

The Wilbraham Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wilbraham Town Hall
January 30, 2017
7:00 p.m.

Present: Nancy Piccin, Tim Murphy, Carolyn Brennan, Kevin Murray, Marc Ducey

Absent: Dan Miles, Mike Mannix, Todd Luzi, Anna Levine

Also present: Laurie Broadbent, Veterans Agent; Tom Sullivan, Town Treasurer/Collector; Nancy Johnson, Town Accountant; Nick Breault, Town Administrator

I. **Open Forum**: Marc wants to discuss future meetings at the end of this meeting.

II. **FY2018 Budget – Veterans Agent**

Laurie Broadbent explained that Chapter 115 is a welfare system for low income Veterans or widows of Veterans in the Town of Wilbraham. The Town pays the Veterans 100% upfront. The state will then reimburse the Town 75%. This reimbursement is not received for approximately a year after payment. It goes back into the general fund and then reallocated at the next town meeting. The amount put into the FY2018 budget for Veterans Aid was increased \$25,000 bringing the total to \$100,000. This increase is necessary because the number for Veterans applying for aid has increased from 7 people to about 15. She feels she will run out of money for FY 2017 and may have to ask for a reserve fund transfer. Marc asked Laurie to explain what she does, she:

- Helps gets benefits and services they are entitled to, which is chapter 115.
- Helps them get into the VA healthcare system.
- Files compensation claims.
- Helps with appeals if they are at first denied.
- Helps with home health care or admittance to an in town nursing home.
- Helps nursing homes with aid and attendance paper work.
- Helps funeral homes with death benefits and burials at veterans' cemeteries.
- She is the Grave Officer, which entails taking care of the graves, being sure there are flags on them.
- Maintains flags in Town.

Discussion followed regarding the recent change in the Veteran's agent and increased number of hours worked and how it has positively affected the town's veterans. Laurie explained that as long as all the state guidelines are followed, then the town does receive 75% reimbursement. She further explained that a letter should be forthcoming explaining this in detail and if the guidelines are not met then the reimbursement would be reduced to 50%. Laurie feels she cannot realistically complete all her tasks with working only 21 hours a week. Laurie would like to:

- Increase her Training and Conferences from \$50 to \$2000 as there are two conferences a year and memberships to pay. She would want her assistant to attend a conference as well.
- Office supplies from \$210 to \$300
- Would like to change the name of line item 'Other Supplies' to "Veteran Events" with a budget with a budget increase of \$700 to \$4000.
- Increase postage from \$70 to \$150 as she has been using Council on Aging postage at times.
- Increase her hours from 21 hours per week to 35 hours per week. Increasing the salary budget by \$13,366.

Laurie then initiated a discussion regarding the poor living conditions of some of the veterans she has been able to help. Laurie wants to be able to help every Veteran in town that qualifies for benefits. Marc is concerned that \$100,000 may not be enough, and that we have an obligation to budget for what we need and not rely on Reserve Fund transfers. It was explained that it is very difficult to budget for this kind of benefit and we can only do a best guess estimate. Nancy reminded the committee that the Town does get 75% reimbursement of Veteran's Aid from the State. Laurie was able to help at least three veterans receive Federal disability which brings them over the income level to receive the state Chapter 115 aid. A veteran that qualifies for 100% disability receives \$3,300/mo federal aid.

FY2018 Budget Presentation

Tom Sullivan presented the overall calculation of what goes into determining what the levy limit is and how much funds the Town has to spend on items the Department heads have requested. Currently the proposed FY2018 budget is approximately \$356,499 under the levy limit. The estimated tax rate would be \$22.50. Tom reminds everyone that the department heads were sent a memo saying they could only increase 1% from last year's expense number. Salaries were capped at 2%, or whatever a contract stipulates. Tom then went through each department's budget with an overview of any changes that the finance committee must review and eventually vote on. Some of the changes outside the 1%/2% increases include:

- **Selectmen/Town Administrator:** Increase Professional Services budget by \$15,000 (bringing it to \$30,000) for an assessment center to replace the Police Chief. The Police Chief is retiring in December 2017. Also an increase of \$30,000 (bringing it to \$150,000) in the Salary Pool. There are two Union Contracts that need to be settled. Once they are settled the money for any increases will come out of the Salary Pool line.
- **Information Technology:**
There has been a proposal to move IT to the old Police Station when the building becomes available. Tom added two line items to IT's budget to pay for electricity and heat. He added \$17,500 to those two line items in case the move takes place. If the decision is made not to move IT, he will remove those lines from the budget.
- **Facility Maintenance:**
There is an increase in Contract Services of approximately \$40,000 (bringing it to \$93,881). Ron was using Grounds and Building Maintenance to pay for some contract services. They told Ron that he should charge Contract Services for any contractual service. So this budget reflects that change. Plus they added another \$40,000 for the cleaning of the new Police Station. We are going from \$7,000 for cleaning and maintenance of the old Police Station to \$40,000 for cleaning and maintenance on the new Police Station.
- **Town Properties:**
Memorial School Maintenance was originally budgeted at \$26,000. This was too low. Just to pay oil and electricity is actually \$50,000, no maintenance. Right now the Rec Dept. and Police Dept. are using the building. There is some interest from Lower Valley Collaborative to rent the building. The school needs to make a decision on whether or not they want the building.
- **General Insurance:** This budget went up about \$20,000. The town has no control on this. Workers comp, unemployment comp, property & liability ins, and indemnification all increased.
- **Group Insurance:** They budgeted for an increase of employees taking advantage of health insurance coverage. This may not come to fruition so there may be a surplus here, but they must budget for it in case it is needed. Right now there is no increase in health insurance premiums for FY2018.
- **Hampden County Retirement:** Again, an increase that the Town has no control over. The State created a law stating that the HCRS has to be fully funded by the year 2036. We can expect an 8% increase till 2024.

- Police: The only increase is for a third police cruiser, they were supposed to get 3 cruisers in FY2017, but decreased it by one so they could hire police officers. They would like now to get the third cruiser.
- Sealer of Weights and Measures: The Sealer is asking for an increase in salary for \$1,500 due to an increase in responsibilities/duties over the years.
- HWRSD: This FY2018 budget is currently \$459,682 (2.5%) increased over last year. The school committee was informed of this amount, and if they need more, then it would have to go to the Finance Committee. Beth will have preliminary numbers for the Finance Committee at the Feb. 15th meeting.
- Highway: An increase of \$25,000 (bringing it to \$125,000) to Guardrails & Sidewalks. There is a spot on Main Street near Memorial School that are in great need of repair.
- Veterans: \$800 was added to the budget for lighting of flags. Also the Veterans Aid was increased by \$25,000 (bringing it to \$100,000). Training and Conferences was increase from \$50 to \$2000.
- Long Term Debt: There is an increase in Long Term Debt Principal and interest to pay for the Police Station.
- Water: The largest increase in this Enterprise Fund is the MWRA line. MWRA decided they need corrosion control and have passed that cost onto cities and towns. So the water cost will increase approximately \$13,000 to \$497,372 for FY2018.
- Solid Waste Department: While the budget is essentially the same this year, it is one Dept. that has to be watched as it uses all its retained earnings every year.

The following are items that are not in the proposed FY2018 budget, but are requests from Department Heads:

- Library Clerk, \$16,725
- Assistant Library Director, \$48,000
- Fire Department is requesting a new position called Officer of Medical Services and Training. Total cost of \$81,000. \$70,000 of that will come from the ambulance so a net increase to the general fund of \$11,000, plus the cost of health insurance.
- Veteran's agent wants to go full time at an extra cost of \$13,688.
- Treasurer's department was told they may need a new potage machine.
- The Sealer wants an increase of \$1500.

Tom feels the 2.5% increase to the school is probably not going to be enough. He also noted that the library is short \$36,083 in funding from the Town to qualify for state aid. The town can submit a waiver to the state. In the past a waiver has always been granted from the State. More discussion followed about the Veteran's Agent hours, and if it will be necessary to increase her hours.

Next meeting is Monday, February 6 at the Fire Station.

- III. **Vote Minutes:** Accept the minutes for the January 18, 2016 Finance Committee meeting. Seconded, voted unanimously. Carolyn Brennan abstained.

Debbie Brennan
Staff Accountant