

Lunenburg Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Bilotta Meeting Room
Lunenburg Town Hall
February 29, 2024

Present Members: Chair Evan Watters, Vice Chair Chris Menard, Board Member Tom Gray, Board Member Dave Passios, Board Member Jean Russell, Board Member Jay Simeone

Absent Member: Clerk Tiffaney Tavares

1. Call to Order

The meeting opened at 7:00PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Announcements

There were no announcements.

4. Public Comment

Rhonda Lisio, 181 Reservoir Road, states that she came close to filing an open meeting law violation complaint against the chair because of last week's meeting. She believes it's outrageous that the committee had a discussion brief and a vote on an item so impactful on the town. This item was not added as an agenda item. If this item was posted on the agenda, she would have attended to voice her opinion. She questions what increases in tax bills can we expect from a combination of the budget override and the debt exclusion estimates needed for future projects. These items and details do matter, and she is requesting numbers.

5. Finance Director Report

There are no new updates or reports.

6. New Business

a. Information Technology FY25 Budget Presentation

The IT Director, Casey Chisholm, presented the budget.

The completed FY 24 initiatives are as follows:

- Internet service upgrade in the town hall
- Technical support position was filed.
- The new website launched in October.
- Munis Migration
- Hardware Maintenance

FY 25 Budget Requests

Software maintenance includes any contractual increases/inflation for existing software.

Hardware maintenance includes maintaining the device replacement cycle totaling \$30,000.

Public safety phone system upgrade totaling \$12,000. This includes the completion of phase 2 and features for the phone system.

Increased hours for the administrative assistant to aid in additional support for the department.

Questions

Chris Menard asks how training has been going. Casey Chisholm says training for Office 365 was 2 years ago and then a follow up training is conducted a year later. The vendor has provided pamphlets and brochure documentation about the phone system. Casey Chisholm this has not been completed yet and they are working on continuing training because they are still using some older file shares on the server.

Chris Menard states the School Committee mentioned that their phone costs went up because there not sharing with the town side of the budget. Casey Chisholm states the town no longer has a phone bill since moving to voiceover IP.

Dave Passios asks why there is such a sizable increase in tech support. Casey Chisum states this has created a quicker response time and communication internally and externally.

Dave Passio asks if the connection to the cloud is functioning properly. Casey Chisholm will investigate this, but she doesn't recall seeing any service requests.

Dave Passios questions if there is a way to link the YouTube videos of meetings to the minutes. Casey Chisholm will do some research and see if there is a better process for uploading.

Evan Watters asks if the tech support position is currently a benefited position. Casey Chisholm confirms it is not benefited. The position is currently 16 hours but IT is requesting an increase to 32 hours. There is the question if it makes more sense to have a second part time position that would be less overheard but still accrue the same number of hours per week.

Evan Watters asks what percent of the town assets need to be replaced. Casey Chisholm says it's typically 10%.

Evan Watters asked how long the current internet contract is for and the answer is 3 years.

b. Police FY25 Budget Presentation

Chief Thomas Gammel presented the budget.

Despite the increase in the town's population there is still a challenge with recruiting and retaining officers. Currently Lunenburg has 20 officers: 1 chief, 1 lieutenant, 4 sergeants, 11 patrol officers, 1 detective, 1 school resources officer, and 1 recruit officer.

Chief Gammel provided an organizational chart in the presentation. This included a 10-year plan showing where the current vacancies.

In 2023 there were 23,000 calls for service resulting in 322 arrests.

Last year there were 259 motor vehicle accidents, 3,059 motor vehicle stops, and 25 OUI arrests.

In 2023, the police responded to 122 domestic violence related incidents.

Chris Menard asks if there is a reason why these numbers are high and if anything can be done. Chief Gammel says this is a tough question and not predictable. Some potential reasons include social issues, alcohol/drugs, and mental health issues.

Chris Menard questions if overtime can be decreased. Chief Gammel stated we are obligated to cover shifts.

Below is the breakdown of the budget:

- Personnel is 83% or \$2,375,310 of the budget.
 - o Salaries are 73% or \$1,723,937.
 - o Incentives are 10% or \$250,078.
 - o Overtime is 13% or \$301,680. This includes community policing, court time and investigative field services.
 - o Training is 4% or \$99,614. Training is completed on a yearly basis and includes 40 hours of mandated training, 16 hours of firearm training, and 4 hours of less than lethal training.
 - o Purchase of service is 1% or \$21,950 Includes printing, postage, equipment maintenance and motorcycle lease.
- Regional dispatch is 7% or \$212,921 of the budget.
 - o NVRDD
- Purchase of services is 1% or \$21,950.
- Supplies are 1% or \$32,650.
- Other expenses total 1% or \$34,700.
- Animal Control services total 2% or \$46,125.
- Lockup is 1% or \$20,600.
- Radio Watch 2% or \$56,502.
- Vehicle Maintenance is 2% or \$67,000.

Potential Reductions

Eliminate desk coverage to promote Lieutenant. The Lieutenant would be responsible for answering the phones and dealing with lobby complaints in addition to regular duties. This would eliminate the 3 to 7 shift front desk coverage. Reduction in lockup budget as someone will always be in the building.

Chris Menard asks what shift is the busiest. The answer is 3PM to 11PM.

Evan Watters asks who sits at the front desk currently. Chief Gammel states there is a full-time person from 7AM-3PM. Typically the 3AM-7PM shift is bid out to reserve officers first then it goes to the clerical union within the building, after that it gets put out to patrol.

An unfunded request for FY 25 is to participate in the comfort dog program. The Town Managers budget recommends \$19,095.09. The FY 25 rate for 1 k9 handler and or a comfort dog handler is \$19,572.47.

Currently, Officer McNamara offers comfort dog Hank as a volunteer. Hank is approaching retirement, and the department will be unable to fund the program.

Chris Menard asks if the plan is to have another comfort dog. Chief Gammel confirms. Once that point comes and there is funding Officer McNamara has connections with the breeder of Hank and they will work with us on the cost of the dog and training.

Evan Watters asks if there are any grant opportunities for a comfort dog. Chief Gammel states there are no comfort dog grants. There are patrol dog grants, but they are a 1-time grant.

Chris Menard asks if payroll continues for a dog that retires. Chief Gammel states they are off the payroll at that point.

The Capital plan for FY 25 includes replacing the k9 cruiser, replacing a traffic vehicle, MILO training system.

Evan Watters asks if there are grants available for MILO training system. Chief Gammel states there are and that more competitive and sometimes departments our size just don't compete.

Dave Passios questions if there are any vehicles still left in the fleet that are not hybrid. Chief Gammel stated there are still some gas-powered vehicles.

Evan Watters asked are there other towns and departments that could share the MILO training platform. Chief Gammel states there will be opportunities.

The upcoming goals for the police department include:

- Increasing staffing levels
- Maintain and evaluate co-response team.
- MPTC training to remain in compliance.
- Citizens police academy

- RAD/RAD Kids Program
- Employee evaluation

Evan Watters states the request budget versus preliminary budget has a \$20,000 difference. Ultimately, there is the question of whether the preliminary budget meets the needs of the department. Chief Gammel states no as that \$20,000 would be valuable to put towards a comfort dog. Aside from the comfort dog the answer would be yes.

c. FY21-FY23 Revenue and Expenditures Recap Discussion

Chis Menard spoke with the Finance Director, Ezequiel Ayala, and discussed if it would be possible to start collecting totals to show trends. The suggestion is for this to be done in the off season. This will be added to future agendas at a topic.

7. Public Comment on FY25 Budget Presentations

There were no comments from the public.

8. Old Business

a. Town Grant Writer Letter - Vote

Evan Watters has not had a chance to read through the new changes. The letter edited by Tiffaney Tavares, Dave Passios, and Jay Simeone was read aloud. There were minor edits.

There was a motion to approve the letter to be sent to the Select Board by Chris Menard, seconded by Jean Russell.

Roll call vote. Jean Russell aye, Dave Passios aye, Tom Gray aye, Jay Simeone aye, Chris Menard aye, Evan Watters aye. Unanimous vote.

b. FY25 Budget Update/Discussion

i. Override Warrant Article Update

Dave Passios shares that he will not be voting for an override.

There was a vote by the school dept to support an override. Below are the 4 options that the School Committee provided as possible options.

- Town Managers budget was 2.94% of the budget.
- Superintendent budget was 5.42% of the budget.
- Level service budget plus increased line expenses, personnel expense, cost of living expense and considering the loss of Esser funds was 8.73% of the budget.
- Level service budget with all positions and no position loses was 11.46% of the budget.

Chris Menard has continued to request the Town Council give advice to the Committee about an override and possible approaches. This still hasn't

happened, and the executive branch needs to come forward with recommendations.

The Committee is requesting the Town Council attend upcoming meetings. The options need to be explained relative to prop 2 ½ and the override.

Tom Gray agrees with the fact that a warrant article would provide a voice for residents and an opportunity to vote. He doesn't want people to feel like there wasn't a chance to hear each voice. It will help people accept whatever comes down.

Chris Menard states the most critical aspect that hasn't been provided is the school's recommended budget. We don't have that yet but is interested to see what select board comes up with that their next meeting.

Chris Menard states there have been allegations that there have been health issues for the staff at TC Passios. He doesn't understand why that building hasn't been demolished.

An additional discussion relating to a warrant article will be added to the agenda for the meeting on the 6th.

9. Minutes

There are no minutes to review.

10. Committee Reports

Jay Simeone observed the Sewer Commission meeting last week. There was a significantly costly overnight project that recently started. After starting the work, it was apparent there needed to be additional work and money to complete the project.

Tom Gray watched the Board of Assessors meeting and there was discussion about a letter related to the evaluations on the assessor's website. It was important to note that evaluations were entered after the abatement changes were made for lake front properties.

Dave Passios attended the Green Communities and there is now a full 5-seat board. There is a Facebook page now posted for Green Communities.

11. Topics for Future Meetings

Evan Watters took notes throughout the meeting on future topics.

12. Upcoming FY25 Budget Meetings

- a. Mar 5th - Select Board Meeting
- b. Mar 6 - School Committee Meeting

- c. Mar 7th - DPW & Facilities (FinCom)
- d. Mar 14th - Fire & Lunenburg Public Schools (FinCom)
- e. Mar 20th - Monty Tech & Administration, Unclassified, & Debt Services (FinCom)
- e. Mar 21st - Public Access Committee, Sewer, & Other Monied Articles - Lunenburg Public Schools Update (FinCom)

13. Important Dates

- a. Jan 9th-Mar 18th - Town Meeting Warrant Open
- b. Mar 14th - FinCom Public Hearing
- c. Mar 28th - FinCom Public Hearing
- d. Apr 2nd - FinCom Report for Warrant
- e. May 4th - Annual Town Meeting
- f. May 18th - Annual Town Election

14. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

15. Adjourn

There was a motion to adjourn by Chris Menard, seconded by Dave Passios.

Jean Russell aye, Dave Passios aye, Tom Gray aye, Jay Simeone aye, Chris Menard aye, Evan Watters aye. Unanimous vote.

The meeting closed at 10:35PM.