

Budget Committee/Town November 9, 2011 Minutes

MINUTES

NEWMARKET TOWN COUNCIL/ BUDGET COMMITTEE

November 9, 2011

Town Council Auditorium

6:00 PM

Present from the Town Council: Chairman Michael LaBranche, Vice Chairman Eric Botterman, John Bentley, Jim Bergeron, Gary Levy, Phil Nazzaro, Al Zink, Town Administrator Ed Wojnowski

Present from the Budget Committee: Chairman Brian Hart, Dana Glennon, Drew Kiefaber, Linda Mantegani, Judith Ryan, Ellen Snyder

Absent from the Budget Committee: Leo Filion, Erica Hiera

Call To Order:

Chairman LaBranche called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Police Department: Kevin Cyr

Chief Cyr explained that the proposed budget is essentially flat, with a \$500 increase due to a contractual educational incentive for union personnel. He did not add the 2% wage increase as part of the numbers he gave to the town administrator. Councilor Levy asked about the increase in overtime from FY 10 to FY 11. Chief Cyr said that there was no increase in the number of overtime hours worked, but the overtime pay rate increases with the base rate. There has been a delay in getting union contract negotiations underway, and we may not have a contract ready for a vote in March. If there is no contract in place, police will not receive a pay increase. Chief Cyr said that the majority of the overtime is due to shift coverage and court appearances.

There was a discussion about the dispatch operation. Chief Cyr said that our dispatch operation is no more expensive to run than any other, but it provides twice the quality of service to residents. He said he did not want to bash Rockingham, which is the only other game in town. Rockingham serves 29 communities, so they simply cannot offer the same level of attention to Newmarket. Our dispatchers know where people live and can send rescue workers more quickly. He added that residents can find a town employee at the police station 24/7 all year. He said he could not believe that the town would vote at town meeting to give up their own dispatch service and join another, now that they are used to the higher level of service. Councilor Bentley said that officers in other towns have told him not to let Newmarket lose its own dispatch service, because it is special. Councilor Nazzaro said it would be helpful to be able to quantify the difference. For example, if we can respond to a scene 2 minutes or 5 minutes faster with our own dispatch service, that could save a life. The service would sell itself. He said that having other communities join us had been a revenue center for Newmarket. Chief Cyr said that Newmarket began charging the other communities an equitable rate, and they left. There are a few other communities interested in switching to Newmarket for dispatch, but it is difficult for them to get the additional money given the economy.

Chief Cyr explained that Newmarket has an interface that allows dispatchers to see what the 911 operator sees. Dispatchers will know the location of the emergency before the phone from Concord even rings, so ambulances can be on their way to the scene as soon as possible. Rockingham is so busy, they cannot use the interface. They have to wait for the phone to ring.

Councilor Levy asked if we could split up shifts so that Rockingham covers some, but not all, of our dispatching. Chief Cyr said he had not considered that option, but he thought it would be confusing for emergency services. Councilor Bentley said that we are responding to just as many calls, even though we are dispatching for fewer communities. There were some questions about the police communications costs (telephones, cellphones, pagers, and interface cards) and equipment costs (maintenance contracts for copiers and radios).

Linda Mantegani said that if and when more communities join our dispatch service, we should make sure that we do not lose our ability to respond so quickly. Chief Cyr said that the larger towns in Rockingham County all have their own dispatch centers. If the county transitions to a fee-based system, the smaller towns will probably clamor back to Newmarket. Councilor Zink said that Senator Prescott had reached out to Newmarket to see if there is anything he can do. Perhaps Chief Cyr could contact him and try to move that effort forward.

Fire and Rescue: Rick Malasky

Rick Malasky said that the town administrator added the 2% wage increase after he sent in his numbers. Otherwise, the budget is level-funded. Part-time salaries would go up, because responders would be paid \$15-25 per call instead of \$10-\$15. The rate had been \$10-\$15 for a very long time.

Rick Malasky said that we currently have 43 members in the volunteer fire department, which is a very good number for a town of our size. It takes a year to be certified, and we have a lot of new people. This budget reflects a more accurate estimate of the number of firefighters likely to respond to a call (8 instead of 12). The department uses some outside instructors to keep the training interesting. We can get some training for free for volunteering to host a class. He added that we do not turn anyone down unless their background check comes back bad, which occasionally happens. EMTs need to have a very clean record.

Public Works/ Administration: Rick Malasky

Jack Fitzgibbon joined the meeting at 6:58 PM.

Rick Malasky said that 90% of the overtime was due to snow and ice removal. There was a discussion about whether it would be feasible to reduce overtime by adjusting employees' schedules in advance of a forecasted snowstorm. For example, if we expected to get a lot of snow over the weekend, employees could have Thursday and Friday off. Rick Malasky said that if the snowstorm did not happen, his employees would be short on hours. Councilor Zink said they could do whatever they would have done earlier in the week. Councilor Bentley said that would only work if the storm were at the end of the week. Rick Malasky said that it takes multiple days to clear the snow and prepare for the next storm. He said that the plows start out at 4 AM to get the roads ready for morning commuters. He could send the crew home at 1 PM instead of 3 PM, and get the rest of the work done another time. He added that despite a very tough winter last year, the department came in under budget for labor and salt.

Town Clerk:

Becky Benvenuti said that her budget is essentially flat. There would be some increased costs associated with elections (\$4,130 excluding additional salaries). To get to a flat budget, she would need to cut \$4k. She would find the money by cutting meals for election workers, some hours for the supervisor of the checklist, and mileage for training. She also came prepared to talk about the impact of a 2% or 5% cut to her department. A 2% cut would involve cutting some training and postage costs. Cutting 5% would require cutting some staff hours. This would be difficult, because 90% of the work done in her department is required by statute. Some of the costs are actually offset by fees. For instance, we have had more liens, and those notices need to be sent by certified mail. The costs are built into the lien and paid back eventually.

Becky Benvenuti said she believes motor vehicle registrations hit rock bottom last year and are starting to go back up. They peaked in 2006, and then during the recession people held onto their vehicles longer. Vehicle registrations are the town's second largest source of revenue after property taxes.

Becky Benvenuti said that there was some confusion about what staff had been asked to do, and it has led to anxiety. She wanted to speak only for her department, although she knew other departments were anxious as well. She said her people work hard and they take pride in what they do. They are also taxpayers and have their own families.

Roadways and Sidewalks

Rick Malasky said that the price of salt has increased. He said he was requesting enough money to resurface some roads, and would plan on requesting money from the Municipal Transportation Improvement Fund to pave more. There was a discussion about the role of the Municipal Transportation Improvement Fund. Rick Malasky said that the voters authorized the Town Council to expend money from that fund as needed. It is a capital reserve account; paving is no longer in the CIP. Councilor Botterman said that cutting the paving budget will eventually cost us. It would be helpful to invest in a roadway maintenance plan. It would cost around \$30k, but it would give us a prioritized plan for paving. Rick Malasky said that we could put \$300k a year into paving for the next 20 years and never get ahead. Councilor Zink said he thought it was disturbing that we had the same conversation three years ago. Chairman LaBranche said that the Council would discuss the paving issue at the workshop. Councilor Nazzaro said that the reserve fund acts as a shock absorber for the tax rate. Brian Hart said that at the time, he had not agreed that paving should be taken out of the CIP. In the case of a major flood, we would need money for road work. He also did not feel that we were using the Municipal Transportation Improvement Fund sustainably. It should be used for new things, such as new sidewalks or stoplights, rather than maintaining existing roads.

Street Lights

Rick Malasky said that the timers and dimmers are saving money.

Building and Grounds

There was a \$14k difference between Rick Malasky's request and the number that Ed Wojnowski submitted to the Town Council. Ed Wojnowski's figure involved cutting one seasonal staff member and reducing the weeks worked per summer.

Dana Glennon said that he did not think the turf was well maintained. The volunteer gardeners seem to be maintaining their areas better than the paid workers. There was some discussion about the narrative not matching the spreadsheet. Councilor Levy asked what the building and grounds people do. Rick Malasky explained that they maintain the conservation properties, the cemeteries, and the parks. They also take out the trash downtown. They make \$13/ hour and get no benefits or holidays. Linda Mantegani said that if the grounds are not being maintained well, perhaps it is because we do not have enough manpower. In that case, cutting one person would not help the situation.

There was a short recess at 8 PM.

Cemetery

Rick Malasky said that contracted services were cut \$2k. Councilor Levy asked if pest control were absolutely necessary. Rick Malasky said that you cannot see grubs until they are doing damage. Skunks basically roto-till the ground to get at the grubs, and it kills the grass.

Vehicle Maintenance

There was a discussion about the mechanic line in the budget. Ed Wojnowski said that the town paid Bud \$16k when he left. He was entitled to half his total sick days and 5 weeks of accrued vacation time. Ed Wojnowski said he wanted to keep the salary in the budget in case the town decides to hire a mechanic instead of continuing to outsource the maintenance work. It is difficult to see 9-18 months in the future only 5 months into the fiscal year. Several councilors felt that there should be a line in the budget called "contracted labor," so that the money we are spending on mechanic work now does not fall under a nonexistent mechanic position. The current line for vehicle maintenance refers mostly to parts. Councilor Levy said that there should be nothing budgeted for vehicle maintenance overtime, since we do not pay contractors overtime.

Brian Hart asked if these items were left in the budget because the DPW director and town administrator want a full-time mechanic on staff. Rick Malasky said that is his position. Ed Wojnowski said he wants to make sure the money is there if we make that decision later.

Solid Waste

Ed Wojnowski took spring cleanup out of the budget for this budget year. Councilor Botterman said that the town should either follow its plan and do the cleanup every other year, or not make such a commitment. There was a discussion about trash bags. Ellen Snyder pointed out that the town picks up recyclables for everyone, even people who do not pay for the town bags. She asked if it would help the town budget if everyone bought the bags. Ed Wojnowski said yes. The Town Council has the authority to mandate this. Single stream recycling has helped. The market for recyclables goes up and down. Councilor Zink said that it is less expensive not to recycle. Brian Hart said that ordinances were drafted at one point to require trash collectors to pick up both the trash and the recycling. No one wants lots of different trash trucks coming into their neighborhood. Rick Malasky said he orders 100,000 bags at a time, because they take 10 weeks to

arrive. If he has to make more than one order in a fiscal year, it can drive the general supplies budget up.

Adjournment:

Eric Botterman made the motion to adjourn. Councilor Nazzaro seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting ended at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenn Hastings