

Ross Tartell Questions

BOS Budget Review

2/9/2022

Budget Questions CERT, Transfer Station, DPW, Police & Fire

CERT

No Questions

Transfer Station

No comments

Buildings

001-08-1325.47215 There are a number of items listed in the comments – is there enough money? Station 2 has a bathroom and other items to be covered (I thought there was about \$200K set aside.) Fire HQ has the kitchen – was the roof leak fixed?

The items listed in the comments are typical type of repairs that would fall under this account line. This budget is not for major projects. It is for repairs, such as the roof leak at HQ, which was repaired.

\$200,000 was previously assigned in the fund balance for Fire Station 2 and was/is being used for completed/in progress/and scheduled work.

Up to \$100,000 has been approved from the Infrastructure Fund for the plan presented for the Fire Headquarters kitchen. Those materials are on order.

Other project work will be presented at a future meeting as part of the prioritization of spending of the Infrastructure fund and ARPA monies. Examples include replacement of the Town Hall pillars and front steps, repaving of the Town Campus parking lot following the completion of the Police HQ project, replacing windows in Town Hall, insulating areas of Town Hall without insulation, work on the Parks and Grounds “Barn” and replacement of the red garage by Horseshoe Pond. Chris Burney is compiling and costing the projects.

001-08-3105.46030 Eviction Storage \$2000 Is this due to blight – what is the source of evection? The State Marshall handling the eviction will require the Town to store goods left at the location until they are claimed by the occupant within 14 days or potentially 45 days due to possible auction. Evictions can include a tenant eviction, foreclosure or an abandoned property or a health violation. Blight be a contributing factor.

What is the teamsters pension plan withdrawal? Due to concerns about the Plan, in July 2013, the Town withdrew from the Teamsters Retirement Plan and agreed to pay \$148,734 per year through July 2034.

Police

In the overview – I would think that the town's failure to fund the new police station should be a risk. If it is not funded, there are wide ranging negative impacts.

There is no FY2023 specific budget risk if the new station is not approved in May. If the referendum is defeated in May,

- We will likely put on hold all prioritized ARPA and Infrastructure Funds expenditures.
- We will put the police headquarters on the November ballot. We would also decide whether to put the emergency radio system on the ballot. Doing so would provide us options in terms of ARPA funds should the police headquarters project not be approved, but the emergency radio system pass.
- If the police headquarters building did not pass in November, we would decide whether to prioritize it (along with the emergency radio systems, if that too failed) for all \$7 million of ARPA and Infrastructure Funds. If so we would need to develop a new phased plan and accomplish what we can with the available funds. You may recall that early in the pandemic we did preliminary work on a phased in plan because of uncertainty.

Are there emerging safety/crime issues that need additional resources? The House Republicans had a news conference on Feb 2 outlining their legislative proposals addressing Connecticut's crime crisis – especially juvenile crime.

Juveniles are defined as under age 18. Juveniles are tied to the increase in car breaks-ins and car thefts experienced in Wilton and communities throughout the State. We are hampered in our enforcement, as the thefts travel at high rates of speed and state law prohibits chasing vehicles for non-violent crimes such as car theft or larceny. If arrested, juveniles can't be detained. Therefore, arrest is no longer an effective deterrent. Once released, the juvenile is free to commit the same crime that same day or the next day. We have experienced this first hand in Wilton. We arrested a juvenile for a car break-in, who committed the same crime the previous night in a different town and the next night in a third town.

In response, we have extra evening patrols when we can and when activity is particularly high. We coordinate with neighboring communities when a chase must end. We conduct *Lock it or Lose it* campaigns to raise awareness about leaving unlocked cars in driveways or parking lots and leaving keys or valuables in the car. Hiring several more patrol officers is not being recommended as a means to solve this problem.

The state has provided funding for two task forces, staffed by law enforcement personnel to address car theft etc. Programs are being discussed to reduce recidivism and working with JV offenders in their home communities/cities. The juveniles committing these crimes are not originating out of Wilton. We have existing programs we use to address Wilton juvenile issues including JV Courts system and in-house measures.

What is judicial bench revenue?

Fines for motor vehicles infractions are paid to and retained by the State. Judicial branch revenue is the small percentage of the fines from certain motor vehicle infractions that is distributed to Wilton and other municipalities.

In 2021 overtime was \$702,571. Why is it so high and what steps are being put into place to mitigate the drivers of overtime? Overtime was high and overbudget due to shift coverage for officers out due to COVID. Overtime is forecasted to be over budget in FY2022 by approximately \$100,000 due to higher than anticipated and planned for retirements, four versus one. We proactively hired in advance of the one planned retirement, but early in the year, an unplanned retirement occurred. The planned and two additional unplanned retirements all occurred on or shortly prior to December. One vacancy was filled in February. Two positions remain vacant, which we hope to fill by April 1. Our ability to hire has been hampered by the statewide shortage of police officers. FY2023 salaries are forecasted to be underbudgeted by just over \$200,000.

Was it due to Covid and if it was, can we get reimbursed from the Feds? In March of 2020, what is known as the Cares Act was adopted by the legislature. In April of 2020, the Federal government awarded CT \$1.382 billion. From those monies, the State made awards to CT municipalities, including Wilton. The State disbursed monies based on factors including qualified expenditures and prioritized communities. COVID awarded were recorded in miscellaneous revenues in FY2021, see page 206 of the budget. That comment should read FY2021, not FY2022.

How much is the defined contribution percentage (p.278) Is it forecasted to go up in 2023?

The define contribution rate is defined by contract. An employee contributes 7.5% and the town contributes 9.5%.

What investments are being made to build the leadership skills in the department?

Leadership training has been a hallmark of the department as evidenced by our ability to promote within up to the level of Chief. We are committed overall to a well-trained police force. Our budgets have always provided necessary funded. In addition, we encourage individual advancement. We fund up to 75% of the cost of tuition and provide an education incentive.

What ideas/actions are being considered in order to increase the likelihood of officer retention?

Historically, the department has not had an issue with retention. The current shortage is impacting our ability to hire new officers to replace retired officers. One factor contributing to the statewide and the national shortage is the perceived state and national attitude toward policing. Wilton is not perceived as having that same attitude.

Factors that have contributed to the ability to retain officers include,

- Benefits. The medical plan is particularly strong. The defined benefit plan helps retain those employees until they vest. The defined contribution plan doesn't.
- Flexibility related to leave time and work hours. We are very flexible in terms of schedule changes, switching shifts, etc.
- Moral, promotion opportunities, educational opportunities.
- Community support, which has been strong and reflected in the budgets which have provided the department and the officers with the training and the tools needed to perform their responsibilities.
- Facilities. The new headquarters is important.

How many people are in Central Dispatch?

The budget represents two full-time civilian dispatchers. Dispatchers work M-F weekends and holidays off. The civilian Dispatchers always work with an officer in dispatch and there is at least one officer on all shifts.

Fire

Do we need to ask in risks about unforeseen problems in the ongoing rehabilitation of the Marhoffer Fire Station (Station 2)?

No. \$200,000 was previously assigned in the fund balance for Fire Station 2. Work is ongoing. We have a good handle on the work. If there were an overage, it can be covered by the Infrastructure Fund.

What strategies are in place for public education? Fire prevention materials; Education of new tenants or commercial property owners.

Chief Blanchfield will address in his presentation.

Is the average cost of outfitting a fire fighter only \$4? (Two or three Brooks Brothers Suits probably cost more.

The cost to outfit a fire fighter is \$4,000.

Promotional process – Fire Marshall – is there a possibility of a retirement?

Yes, Kevin Plank will hit mandatory retirement age.

Does money need to be set aside for promotional tests for the rank & File?

We do not expect a retirement or resignation in FY2023.

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