

Town of Charlemont
Joint Finance Committee and Select Board Meeting
Minutes February 22, 2023
Via Telephone and at the Town Hall

Board Members Present: Lynn Hathaway, Bill Harker, Amy Wales

Board Members Joined by phone: Valentine Reid, Rich Filoramo, Ron Smith

Absent: Jay Healy, Jared Bellows

Others present: Sarah Reynolds (Administrator,) Cheryl Handsaker, Star Atkeson (Secretary,) Dennis Annear (Fire Department,) Dana Johnson (Ambulance)

Rich Filoramo called the meeting to order, 4:30.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

1. Free Cash

- There is \$376,202 in the Town's General Fund
- The Broadband number is at \$36,654.00., Amy Wales said that they need to accumulate retained earnings in an enterprise fund to do repairs and that it will grow exponentially.
- Amy Wales asked what is in Stabilization and Lynn answered \$386,000.
- Sarah said that the Cherry Sheet numbers weren't out yet but that she had looked at last years and it was \$356,128., the year before was \$339,599.
- The Chapter 90 money is based on population, and the pattern is a decline. FY23 was at 177,599., FY24 is around 176,000 "and change."
- Cherry Sheet numbers are expected in March.

2. Updated Town Revenue Numbers (sent out spreadsheet)

- Sarah is actively working to clear up accounts from the Transfer Station (bags, TVs, light-bulbs, computer monitors, AC) and Ambulance. She suggested assessing the Transfer Station Line on Town Meeting Floor. The Hauling has gone up. Also, Town Fuel is over considerably— more than the increase they had allotted.
- As far as the Ambulance revenue, a lot of the calls are not getting paid. The Billing Company gets told the wrong addresses. Lynn asked whether when she gets the report if they can correct the addresses in order to send the bill to the right person. She suggests offering them a payment plan which could take care of some of it. In compliance with HIPAA laws, the Select Board does an executive session to review the billing and to try and correct addresses where possible.
- Val asked what percentage of the people are out of state and out of town. Sarah said both local and out-of-towners (calls to Berkshire East, the River and Rte. 2). The ambulance crew gets given false addresses. There is confusion about this because there is an assumption that health insurance would have a correct identity and address attached to it. Dennis suggested contacting Comstar to see if they have a search program. Sarah will look into it as it is worth more than \$20,000. Lynn suggested sending the bad addresses to the collection agencies, as they have all sorts of search engines. On the report you "check off a box."

APPOINTMENTS:

1. Dennis Annear, Fire Chief:

- There is not a lot of increase in his budget.
- The Fire Station roof is a capital item, he is getting quotes— but a lot of contractors don't want to work for a municipality.
- The Fire Department Pagers are covered by a FRCOG grant that Dennis got and Sarah got an additional grant.
- The protective gear is expensive, the \$6,000 budget line is low for that, but at \$4,000. per person he will wait to make sure the 6- week training (which can take up to a year) is complete before giving an employee gear.
- They are all set with new radios.
- Ron Smith asks about Capital Planning Items: two engines and a pick-up— was the hope that they be bought with or without a grant? Dennis has submitted for a grant for the 3rd time, they are hoping that it will get accepted this year. The cost of the truck has risen to \$250,000 since 2021. The prices went up 36-40%
- Lynn suggested leasing as a way to get an engine, taken from Expenses and not adding to the debt load of the town.
- Amy pointed out that long-term borrowing as Broadband is doing is debt excluded, and they can add other things.
- Dennis confirms that it is the roof and the car that are the asks.
- Valentine asked if one of the Capital requirements is a new building. Yes, there are numbers at the bottom of the sheet. Ron doesn't have that update and Sarah will send it to him with notes: Fire, and Sarah's item: an audit, telephone, bridges are on there. The expense is over \$5,000.
- Dennis thinks the sequence will be as follows: Vote in May, wait for grant, find out in January 2024. The truck would come in 2026 the earliest and the cost would be 95% covered by Federal Grant.
- Rich asked if there are still facing increased costs to fit vehicles into the station. Yes, they need to buy special order trucks, no program trucks, as they only have 30' depth into the station. Rich wondered down the road when new Fire Station is built, Where would it go Wondered where the station will go. Dennis has a price per square foot.
- Sarah spoke of USDA grants and other programs pay for portions and phases of the building; she suggested getting a combo of grants. There is a requirement that they have the design absolutely build ready in order to have the grant rewarded.
- Dennis said he had to order a project manager during the study phase and would like to put \$100,000. Aside to start to hire a project manager. The statute says that a project manager must be in there from "Day one." Sarah added that they need to apply for a community facilities grant for that. Dennis said that the feds say there will be grant \$ but he hasn't seen it yet, but to qualify they need a shovel ready project and need at least \$50,000. for project manager. They need to determine location, do building design and soil testing and construction testing of the site.
- Ron Smith questioned whether that would be a Capital item and Amy said yes unless they are planning a warrant article.

- Rich wants to go ahead and get the \$50,000. For the project manager (to take it out of stabilization) and get the ball rolling, he is concerned with the location of the fire station, it needs to be dealt with.
- The boards brainstorm locations. Dennis said the new Building Committee would decide, but that Avery Brook Road has big enough land in front. They need a minimum of 2-3 acres. Rich suggested the board look for property.

2. Dana Johnson Ambulance

- Not many changes to the ambulance budget. There is a state law mandating that ambulances buy equipment to accommodate police canine. He applied for a waiver until May, hopefully they will extend it. He based it on the inability to take a truck out of service for the length of time it would take to bring a dog to The Deerfield veterinarian hospital.
 - The other issue is that they want ambulances and staff to carry psychiatric medicines to administer orally. He's not ready to do that. Doesn't think that it makes sense.
 - Rich asked when the new ambulance would come, and he said that it's still a year out or longer. If it comes within 3 years, they can use a grant Sarah got to cover \$120,000 of it.
 - Ron Smith asks about the monitor. Sarah suggests pushing it out.
 - The monitor will also act as a defibrillator.
 - Dana would like two more portable radios like the current ones they have from FRCOG. The ones they have from the State might not be available anymore. They are 4,000 apiece. He wants to use Motorola and they said they may work on the state police system.
 - Sarah wonders why pagers would be with individuals and not within the trucks. Dana replied that people in East Charlemont need them in order to be able to response to tones and say that they are on the air. Sarah asks if the "I am responding" program doesn't work. Dana says that is fine but that they don't check the "I am responding" program at control. They can't tell if multiple people have responded.
 - Ron asked if that was a capital planning item. Dana said yes, he will get the figures together.
 - Val suggested that radios were something for grant money. Sarah said she would need to justify it but said she will look into it.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Review/ Approve Meeting Minutes from 2/15/2023.
Fin Comm and Select Board will wait until next meeting when there are more members to approve the Minutes.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. Salaries
 - The Board spoke about salaries and explained their stances. Marguerite Willis had asked for an 18% raise for staff months ago.
 - The Select Board had come up with 4-6% over a 3-year phase to try and slowly get them to where they should be.
 - Ron Smith made a motion to recommend the Select Board go with 6% but didn't get a second from the rest of the Board. Amy and Rich said they needed to see the complete budget. There was a lot of acknowledgment of wanting to invest in the staff as they are getting good

results from the staff and that also out of concern regarding the cost-of-living increase. Val said they are shortchanging the staff in the meantime if using the phased approach to get them to the true cost of living.

- The social security cost of living increase is 8.7% this year. They admit that 4-6% is not high. Neighboring towns are doing the social security increase or a little less than. FRCOG had 4-6% for some. Some towns did 3% for several years.
- Amy said they have free cash and stabilization and that there are ways that they can consider increases without hitting the tax rate. Departmental stipends are included.
- 4% amounts to 27,000.; 5% —37,000.; 6%—47,000
- Val asked for it to be added to the SB agenda, there is a meeting on Monday.

2. Highway Vehicle Leasing Update

- Lynn Explained that you can choose the vehicle, they buy it and you lease it from them. There is no downpayment and it is at 7 ½% for 3-10 years and that you build it into your budget. At the end of the lease, you own it and don't need to pay it down.
- Amy said that an article would still be required to enter into a lease. Can't enter into a 10-year lease subject to annual appropriation. She understands the funding but maintains that they would still need to do a warrant.
- Bill Harker cautions accepting information about budgeting from a vendor and not a separate source. Sarah will make inquiry to DLS. about whether it can go into the operating budget but still go on a warrant as a lease.
- Amy wonders why lease for 7.5% when they can borrow for less, borrow for 3%.
- Ron Asked if the Highway department will meet with Capital Planning for the building. The trucks will last another year with maintenance. They had wanted to talk to the capital planning about stabilization for town vehicles. There is still a need for that conversation. Name it capital: Maintenance, equipment town hall expenses. Ron thinks it might be complicated to present an amount to the town about the total out of a year's budget. Val suggested taking the next 5-7 years capital improvement and averaging it out. Do a warrant article every year to vote money into stabilization. Ron said each department would need to come up with a capital improvement plan and update it next 5 years, take the figures, figure out how to pay save \$ in there every year. Going forward it will help with purchases budget, instead of kicking it down the road. Amy said they are kicking it onto stabilization for specific items, what matters is voting what to take out of stabilization, not what goes into stabilization.
- The alternative is for example, using free cash to pay for an ambulance. Lynn suggested HWY get a used truck, 2016 or 17, 25,000 to put Highway fixtures on it. ZWACK fit it, it will work.
- Val said Ron still needs to meet with HWY regarding their capital needs. They have 2 trucks listed for 2024, and don't have anything beyond 2024.
- Sarah said yes, Capital Planning need to update the plan and meet with everyone.
- Amy said they need to find out deadlines for the warrant articles, it is way in advance.

3. Second Draft of FY24 Budget

There was not a discussion of the budget as there are still missing cherry sheet numbers and assessment numbers.

Rich motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:00, seconded by Amy Wales. All in Favor.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 8th 2023 at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted on March 3rd, 2023 by Star Atkeson, Secretary to the Boards.

Documents viewed at meeting:

The Agenda for the February 22nd 2023 meeting

The Minutes for the February 15th 2023 meeting

Second draft of budget

Previous Cherry Sheet info

Division of Local Services: Free Cash Certification— Retained Earnings calculation Broadband FY23; Free Cash Calculation FY23

Town Income numbers: Revenue sheet for transfer station and ambulance, room and meals tax, previous Chapter 90 numbers