



**TOWN OF NORWELL**  
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112  
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2022 APR -5 AM 11:29  
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## **Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes February 8, 2022**

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Jesse McSweeney at 7:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin, Finance Director Darlene Sullivan, and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Bob Perniola, Susan Darnell, Elizabeth Hibbard, Dane Hutchison, and Peter Leppanen. Unable to attend was Rick Goulding.

### **AGENDA**

*Motion made to approve the agenda as submitted. Seconded and passed 7-0-0.*

### **ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

**Minutes** – Tabled

**Bills** – None

**Reserve Fund Transfer Requests** – None

**Correspondence/Notices** – None

**Action Items / Discussions** – None

### **FY 2023 BUDGET OVERVIEW**

Mr. Morin noted that the budgets before the Board were those requested by the Police and Fire Department Chiefs, as he was waiting on additional information before making adjustments. He anticipated approving much of what was requested, but would take into consideration what the Town could afford and will advise the Board of any changes.

#### **Police Department**

Chief Edward Lee present. Mr. Morin commented that Chief Lee had adjusted well in his first year on the job and was easy to work with.

Chief Lee noted that this was his first full budget; he and his team had tried to be fiscally responsible while meeting contractual obligations and Department needs. The budget includes funding for increased training, mandated at the state level, in areas such as use of force, firearms, and reporting requirements.

Ms. Hibbard asked about an increase in Educational Incentive funding of almost \$100K from 2019. Chief Lee indicated that three Officers had received degrees recently which, under the Quinn Bill, increased their base pay. A \$60K increase in the salary line reflected contractually negotiated increases. An increase in the Retirement line last year was due to retirements of the former Chief and a Deputy Chief; Chief Lee does not anticipate any such retirements this year.

Ms. Darnell asked about a \$15K increase in the computer maintenance line; this was due to software upgrades and a switch to a new IT services provider, at a higher hourly rate, after the previous provider retired. Mr. Morin would like to consolidate the Police and Fire IT budgets into the Town's IT budget in the future if it could result in cost savings; Mr. McSweeney requested that Mr. Morin provide the Board the current IT cost for the Town minus the School Department.

Mr. Cleveland noted that overtime represented about 10% of the budget and questioned whether it was worth hiring more Officers to reduce OT cost. Chief Lee noted that the Union contract to some extent dictates how overtime is allocated; Mr. Morin added that some of the cost is in fact training time, which is paid at the overtime rate. The Officers have a strong work ethic, and there were no issues with leave abuse; it may be worth adding more staff to reduce reliance on overtime. Chief Lee added that younger Officers tended to prefer time off to overtime and had less interest in certain paid details.

Mr. McSweeney inquired about staffing projections; Chief Lee would like to add a Lieutenant this year to act as a buffer between the Sergeants and Administration, but may have to make do with one less Sergeant to do so. Ms. Hibbard inquired if there were any "big asks" not asked for. The Department was interested in acquiring a drone, but the required insurance is cost-prohibitive.

All parties reviewed the vehicle roster provided to the Board. Chief Lee anticipated replacing two Interceptors; a third vehicle may also be replaced or kept for use in details depending on what the dealership offers in trade. Ms. Hibbard asked if there was a possibility to reduce numbers by increasing the sharing of vehicles, but Chief Lee noted most were already shared, particularly supervisor vehicles, and insurance companies provided incentives for keeping vehicles under a certain number of miles per year. Ms. Darnell asked what the \$10K in the Cruiser line was for; this covered two motorcycle leases.

### **Fire Department**

Chief David Kean indicated that the majority of increases in his proposed budget were due to contractually negotiated salary increases and benefits, as well as projected vacation buybacks. The educational incentive line has nearly doubled recently due to promotions and an increasing number of firefighters obtaining their degree; this amount fluctuates depending on the educational attainment of staff.

Mr. Kean advised he is proposing to increase staffing by four firefighters, one for each shift, phasing in one per quarter to reduce cost. This increased staffing would help fill coverage gaps created by military and injury leave, as well as reduce reliance on mutual aid. Mr. Morin agreed with the need to increase staff, noting that forced overtime is an ongoing issue which can contribute to staff burnout. He is not sure the Town can afford to add four new firefighters in one year, but agrees it makes sense to increase staff by a multiple of four so it affects each shift. If funds were unlimited, Chief Kean would double his request to eight new hires.

Mr. Perniola noted Chief Kean had told him that the number of calls had increased by 50% since 2004, and Chief Kean added that an increasing proportion of calls were for EMS services; Norwell has a large elderly population; the Department currently handles the emergency transport of patients from nursing homes and South Shore Medical Center, and a new memory care facility is coming online. Almost all Department personnel are paramedics, and new firefighters are required to have the training.



Ms. Hibbard asked about the Council on Aging taking on certain Department functions. Chief Kean indicated most FD services required specialized training that couldn't be outsourced, but they do make referrals for COA services as appropriate, which can prevent future calls.

Chief Kean indicated that firefighters were stationed at 300 Washington and Norwell Center, where the ambulance is housed. The Pine Street building is currently used for storage and can serve as a backup shelter or emergency operations center; they will also station firefighters there in big storm events, and may need to regularly staff the building in the future.

Recent upgrades to radio communications in the south part of town are coming online. The previous system required firefighters to switch frequencies to communicate with certain parts of town. The Department has put in a capital spending request to replace a pumper truck from 2007 that is unlikely to pass inspection. Chief Kean tries to build in extra protection against deicing chemicals when ordering new vehicles, and the Department has certified mechanics on staff that reduce maintenance costs to the Town.

Mr. McSweeney asked about a discrepancy in the "gas heat" line for Fire (\$8K) and Police (\$18K) when both Departments occupied the same building. Chief Kean indicated that Fire paid for the entire building's electric service, while Police paid for the majority of the gas service. Mr. Morin didn't think there were any savings to be realized by combining these expenses into one line.

#### **SSRECC and Supplemental Funding**

Chief Kean indicated his proposed EMS budget is level-funded save for a \$2K increase in contractor services to provide a monthly third-party quality assurance review of paramedic services per a strong State auditor recommendation; this has improved the Department's performance and regulatory compliance.

Mr. Morin anticipates a 4%–5% increase in the SSREC assessment, which is based on population and call volume. This regional dispatch system allows the town to realize economies of scale and qualify for grant funding not possible when dispatch was handled directly by the Town. Mr. Morin felt the system is working well overall but would like one more town to join the system to reduce the total cost. Chief Kean will arrange a tour of the communications center for Bboard members.

#### **2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ARTICLE OVERVIEW**

An article proposing an amendment to the Harbormaster bylaw will be added to the warrant; there may be some other additions. Mr. McSweeney asked about a possible article for firearms funding; Mr. Morin preferred that this be worked into the budget.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS**

Mr. Morin indicated that the Board's review of the budget will likely be complete by the end of the month, but the actual votes will be in late March to allow for adjustments. He will probably cancel the March 17 meeting due to a family commitment.

Mr. Cleveland advised the appointment of a new member may take longer than expected. ABNC Chair Matt Green is conferring with Town Counsel as to whether the interview process has to be done over.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

February 10, 15, 17

March 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, 31

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## **ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 8:56 P.M. Seconded and passed 7-0-0.*

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Jesse McSweeney, Chair