k per year for 10 years?   
  Yes. Lease is 35k per year for 10 years, minus hospital fund.
* Any idea how much the ambulance fund (revenue) will pull in?   
  We will be close to $346k. This amount offsets the EMS budget. We will not have the final number until right before town meeting. Right now, we’re about 50k ahead of last year in billings.
* The numbers you handed out show that there has been a dramatic increase in Fire calls over the past few years… 120 to 200 to 250 over the past three years. What accounts for this increase?

There is a full list of the calls is in the packet, that will give you an idea. The 100s are the fires (20 total calls).

* Yes, but I’m wondering about the increase… this is a 100% increase in 2 years?  
  Some of that is better reporting. We are now mandated to report every time we move the trucks.
* So there hasn’t been a dramatic increase in structure fires, or automobile accidents, or anything?

No.

* How many ambulance calls?  
  We do 350-400 transports per year. That’s where the revenue comes from.
* Can we get an update on AFG Grant status?   
  In 2004 we got a grant for forestry truck. We got 8 defibs and monitors, we got engine 2 in 2012-14. Ambulance in FY15. We were able to not spend over 100k on that ambulance because of the grant. We apply every year for specific capital projects. We are late hearing notifications due to the government shutdown. We hope to hear in May/June but it’s not certain.
* What is the active membership in the dept. right now?   
  27, with 5 more in training.
* If you have 27 people, why does annual report show 40+ sometimes?   
  We purge… if you don’t make 60% of the training you get purged from the roster.
* Mr. Bagdis questioned the amount we’re spending on equipment vs. the Federal guidelines.
* Mr. Bagdis: If we have 26 certified people, why do we have 29 sets of apparatus? I’m concerned about 2 sets of gear for everyone… not everyone is usually on a call, and not everyone I know enters the structure. I’m concerned with buying 50 or 60 sets of gear… that’s a lot of money for a small town.   
  Chief Conte: We don’t plan to buy for everyone, can’t do that for this budget.
* What is the lifespan?  
  10 years. That becomes a problem because we were only buying 3 sets/year.
* Mr. Bagdis: I heard someone in this meeting say that breathing apparatus expires every 10 years. That’s not true.   
  Chief Conte: We didn’t say that… it can expire if regulations change.   
  Mr. Bagdis: If you maintain it can last much longer than that.

Chief Conte: We expect it to last longer.

### Jeff Kent (Capital Improvement Committee Chairman)

Mr. Kent briefed the finance committee on capital projects for this budget year, as well as our ongoing capital plan.

* This year we got requests from DPW, Police, Fire/EMS, Town Admin, and the Water Department totaling $3.955M.
* We reviewed these projects and voted to recommend the 6 capital projects as shown. Total amount of $3,955,000
* After review, we prioritized as follows:

1. Ambulance ($285,000, budgeted over 10 years @ $28k)
2. DPW Facility Site Plan and Initial Design ($150,000, budgeted this year)
3. DPW Roof ($42,000, budgeted this year)
4. Senior Center Boiler Replacement ($17,000, from Capital Depreciation Fund)
5. PFD Ladder 1 Replacement ($800,000 - $1.1M, funded through borrowing)
6. 3 Police Utility Vehicles ($99,000 budgeted over 3 years @ $33k)

* If all of these are approved, the tax increase would be approximately 150/household.
* If DPW Facility is approved, we will recommend passing over item for the DPW roof.
* Committee discussed whether roof would last until new building was complete.
* The long term capital plan calls for $18-20M needed by 2021-2025.
* The committee also recommending an expert study of the town’s capital needs… which will cost between 25 and 50k. The goal is to identify what is really needed vs. not needed. Do we need two ladder trucks? Do we need other things currently in the plan?

### Budget Consideration

**1220: Fire Department.** Motion to approve the budget for Fire (#1610) in the amount of $383,531 made by Ms. Herron and seconded by Ms. Lennon.  **Approved Unanimously.**

**1232: Emergency Medical Services.** Motion to approve the budget for EMS (#1232) in the amount of $651,302 made by Mr. Peters and seconded by Ms. Lennon.  **Approved Unanimously.**

### New Business

Mark Love handed out information and shared prepared remarks on the current budget.   
Mr. Love believes that:

* Town employees continue to be underpaid
* Property taxes are too high
* Capital improvement requests are outstripping the town’s ability to fund them.

As a result, Mr. Love recommends that the town increase its revenue estimates for Local revenue and new construction, eliminate funding for the OPEB account, and use the resulting revenue to increase the COLA for town employees and fund the Capital Depreciation fund. In addition, Mr. Love believes the town would have enough of a budget surplus to vote a $300,000 underride.

Ms. Riches: We aren’t losing the money on local revenue and new construction… it goes into free cash and rolls into next year’s budget. You don’t want to overestimate these amounts. DOR won’t let you overestimate these amounts.

**Motion** to increase the COLA for town employees from 3$ to 4% made by Mr. Love.   
No second. **Motion fails**.

**Motion** to recommend eliminating funding for the OPEB account made by Mr. Love and seconded by Mr. Runstrom.   
**Motion approved** by a vote of 6-1.

Mr. Fenton outlined what is still not finalized in the FY20 budget:

* We have incomplete state aid numbers
* We don’t know the final number for the agricultural student
* We don’t know the final ambulance fund numbers.

With those caveats in mind, we currently have a budget surplus of about $162,000.

The date of the next Finance Committee meeting is TBD.

At our next meeting we will vote to recommend approval or disapproval of the individual warrant articles, as well as the WRSD and Baypath budgets.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:55pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Runstrom, Secretary.