

Minutes of the Board of Selectmen Meeting

This meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 6:00PM on Tuesday, September 5, 2023 at the Police Department. Jason Petraitis, John Tripp, and Brooke Canada present.

Chief Mark Smith-New Hire: Mr. Petraitis asked Chief Smith to explain the information he handed out. Chief Smith said that Finance Committee has seen the handout, and explained that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts doesn't allow part-time police officers without the full-time training/education. There used to be a bridge academy but they are no longer offering that. It's very difficult to get part-time positions filled. Chief Smith said he had to go to Finance Committee to get money to pay for overtime, the department is down to two part-timers, and if we don't take this officer on as full-time, he will leave the department and they will be down to one part-timer. Chief Smith said \$53,976.00 was approved at Town Meeting for this officer, and there's an additional cost of \$38,736.60 in benefits and retirement. Chief explained that with 6 full time officers, if someone is out, they don't need to replace that person, he can run a signal person shift, making over time an exception rather than a rule. This would save \$66,000.00 in over time costs. Chief Smith said that in FY 23 a lot of work was put off or missed due to low staffing. He had a senior officer looking to transfer to another town. He can't put services on hold, and investigations take a lot of time and staff. In July there were over 700 calls for service, we are the busiest of the Brookfields. Chief said Brookfield recently got rid of their part-timers and hired two full-time officers. Chief Smith said when he started in North Brookfield, he wanted to hire full-time officers. Mr. Petraitis asked if the person Chief Smith wants to hire is currently part-time. Chief said yes, he's been with North Brookfield 3 years and put himself through the academy to get full-time training. The officer is Nick Newman, he's taken on a lot, lives in Town, and is a solid candidate for this position. Karen Hubacz asked how many people were on per shift now. Chief said they're using Nick for now, 3-11 is dual coverage. In FY 23 they had one person on Saturdays, and if someone was on vacation, they had to pay overtime. He said 11-7 is 1 person, 3-11 is 2, and day shift is covered. This extra officer would allow staff to work on grant writing, currently Officer Martin is trying to get money for cameras, and for traffic enforcement. A lot ties in to having a full-time staff. Joe Trentacosta asked if the budget number approved at Town meeting included the benefits, Chief said it did not. Joe noted that when we look at the current deficit, we need to add the money for the benefits. Chief Smith explained the \$53,000.00 included salary and uniform. Mr. Tripp asked if we have any part-time officers now, Mrs. Canada said this new hire would be moving from PT to FT. Chief Smith explained all officer salaries are in one line item. The numbers for the FT salary vs. OT was gone over a few times. Mr. Petraitis clarified that with 5 officers overtime costs \$116,000.00, with 6 officers it will cost \$50,000.00. Chief Smith said the \$50,000.00 for OT is included in his budget. Chet Lubelczyk said the numbers don't reflect the beating our officers take, they will leave, and we need to think of the human side of things. Chief Smith said he only had two applicants for this position, Brookfield had a similar situation, only getting 2 applications for 2 positions. We don't want to lose our officers, Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen have done a lot to bring this station up: they've got good pay, good equipment, and great officers. They have to have time to investigate serious crimes/complaints (SA/guns), they're very busy and doing a good job. If we give them the tools to do their job, they will be happy and stay. Mr. Tripp asked if we would save \$66,000.00 in OT, Chief said yes and all shifts will be filled. Mrs. Canada asked if he had the money for 6 officers, Chief Smith said yes. Mr. Tripp asked if we didn't hire this guy, will he leave the part-time position? Chief Smith said he may. Mr. Tripp said it makes sense to him to hire Nick Newman and save money on OT. Chet

reminded everyone not to be short sighted, these numbers will change next year. Mr. Tripp said OT should be the same.

Mr. Tripp moved, and Mrs. Canada seconded, a motion to approve Chief Mark Smith's request to hire a new Full-Time officer. Discussion: Mr. Tripp said this would save money, Finance Committee agreed and are on board with the decision. All in favor: Aye. So voted. Mr. Petraitis asked Chief Smith to bring Nick Newman in next week during the televised meeting for official appointment.

Turn Out Gear: Chief Joe Holway was unavailable to attend the meeting. Joe Trentacosta said Joe Holway spoke to FC and discussed waiting on the gear or spreading out the purchase to two sets/year. This should apply to all equipment (plan to replace annually). This led to a brief discussion on the Capital Improvement Committee.

Mr. Petraitis noted that Ashley would be starting Procurement Training.

Discussed date to start department head meetings.

Discussed meeting with the School Committee as soon as possible. Ashley will reach out.

Chet said we're not in this fiscal position because department heads are buying too many supplies, the school asked for a million dollars. Mr. Petraitis said he won't put blame on the school, the state issues unfunded mandates. Chet said we should shut down the high school. Tara Hayes shared information on writing to the Division of Local Services to explain unfunded mandates, tell them we need help and explain we cannot afford them (specific example of special education was given). Karen Hubacz said this is hitting other small towns as well, if all complain they will change or help out, otherwise the state could take over.

Ethan Melad was present to discuss the swales at the recycling center. Ethan got an estimate for management, documents, and bidding for \$49,100.00, which does not include construction cost. ARPA has set aside \$75,000.00 for the swales. Mr. Petraitis asked if there was an original cost for construction. Ethan said it was originally estimated at \$20,000.00 but he could not get in contact with that engineer any longer. Mr. Tripp said we already have the design/drawings, Ethan confirmed and said if any changes need to be made to the design it would be included in the \$49,100.00. We could use ARPA funds for the difference. Ethan said we are still holding \$200,000.00 pending the Town Administrator search. Mr. Tripp said we should pay for swales before the Town Admin. Mr. Petraitis asked if there was a timeline to find out the final cost, Ethan said no, but hopefully they can get started before the ground freezes.

Tara Hayes brought up the spending freeze and said Highway was buying hot patch, that is part of the budget and shouldn't be part of the freeze. Mr. Tripp said her postage is in her budget, but she still requested to spend. Tara said people don't like hearing that Highway can't do their job due to the freeze. Mr. Petraitis said Highway can put together a plan ahead of time. Karen said if it's specifically appropriated you shouldn't have to request to spend it. This led to a discussion on the budget freeze generally, discretionary vs. non-discretionary, Ashley indicated people are confused about it. Karen suggested having everyone cut 10% of their budget. Tara said things can be done without money- Highway can clear sidewalks, Karen said they can also clean drains/culverts.

Brief discussion on complaints of overgrowth throughout town.

Mrs. Canada said department heads should come to us with a plan. Mr. Tripp said the BOS would be getting calls at midnight during flooding, Mrs. Canada and Mr. Petraitis both said that was different, an emergency situation wouldn't fall under the freeze, but they should have a plan ahead of time if possible.

Mr. Petraitis agreed that Mrs. Canada made a good point about having a plan, and that Karen made a good point of cutting 10%.

The Board is going to meet with Chief Mark Smith, Chief Joe Holway, and Highway Superintendent Jason Benoit next Wednesday. Mike Zalanksy said those three departments go to Fin Comm for Reserve Funds more than other departments. Mr. Petraitis said they won't be able to do that this year.

There was a discussion on the storage units and coming up with a lease agreement. We are still waiting to hear back from Town Counsel on this.

Mr. Tripp said that hoodlums are ruining the picnic tables at the Playground. Mr. Petraitis asked if there were names, no. Mr. Tripp suggested taking away the tables for now, and he can store them. Mrs. Canada suggested putting cameras down there, even if they're broken it might deter the destruction of town property. Mr. Tripp said he has a trail cam, but the people destroying the tables will also destroy the camera.

Mr. Petraitis said we should expect a bad winter. Karen suggested using a lot more sand than salt, that would be a cost savings for the town. Certain roads should be just salted, but back roads/hilly roads need sand.

At 7:16PM, there being no further business, Mr. Tripp moved, and Mrs. Canada seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Barre