

TOWN OF EAST LONGMEADOW
TOWN COUNCIL'S BUDGET FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 13, 2021

Attending: Chr. James Broderick, Kathleen Hill, Thomas O'Connor, Richard Freccero & Christine Saulnier
Ex-officio, Michael Kane

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 1:33 PM and noted that the meeting was being conducted by Zoom in accordance with the Governor's regulations of March 16, 2020.

First item for discussion was the Police budget and the need to clarify the vote taken on May 12, 2021.

Salary line item was approved with 6 month's funding for a potentially new position of lieutenant. There are currently 7 sergeants and the Chief is dedicated to promoting from within. The Lieutenant position would be a leadership position not in Civil Service. Discussion followed on rescinding the prior motion which had been made by Kathy Hill. Kathy moved to rescind and Chris rescinded her second of the motion. Further discussion related to the negotiation to take place between the Town Manager and the Chief in the filling of the new title. Kathy offered a new motion which moved to reduce the salary line item in the Police budget by \$40,000, seconded by Chris. Discussion that the \$40,000 would equate to half a year's sergeant's salary in anticipation that the position would be filled by a current employee.

Roll call vote taken which passed unanimously.

Second agenda item was the Fire Department's budget and a proposed new position of Deputy Chief. The position would be the second in command, a non-union position. \$55,000 is in the budget for a half year. It is unclear whether it would be filled from within. Currently there are five Captains. There was a question on the impact of health and retirement benefits for a new employee. The point was made that the Police approval was for a new title, not a new employee. Rich mentioned that the Town's budget is increasing by only 0.9 percent and felt this might be the year to okay the Fire request. Jim proposed waiting one more year although the position has been requested for the past two years. Chris made the motion to reduce the Fire salary line item by \$55,000 with the position to be reconsidered next year. Kathy seconded. Roll call vote taken 4 in favor 1 opposed. Motion passed.

Kathy suggested we discuss the School Committee budget 399 next. This line item budgets for the stipends for the School Committee members. Kathy made the motion to fund the School Committee budget at \$10,700. Chris second. Discussion involved recognition of the School Committees work this past year in dealing with the effects of the pandemic on the education function. This is a \$2,200 increase to be allocated according to the School Committee's discretion. It had been approved by the Town Manager. Roll call vote taken. Passed unanimously.

Next item for discussion was Education – 300. Jim mentioned the analysis done by Chris which had been shared with committee members. Chris was asked to review her analysis. Chris stated she used different percentages applied to last year's Town contribution to Education. It was noted that the school requested an increase of 2.78%. Jim commented that he had studied the State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) website and learned that because of the decreased student enrollment, the State had lowered the School Foundation money, the Local Contribution and the Net School Spending amounts. He also mentioned the likelihood that the Ch. 70 aid would be greater than what the Governor proposed. There has been and will be money paid to the school from Covid Relief funds, ESSER funds and the American Rescue Plan. So expenses due to Covid-19 will be covered. Tom stated that all departments were directed to level fund and a reduction seemed to be fair to other departments. Rich, stating that he is a former School Committee member and former School employee, spoke against the reduction stating that the greater school costs are in personnel. He stated he could see both sides but this would hit families, that fees for busing etc. would be raised. He stated that our town has the 2nd lowest percentage increase among surrounding communities. Chris stated that 2.78% on a \$31 million dollar budget amounts to a lot more than it does on a \$2 million budget. Kathy, too, said she could see both sides being a former educator, however with the money flowing from the Federal Government to patch holes in learning over the past year, a reduction in some way should be considered. Chris made the motion to increase the FY'21 Town contribution by 2% equaling \$19,890,579 bringing the school budget to \$32,066,537 an increase of 1.5%. seconded by Tom. Roll call vote taken, 4 in favor 1 opposed. Motion passed.

Next item of discussion was Utilities – 429. Tom expressed concerns about the \$2,500 reduction in this account for the coming year. Costs are going up and he would rather fund the \$2,500 than have to pay it out of free cash at a later date. Jim stated that the DPW Supt. had reviewed all contracts when formulating his budget and was confident he had cushioned the Town from any increases for the coming fiscal year. Rich suggested to level fund. Tom made the motion to level fund the Utilities budget. Rich seconded. Discussion followed and Kathy stated that budget items cannot be increased only cut or decreased. Jim asked Mary McNally and Steve Lonergan to join and clarify the status of the Town Council's ability to increase budget line items. The both stated that they believe that budget line items, according to law, can only be cut or decreased by the Council. Jim then stated since our committee makes recommendations. We can recommend and any action on the line item is up to the Town Council. Tom chose to withdraw his motion.

Moving on to Capital Projects, Jim spoke about the Sidewalk fund and the proposal to borrow \$1.2 million and bond for 15 years with the project to be complete within 2 years. Proposed in the line item is \$100,000 to pay for principal and interest for FY'22. By bonding for 15 year the Town is losing flexibility for future years if the budget tightens. The interest expense of nearly \$300,000 doesn't seem warranted. Tom understands the concept of getting the sidewalks all done at once, however, there is a limited construction period every year, tree cutting, driveway replacing, clearing of roadways, etc. Kathy stated that doing it over two year the project would have to out to bid and perhaps it would be best to stay with our annual contribution. Rich stated it's been an ongoing project for many years. Chris made the motion to recommend the \$100,000 be approved for sidewalk and to forgo borrowing for that purpose. Tom seconded. Jim questioned whether it should be reduced to \$75,000. Comment made that \$100,000 was already in budget. Roll call vote taken. Passed unanimously.

Heritage Park project was next item discussed. There is \$113,000 for architectural design and \$358,000 of new funding. These funds are from the Community Preservation Commission account. Kathy state that the \$113,000 was rescinded by the Town Council recently. It is a multi- year project with total cost estimated at \$7 million. There's a great deal of planning to be done and there are no hard and fast dollars at this time. It is very much in flux. Not a budget item.

Jim stated we are not yet in receipt of clarification on some items and they will be discussed at our next meeting. Clarification on the Town Hall and Police generators is pending. Discussion on OPEB, Stabilization Bund, and Overlay Account will be taken up.

Rich made a motion to adjourn, Kathy seconded. Roll call vote. Passed unanimous

Respectfully submitted,

Christine M. Saulnier