

FINANCE COMMITTEE

March 14, 2023

Members: Chair: My Linh Truong Vice Chair: John Miller
Hafiz Adamjee, Megan Blackwell, Jeff Calabrese, Stefan Carp, Yannis Evrigenis, Lauren Hermann, Patrick Matteson, Nicole Soto, Enzo Rascionato, Derek Ross, Brian Vernaglia, Kathryn Hughes

General Business

Chair Truong called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

Roll Call:

Brian Vernaglia
My Linh Truong
John Miller
Jeff Calabrese
Patrick Matteson
Nicole Soto
Kathryn Hughes
Derek Ross
Hafiz Adamjee
Yannis Evrigenis
Laureen Hermann
Enzo Rascionato

Late Arrivals: Megan Blackwell

Missing: Stefan Carp

Guests-Dan O'Connell-Police Chief, Rick Tustin-Fire Department Chief

Public Comments-No speakers present.

Fire Department FY24 Budget

Chief Tustin began his presentation by announcing that he will be retiring after 37 years effective April 28. He went on to say that he was seeking a 7% increase over the FY23 budget. The major increases are as follows:

- Addition of the Deputy Chief position-approved by Town Meeting & the Personnel Board but vetoed by the Town Manager. He stated that Winchester is the only town that does not have a Deputy Chief position. It his view having the position provides better succession planning, continuity of command and is a morale booster by providing advancement. opportunities.
- Addition of CDL coordinator
- Paramedic Coordinator to 9% from 4.5%
- Hazmat stipend increase from 1.32% to 1.5%

In addition to vetoing the Deputy Chief position the Town Manager also reduced funding in overtime by \$50K and equipment by \$10K.

Equipment continues to be replaced as it approaches end of life. Will continue to seek grants in an effort to offset costs.

The West Side fire station is in need to be replaced. Studies have shown that it should be torn down. It was noted that \$215K has been spent on capital projects since 2015. Back in 2018 it was estimated that the cost to replace the fire house would cost \$8MM. The chief commented that Westford recently build a new much larger firehouse for \$12.5MM . He wondered why Winchester is always more expensive.

The Chief added, as Winchester continues to build additional housing he stated that the number of medical and fire calls will increase. As a result, staffing in the future should be increased to 14 fireman per shift. This is in addition to the Deputy Chief and EMS day positions. (currently a shared position)

An idea was raised to solve the staffing of the Deputy Chief position. Why couldn't one the five captains be promoted to Deputy Chief and also serve as Captain. Furthermore, if there are three open positions why couldn't the monies be allocated for Deputy Chief. The Chief commented that the Town is one position short and is at the mercy of the civil service process. Any change would have to incorporated as part of the bargaining process. It was noted that the Fire Department is currently at 12 fireman per shift which is the bare minimum.

A question was asked about overtime and if it is going up or down. The Chief felt it is now budgeted properly versus previous years. Overtime is needed to cover sick time, vacations, leaves and staff shortages.

FinCom Member Derek Ross moved for favorable action the FY24 Fire Department Budget for \$6,973,140. (\$6,541,060 Personnel Services, \$368,180 Expenses and \$63,900 Equipment) Seconded by FinCom Member Patrick Matteson.

The committee was reminded that a long term strategy will be needed to replace both firehouses. Also, it was mentioned that the Chief was considering leaving the civil service system. The biggest drawback is that it becomes a self-service model. For example, any exams would have to be prepared internally and subsequently approved. The advantage is that the department is no longer at the mercy of the civil service schedule.

A comment was made that the budget increase is really 5% and not 3.2%. A request was made to add 2019 as the starting point. FinCom Member Derek Ross agreed to follow-up on the missing data. It was noted that the vote is contingent upon providing the updated data.

A question was asked if Chief Tustin's replacement will be paid less. It was stated the replacements salary will not be reduced.

A comment was made that the overall budget numbers are fluid due to the fact that Winchester on occasion has to support other local towns. On related note a question was asked if the Police and Fire Departments could be combined with Woburn. It was felt however that major political barriers would have to be overcome. Another idea is to combine Winchester's Police and Fire Department. FinCom Member Derek Ross agreed to follow-up on this question.

A comment was made that the same issues appear to be coming up every budget cycle. There is need for a more strategic view going forward. FinCom Member Calabrese agreed to keep an updated list of post budget issues.

Motion to approve the FY24 Fire Department budget of \$6,973,140. Vote was unanimous. Fire Department Budget passes.

Police Department FY24 Budget

Chief O'Connell began with a brief overview the Police Department. The department was previously was at 40 officers. Currently, the department is down to 36 officers with 4 in the Police Academy. Two have since left the Academy with the other two graduating in 2 months. There is also one lateral move pending from Tewksbury. The number of lateral moves has been restricted but the Chief believes in community policing and wants officers that have a community connection. This will leave one position open.

High level staffing overview:

- 6 full time dispatchers, 3 part time dispatchers (one retired and one new hire)
- One Full and Part time Traffic Warden.
- One Traffic Director
- 26 Crossing Guards
- One Animal Control officer
- One Mental Health position
- Two Clerks
- One Chief, 4 lieutenants , 6 sergeants and 27 patrol officers (4 detectives & 1 SRO for the school)

It was requested by the Town Manager that the budget be level set. The Budget will actually be decreasing this year. This is due to turnover and retirements with new positions paying lower.

The Town Manager agreed to funding the second police car this year. Hybrids working well but costs have risen from \$104K to \$116K per vehicle.

The Town Manager did cut \$20K from the parking clerks. Eliminated a half position.

No major purchases for this budget but next year \$15K will be needed for video system software. In addition, Taser replacements will be needed due to a new technology upgrade by the supplier. (estimated cost \$15K)

The Police Chief commented that Police building is 100 years old and has outgrown its usefulness. Storage is becoming a big problem. A replacement needs to be considered for the long term.

Statistics from last year:

- 10,000 calls
- 182 well-being checks
- 1,300 medical calls
- 900 911 Calls
- 170 Animal Control calls
- 400 Motor Vehicle accidents
- 32 Arrests, 5 Protective Custody
- SRO (68 calls elementary, 73 Middle School and 93 High School)
- 7 Break-Ins
- 36 Hospital Calls

A question was asked if the details on the Motor Vehicle accidents is available. It was responded that this data is available. The Chief agreed to follow-up with the Safety Officer on this. This data would be useful in conjunction with road improvement projects.

A question was asked as to how the Dispatch function is structured. Currently, there are 2 employees 8AM to 4PM, 2 employees 4PM to 12 midnight, and 1 employee midnight to 8AM. The staff is supported by part time employees.

Another question was raised about body cams. This question was discussed with the unions and there are grants available. Due to the number of issues no decisions have been made on the use of body cams. The post commission has a committee that is researching. The Chief is in favor of body cams.

Question: Do security systems impact the number of calls. False calls represent 85% of the volume. There is a \$50 charge if there are more than three per household annually.

FinCom Member Yannis Evrigenis moved for favorable action the FY24 Police Department Budget for \$6,312,169. (\$5,896,415 Personnel Services, \$299,754 Expenses and \$116,000 Equipment) Seconded by FinCom Member Brian Vernaglia

The budget represents a decrease of (.855%) over the FY23 pre-cola budget. The is largely due to the retirement of two officers. Also, there was a change in Parking Enforcement with the elimination of a half a position that saved \$20K.

There were minor changes including the removal of auxiliary uniforms, the addition of Juneteenth holiday for administration and patrol officers, ICAC membership and tuition for the MA Chiefs in Training.

As stated by the Chief the FY24 budget marks the return to the normal vehicle replacement cycle of two vehicles per year.

In FY23 the Department received two reimbursable grants (\$80.4K) from the State 911 Department.

As previously stated, tasers and the video system used in the interrogation will have to be replaced soon. Monies will be requested as a Capital request.

A question was asked on the vehicle turnover rates. It was noted that the turnover rate is about every three years per vehicle.

A request was made to add FY19,20,21 into the budget template. Furthermore, based on calculations, the budget increase is actually 3.2%. FinCom Member Yannis Evrigenis agreed to follow-up on the missing data. The vote is contingent upon providing the updated data.

It was noted that taser replacements are made by the manufacturer as part of a new generation of equipment.

Motion to approve the FY24 Police Department budget of \$6,312,169. Vote is 12 for and was unanimous. Police Department Budget passes.

New Business

It was confirmed that the Pre-Cola budget should be used for the YOY calculations. In addition it was also confirmed that the write-ups should reflect the Town Managers budget book.

There was a discussion on whether or not the department owners should attend the FinCom budget discussion. There was a general agreement that they should have the right to attend the FinCom vote.

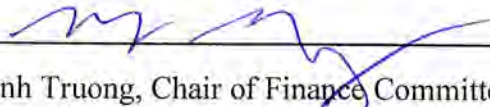
Future budget reviews was discussed. Scheduled for March 16 are: Council on Aging and Treasury. Recreation and Planning Board is tentative for March 23. Regarding Consent Agenda budgets

The new FinCom Member discussion is still in process and tentative for March 16.

Adjourn

FinCom Member Megan Blackwell moved to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting and the motion was seconded by FinCom Member Brian Vernaglia. The motion passed unanimously. FinCom adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Gary Lozowski, Recording Secretary of Finance Committee

Approved by: 
My Linh Truong, Chair of Finance Committee