



Budget Committee Meeting
Town of Gorham
Town Hall Public Meeting Room

MINUTES OF JANUARY 12, 2023

Members Present: Patti Stolte, Mary White, Lee Carroll, Marie Duguay, Greg O'Neil (5:47), Judy LeBlanc, and Paul Bousquet

Absent: Adam White and Abby Evankow

Town Staff Present: Denise Vallee, Town Manager; Bronson Paradis, Finance Director; Phil Cloutier, Fire Chief; Adam Marsh, Police Chief; Jimmy Willhoite, Police Lieutenant

Minutes Taker: Shelli Fortin

1. Call to order: 5:31 PM by Patti Stolte

2. Review Minutes of January 10, 2023

Mary White pointed out that the Whitefield Library budget is \$98,400, not \$98,000. The additional \$25,000 is in grants, donations, and in-kind services, and that the town is required to provide financial support, and requested these revisions be made to the minutes.

On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Paul Bousquet, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of January 10, 2023 with the recommended revisions.

3. Old Business

There was no old business.

4. New Business

a. Review Fire Budget

Mary White advised that she will abstain from the Fire budget review, as her husband is a member of the Fire Department.

Chief Cloutier reviewed the proposed budget. Cloutier advised that a \$1 per hour raise is included in the budget. Telephone and Internet are up \$73, and Gas and Diesel are up as well. Social Security has gone down. IT Supplies are down by \$2,116. Training should be at \$3,500, not \$7,000, so that will reduce the bottom line by \$3,500. There is an increase in Heat & Oil, and Water has increased due to hydrant fees. Building Repairs has been increased by \$1,000 for an electric water heater. The total increase for the Fire Department budget is \$15,066.00.

Patti Stolte thanked Chief Cloutier for the Budget Presentation books. It was noted that the addition of the crew at night has reduced their response time.

Chief Cloutier reviewed the Emergency Management budget, which has decreased by \$1,114, as the NHRS contribution will go down in July.

Chief Cloutier reviewed the EMS budget. Cloutier noted that in order to hire and retain employees that have had to increase wages. Cloutier noted that the wage survey was included in the budget presentation book. The Permanent Position wages have an increase of \$47,547.00, as last year the additional employees were only in the budget for three quarters of the year, and this year they are budgeted for the full year. Part Time Positions is down \$6,600. Overtime has been increased to \$35,000. Health includes a change in demographics. Billing Services will now be done with a service out of Vermont, and will be paid as a percentage of what they collect. The projected cost is \$14,400. Gas has increased with the new ambulance, and they no longer have a diesel ambulance. Patient Medical Supply has been increased by \$1,000, as the cost of everything has increased. Travel is down by \$500, as well as Dues by \$1,000. Electricity and Heat & Oil are both up, as well as Maintenance and Repairs, again due to the water heater. The total increase in the EMS budget is \$112,628.00.

Cloutier pointed out that revenues and CRF information is included in the budget presentation book. Cloutier stated that they received a grant for swift water gear from Brookfield Renewable Energy and TC Energy. Lee Carroll noted that they have done well with grants, and Cloutier noted that the ones listed are since he has been Chief, not just this year. Lee Carroll noted that there may be funding available for the water heater, from Eversource or NH Saves.

b. Police Department Budget

Chief Marsh noted that they currently are fully staffed at seven officers. The Permanent Positions includes education incentives and retention stipends. Marsh advised they are in the third year of their contract. Part Time Positions has been budgeted at eight hours per week, as they are trying to be conservative. Marsh noted that arrests were up 50% this year, criminal investigations were about the same but were more time consuming. Leave Coverage has increased due to the extra officer, same with Holidays. Court Witness Pay is budgeted at four hours per week. Prosecution Services has increased, as they have had a lot more court cases. Attorney Wendy Roberts handles the cases, and since there are more court hours, her fee has increased to \$1,250 per month from \$900. Marsh explained that Training used to be split into two lines, but has been consolidated into one. The State has mandated additional education hours for Use of Force, Implicit Bias, and De-escalation Training, which has increased the Training budget. Telephone and Internet have increased a small amount. Printing is budgeted the same as last year, and Dues are up \$30. PD Office Supplies are up due to toner costs and the need for new chairs. IT Software has increased by \$1,574. Gas is up \$4,000. Marsh advised they have three primary vehicles, and since they are newer, it has kept repair costs as a minimum. Books is up by \$12, for one more book for the additional officer. Field Supplies has increased due to costs going up, and additional items have been added for officer safety. Prisoner Expense has increased due to the need for blood draws for DWI arrests, since many are impaired by drugs, not alcohol. Marsh advised they have discussed using EMS for this service to alleviate the cost. Travel is reduced as many trainings are held on-line. Uniforms has increased with the additional officer, and they are also hoping to update the part time officers' uniforms. Copy charges has decreased, as they have paid off the copier. There was a small decrease in Evidence supplies, as they are fully stocked. Benefits are as they are. Special Details are for the WMNF, OHRV patrols, and Walmart, and these are reimbursed.

Chief Marsh reviewed the Dispatch budget. The Permanent Positions are for four full-time dispatchers, and includes the wage increase. Part Time Positions are budgeted at 16 hours per week. Overtime is budgeted at an average of the past two years. Marsh advised they have hired a new part-time dispatcher. Holidays shows a small increase due to the wage increase. Training is up a little, and covers a monthly training bulletin on which the dispatchers take a test. Benefits have increased some. Telephone and Internet have a small increase. There is no change in the repeater cost. There is a small increase in Office Supplies. Software has increased in cost. Equipment & Machinery has increased due to printers, monitors, and keyboards. The cost of uniforms has increased a little.

Denise Vallee advised that they applied for and received a grant through Senator Shaheen's office for Congressional Delegation Spending, which will cover a Simulcast Repeater System. One will be here, one in Shelburne at the Fire Department, one on a garage in Randolph, and one at the Auto Road. They did a radio coverage study with Ossipee Mountain Electronics and they believe this will cover all the dead spots with the new system. The grant is \$426,000 in Federal funds, and the town share will be \$94,000. Coos County has agreed to contribute \$54,000 toward the town's portion of the match. Vallee advised that they do have money in the Capital Reserve Fund for this project. Chief Marsh advised that they purchased new radios three years ago, and a new console two years ago, but coverage is still an issue, and poor communication ability is an officer safety issue. Chief Cloutier advised it will be a couple years before the project is completed. Chief Marsh advised he did apply for grants to replace ballistic vests and for ballistic vest carriers, which he was awarded from Eversource. They also received a Highway Safety grant for a handheld radar system, which will be used on the streets and trails for OHRV enforcement. Marsh applied for a grant from the Department of Justice to increase mobile coverage, but it was denied. Marsh did get a grant from the State for body cameras, and they will be receiving training this month on implementation.

Chief Marsh reviewed the Patriotic Purposes budget and advised there is a small increase with the new rate of pay. Part Time Positions has decreased, as they are fully staffed. Benefits have increased some, but this is out of their control.

Mary White did a comparison between the towns of Loudon and Gorham, noting population, geographical size, surrounding communities, and that they both see an increase in population in the summer. Mary White noted that Loudon also has 7 officers, with one dispatcher and one part-time administrative support. The total budget for Loudon, with dispatch services from the county, was \$857,636.00. The total budget for Gorham with police, dispatch, and special events is \$1,206,317.00. Chief Marsh responded that he is abundantly familiar with Loudon and the surrounding area, having lived there. Marsh noted that there is a giant different between the communities, especial with the OHRV tourism in Gorham. Marsh stated that Loudon is a pass-through community on the Route 106 corridor and is located between two small towns. Marsh noted that we have lodging in Gorham, which Loudon does not have, and that we are situated next to a more urban location. Although Loudon has a greater population, it is still a more rural community. Mary White noted that the Gorham website does not have current information on the staff, and Marsh advised that can be updated, however it does require additional time that he does not always have. Chief Marsh advised that he did his own study of fifteen departments in NH, and compared statistics between Gorham and Whitefield, noting that Gorham had more calls for service, arrests, motor vehicle stops, criminal investigations, and accidents in 2022. Marsh noted that many budget committees compare towns, but they are not the

same. Marsh noted that they are hoping to provide the LEAD program to the school and have started a peer support team for mental health and will be working with EMS, Fire, and Berlin. Marsh noted that in the North Country, only four other communities provide 24/7 coverage, which include Campton, Colebrook, Lancaster, and Lincoln. Chief Cloutier noted that the population in Gorham can increase by 3,000 when the hotels and campgrounds are full. Marsh noted that many of the arrests in Gorham are not local people, and the town is safer when covered and manned. Marsh stated that Berlin wants Gorham here to back them up when needed, and vice-versa. Marsh noted that Fire and EMS personnel have made the case to have officers available to assist when needed. Mary White noted that her husband, Adam White, has always felt strongly that this could be accomplished with six officers.

Mary White noted that she would like to see a police log available to the public, so that they know what is happening, as she hears mostly traffic stops on the radio. Mary White noted that other departments put this information in the paper, as it is important to have transparency. Mary White noted that the town is not getting anything for all these traffic stops, however Chief Marsh corrected her and advised that the town does generate revenue from OHRV violations and town ordinance violations. Chief Cloutier noted that monthly statistics are available on the monthly report on the website.

Marie Duguay commented that working at night at a local hotel, she feels safer knowing that the police are only a call away when needed. Judy LeBlanc noted that the response time would decline if staffing was reduced. Lt. Jimmy Willhoite noted that working with other officers helps for retention and morale. Mary White commented that Chief Cyr stated that there was not much to do in Gorham, it was boring, and that was why new officers were leaving. Chief Marsh noted that they offer comparative wages and benefits to other departments, and it may not be the best, but is better than were it was. Chief Marsh noted that they cannot change the dynamic of the town. Greg O'Neil noted there is a difference between boring and peaceful.

Chief Marsh shared statistics on crimes and how they have increased. Marsh advised that fatal accidents have increased in the state, and that there are 10,000-15,000 cars that pass through Gorham on any given day. Bronson Paradis noted that Gorham has changed a lot since 2019, especially with the increased OHRV tourism.

Chief Marsh noted that they do not have a full-time detective and that any high profile, multi-faceted cases fall on him to investigate. Marsh noted that he has the lieutenant to assist with other duties, and that Sgt. Turgeon helps with prosecution, field training, and background investigations. The four additional officers, along with the Chief, Lieutenant, and Sergeant, respond to calls for service and make motor vehicle stops. Chief Marsh advised that seven officers are needed to be sure things are done properly and efficiently. Lt. Willhoite noted that they have a very professional group, with four of the officers with bachelor's degrees, one working toward a Master's degree, and one with an Associate's Degree. Greg O'Neil stated that Gorham police and fire are outstanding, but we also need to look at what we can do to save money for the taxpayers. Mary White noted that it would be nice to know these things about the department, and Marsh advised the new officers were in the paper as a press release. Marsh noted that his heart and soul is in the school and in traffic enforcement. Marsh also noted that 91A, or right-to-know, requests are extremely time consuming and expensive. Marsh noted that just one of these requests took 160 hours to answer, which is one month of time for one officer. The town cannot request reimbursement for the time they put into these requests.

5. Other

It was noted that the public meeting room will not be available on January 19, so the meeting will be held in the Medallion Opera House.

6. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date is scheduled for Tuesday, January 17, 2023 at 5:30 pm in the Public Meeting Room.

7. Adjournment

On a motion by Judy LeBlanc, seconded by Greg O'Neil, the meeting was adjourned at 6:43 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelli Fortin