

West Tisbury Finance Committee Budget Hearing
Howes House
January 23, 2018

Attendance

Committee: Gary Montrowl – Chair, Greg Orcutt – Vice Chair, Chuck Hodgkinson, Doug Ruskin, Katherine Triantafillou

Guests: Emma Beach-Green – Co-Director Martha’s Vineyard Shellfish Group, Anthony Cordray – Animal Control Officer, Manny Estrella – Fire Chief, Kent Healy – Selectman, Beth Kramer – Library Director, Skip Manter – Selectman, Cynthia Mitchell – Selectman, Greg Pachico – Deputy Fire Chief, Jennifer Rand – Tow Administrator, Ben Retmier – Tri-Town Ambulance Chief, Dan Rossi – Police Chief, Bruce Stone – Town Accountant, Adam Wilson – Tri-Town Ambulance

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00pm. A quorum was present. The hearing was recorded and will be televised on MVTV.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

Doug moved to approve minutes from January 9, 2018 as submitted. Katherine seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

New Business

#210 Police Department – Dan Rossi, Police Chief

Chief Rossi presented to the Fin Com. The Chair thanked Chief Rossi for a job well done and wished him the best in his retirement. The Chair asked questions regarding the status of the regional 911 communications system, referencing a meeting Sheriff Ogden hosted with the undersecretary of state, which highlighted the antiquated technology built on a copper backbone which can no longer be serviced by Verizon and can only be serviced by independent contractors. The Chair added the system is increasingly falling behind state of art. Chief Rossi responded the infrastructure Island wide needs to be upgraded, but it is not his agency’s job to suggest how money is to be spent.

Katherine asked several questions regarding the number of police officers (9) and the number and type of calls received by the police department. Katherine also asked how Chief Rossi came to staffing decisions and if he would be open other methods of determining staffing such as working with a consultant and evaluating workload.

Chief Rossi responded that he staffs two officers per shift with the exception of the overnight shift which is staffed with one officer. Chief Rossi said he would not be comfortable staffing fewer than two officers per shift for safety reasons. Chief Rossi said it would be up to the Selectmen to determine if an employee staffing consultant is appropriate.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #210 Police Department. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 4-1 with Katherine voting no.

#220 Fire Department – Chief Estrella

Doug said the fire department has returned a fair amount of money to free cash in the past, noting \$25,000 was returned last year and asked if Chief Estrella would consider reducing the budget. Bruce explained the personnel budget includes an amount to cover all fire fighters attending all training sessions, but that does not necessarily happen. Bruce further explained that several years ago, Chief Estrella would submit a personnel and expense budget constructed such that at the end of the year there would be a savings in personnel and Chief Estrella would request to transfer that savings to the expense budget for supplies, maintenance and repairs. Bruce said the Finance Committee at that time requested the expense budget be constructed to all cover supplies, maintenance and repair expenses.

Doug also asked about reducing line #5290 Other Prop Services.

Chief Estrella said he has submitted a warrant article for \$75,000 for the re-surfacing at station 1 on Edgartown West Tisbury Road that has been under the Capital Improvement Committee.

Chief Estrella said he has submitted a warrant article for \$60,000 to purchase and equip one fire vehicle for the Fire Chief for all calls and inspections which will be set up for any M.C.I. calls or mass casualty incidents with radios in the back for fire, police and EMS to be able to run a Unified Incident Command. Chief Estrella said that down Island fire chiefs have vehicles supplied by the towns and up Island fire chiefs receive reimbursement for personal vehicle use.

Katherine asked about Chief Estrella's \$5,000 raise. Cynthia Mitchell explained the town has enjoyed a number of years of moderate/low stipend arrangements and that won't be possible when Chief Estrella and employees like him retire. Bruce added he thinks the protection the town receives for \$116,000 in personnel costs is amazing.

The Chair asked Chief Estrella about the 911 communications system. Chief Estrella said he has been trying to get the cost of a new system for the last ten years so that a stabilization fund could be established.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #220 Fire Department. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 3-0-2 with Doug and Katherine abstaining.

#231 Tri-Town Ambulance, Ben Retmier

Chief Retmier explained Chilmark completed a classification compensation study which had an impact on the Tri-Town Ambulance personnel budget. Chief Retmier said there were sufficient funds in the FY18 operating budget to offset the resulting increased personnel cost. Chief Retmier said the budget also includes the creation of a new position, paramedic 4.

Chuck commented that the quality of TTA personnel has greatly improved since he took over as Chief and thanked him for his good leadership. Chuck also asked how TTA funded the \$31,000+ in FY18 staff costs caused by Chilmark's compensation changes. Chief Retmier said he was able to fund the increase out of his expense budget. Chuck pointed out this transfer of funds from expenses to personnel is allowed because voters approve a one-line town assessment for TTA. Chuck added that if TTA was able to find \$31,000 in this year's expense budget he asked the Chief to consider and return with a way to lower the FY19 expense budget by \$30,000. Chief Retmier agreed.

Chief Retmier said this budget also has newly created Retirement and OPEB lines. Chief Retmier explained that for several years the town of Chilmark has been solely paying for retirement. Chief Retmier said that all fulltime employees are moving from group 2 to group 4 which means they will be eligible for retirement at 55 and will automatically retire at age 65 which is standard throughout the Commonwealth. Chief Retmier said excluding retirement and OPEB, expenses are down from FY18.

Chief Retmier said that revenue is down from \$200,000 to \$175,000 due to medicare payments.

Questions were asked regarding call volume, trends in call volume, and how ambulances are replaced. Chief Retmier said he would review the budget to see if expenses could be cut.

Chief Retmier declined to comment on the 911 communications system.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #231 Tri-Town Ambulance. Doug seconded the motion which passed 4-1 with Katherine voting no.

#291 Emergency Management

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #291 Emergency Management. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#292 Animal Control Officer – Anthony Cordray

Anthony Cordray presented to the Committee. The Committee had questions regarding the structural changes to the personnel budget. Bruce explained that with the new system, the Animal Control Officer has supervisory responsibility and has been regraded from grade 3 to grade 4 and additional hours were added for an assistant. Jennifer Rand explained this is another situation where the previous employee was very generous with her time and submitted very few hours for the work she did. For context, Chuck point out our Animal Control budget seems to be reasonable because West Tisbury's call volume is about four times that of Chilmark and our budget is also about four times Chilmark's.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #292 Animal Control Officer. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 4-1 with Katherine voting no.

#293 Herring Warden

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #293 Herring Warden. Doug seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#294 Tree Warden

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #294 Tree Warden. Katherine seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#297 Insect Pest Control

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Katherine moved to preliminarily recommend budget #297 Insect Pest Control. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#298 Shellfish Department – Jen Rand, Bruce Stone

Bruce distributed the budget and narrative. Bruce explained the budget is for boat expense, insurance, routine maintenance and the periodical purchase of small equipment. Jen said that although there will not be an increase to staffing this year, she expects one for next year.

Katherine moved to preliminarily recommend budget #298 Shellfish Department. Doug seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#299 Martha’s Vineyard Shellfish Group – Emma Green-Beach

Emma Green-Beach presented the budget. There was a question about Rick Karney’s position who now works part time.

There was discussion and request for a budget with prior year actuals and detail about how income from other sources was obtained, with their associated expenses. The Committee had questions regarding fundraising expenses and proceeds raised through fundraising. Emma said she would get back to the Committee with more detail.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #299 Martha’s Vineyard Shellfish Group. Doug seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#610 Library – Beth Kramer

Vote: 4-0-1, Doug abstain

Greg Moved to preliminarily recommend, Chuck.

Beth Kramer presented the Library budget. Chuck asked questions regarding state mandates. Beth explained the requirement for materials expenditures dates back to 1890. Beth said the requirement is to spend an average of 2.5% of the budget on materials over a three year period. Beth explained the materials requirement is based on population size so is currently 19.5% for the West Tisbury Library and up to 10% can be spent on hardware. Beth said materials allowance is actually 15% due to the state considering the operation as being equivalent to that of an area with a population of 15,000 – 24,999 because of the extended hours the library is open.

The Committee asked about revenue from Friends of the WT Library and the WT Library Foundation. Beth said she expects revenue of \$30,000 from each of the organizations. Beth explained the increase in line #5240 Repairs and Maintenance has increased from \$15,000 to \$25,000 as there is more data for the new building and covers expenses including service contracts, elevators and doors.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #610 Library. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 4-0-1 with Doug abstaining.

#620 Parks & Recreation Committee

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #620 Parks & Recreation. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#632 LC Beach & Seth's Pond

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #632 LC Beach & Seth's Pond. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#640 Recreation Programs

There was no presentation. There was a discussion regarding the 52% increase to payroll with the addition of a new soccer program.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #640 Recreation Programs. Doug seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#650 Town Grounds

There was no presentation and no discussion.

Katherine moved to preliminarily recommend budget #650 Town Grounds. Doug seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

#690 Historic District Commission

There was no presentation. There was a discussion about the fact that no narrative was submitted with the budget.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #690 Historic District Commission. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 4-1 with Katherine voting no.

#691 Local Historical Commission

There was no presentation. There was a discussion about the fact that no narrative was submitted with the budget.

Greg moved to preliminarily recommend budget #691 Local Historical Commission. Chuck seconded the motion which passed 4-1 with Katherine voting no.

#692 Martha's Vineyard Cultural Council

There was no presentation. There was a discussion about the fact that no budget was submitted with the narrative. Bruce explained the Martha's Vineyard Cultural Council distributes grant money from the state and funds contributed by the towns and therefore has to budget.

Doug moved to preliminarily recommend budget #692 Martha's Vineyard Cultural Council. Greg seconded the motion which passed 5-0.

Doug referenced the fire department budget stating he doesn't want to jeopardize safety, but the town may be facing a proposition 2.5 override and the fire department routinely budgets \$25,000 - \$30,000 over what it spends. Doug asked if the Committee should seriously pursue a reduction of the fire department budget.

Katherine said that if the town is facing an override, there are personnel increases in every department which add up. Katherine also pointed out the fire department is requesting a vehicle for the fire chief.

The Chair noted a natural maturation of staff in which employees who undercharged or volunteered some of their time are phasing out, citing former ACO Joan Jenkinson and Richie Olsen as examples. The Chair stated that thanks to the Fin Com, departments and committees are now taking OPEB seriously.

Chuck pointed to the structural issues in the wage system which the Fin Com has brought to the Personnel Board's attention including the 5% step increase and the eight steps which are larger than the steps and increases at some of the other Island towns. Chuck said the MVRHS \$100 million facility repair and construction project, which has been rejected for a MVSF grant three times, will be a test for taxpayers on how much they want to spend.

Any Topic Not Anticipated by the Chair

No discussion.

Correspondence/Scheduling

The next meeting is Thursday, January 25 at 4:00pm.

Adjournment

Greg moved to adjourn. Chuck seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:10pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margo Urbany-Joyce
West Tisbury Finance Committee Admin Assistant

Approved 5-0

February 6, 2018