

Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS Commissioners' Budget Work Session

Meeting Called By:	Commissioners	Date, Time:	December 11, 2012 at 17:30
Transcribed By:	Kathy Tobine	Place:	Tilton Town Hall, Upstairs Meeting Room, 257 Main Street, Tilton NH

Commissioners Present: Paul Auger, Patrick Clark, Tom Gallant
 Staff Present: Chief Bradley Ober and Administrative Assistant Kathy Tobine
 Tilton Selectmen Present: Patricia Consentino and Sandy Plessner
 Budget Committee Members Present: Jane Alden
 Public Present: Greg Michaud

Call to Order

Commissioner Clark called the meeting to order at 5:37 PM.

2013 Operating Budget

Line 680 Departmental

Chief Ober explained that the over expenditure on this line was two items were charged to the wrong account. The other item that caused it to go over the budget amount was we ordered window decals that we provide to our members

Line 335 School/Training Fees

Chief Ober explained that we had confirmed with DRA that we can encumber the funds for the paramedic training. The process for doing that was discussed.

Chief Ober passed out a 2012 Benefit Comparison requested.

Chief Ober stated the Retirement increase in his memo that he talked about was an employer increase not an employee increase.

Chief Ober explained that the impact on the tax rate of the proposed staff is \$0.03 per town of that one particular project for 2013.

Commissioner Clark reported on their meeting with the Water District on hydrant fees. They locked in at \$125,988 for next year. They agreed to go for three additional years at this price at their next annual meeting.

LRMFA Dispatch Fees

Commissioner Clark stated one issue to address tonight relative to the meeting with Steve Bluhm about the mutual aid bills. They have received a letter from the Town of Tilton addressing their feelings on the issue. Tilton doesn't feel they should be double paying. Northfield is saying they should go through the County. By doing that, Tilton gets an additional \$4,000 reduction in their bill due to the County's formula. Tilton says the bills go to the towns. Northfield says the bills should go to the District. Discussion ensued.

Chief Ober stated when LRMFA was formed it was the towns that signed on. They should ask the question who can authorize a community to withdraw from Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid and then the District becoming a member.

The Commissioners decided they will work with the Selectmen of both Towns to come to a resolution regarding this for the 2014 budget.

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Salaries & Wages

Commissioner Clark passed out a spreadsheet that he had prepared on salaries. He explained how he did his computations. He used a 1.5% step rather than a 1.6% COLA. He personally feels they are going through a rough time economically. Insurance went up 10.7% and retirement went up 4.95%. Discussion ensued about the purpose of the COLA.

Discussion ensued about the additional firefighter position and the fourth shift.

Commissioner Auger stated there are other options out there they haven't looked at. He suggested privatizing the ambulance service. Discussion ensued.

Discussion ensued about the fourth shift.

Discussion ensued about how the salaries and wages were figured for the budget.

Discussion ensued about annual salaries staying the same when the hours change from 48 hours to 42 hours.

Greg Michaud stated in 2005 when the District went to 24 hours, employees went from 42 hours to 48 hours keeping the same annual pay taking a reduction at that time. This would be giving back that reduction. Commissioner Clark stated that since then a lot of water has gone over the dam. We have had this wage and benefit study and step & grade study we did with LGC. What we did was forward looking in terms of comparison with other departments to come up with what we have today. Regardless of what was done in 2005, the numbers are completely different right now than what they were back then. That is what he is seeing. Looking back the other way right now isn't a fair comparison. Chief Ober stated it is all relevant. You can't just take out that one piece and say we have had an increase. Discussion ensued.

Chief Ober stated the retention forecast is fairly medium. We need to make sure we do everything we can to keep the staff we have because they are doing an excellent job. He wouldn't trade any of them for anybody. We have two major areas in staffing we need to address and improve. If we don't start taking those steps we are going to start getting right back into having a revolving door here. That is going to cost more money than his proposal on the table. It is going to cost you something that is really hard to measure and that is the time it takes to get a new employee fully up to speed. That takes a good year and in some cases it is even more.

Commissioner Clark rebutted that in the last three years they have increased the insurance for the firefighters in a huge way. That is a major plus. He personally thinks that is important. Number two the step and grade system they put in place was a huge step in giving some consistency in looking forward. That is a real plus. Right on the heels of that we are saying we have that stuff done, now lets look at adding a fourth shift. He is saying what's next. Chief Ober stated he knows what is next from his proposals. His comments to the step and grade package are that it is long overdue. It is awesome that it is in place but it is still not the best package if you will. There are better packages available. If we don't work to keep our current staff they are going to go for pay. Yes, we did an awesome thing there but 1) it was overdue and 2) it was minimum in comparison to what some of our neighbors are doing. You can't let that stay dormant. You have to keep that moving and keep it alive.

Commissioner Gallant stated we are exactly where we were last week. Obviously these two guys are not going to approve the addition of a new person for a fourth shift. Commissioner Clark stated that at this time he does not want a fourth shift. Commissioner Gallant asked Commissioner Clark what they want if they don't want a fourth shift. Commissioner Clark said he is recommending they change the step to 1.5% from 2.5% and increase the percentage of insurance paid from 10% to 15%.

Chief Ober passed out budget information on adding the fourth shift with no step or COLA.

Chief Ober stated the increase in health insurance cost will not sit well with the staff. They are already getting a 10.7% increase in what they are going to be paying. Discussion ensued about the increase to the employee on their contribution for health insurance.

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Discussion ensued about wages and benefits. Commissioner Clark spoke about the increases he believes are coming down the road.

Pat Consentino spoke about wages and their experience with the Police Department. When people left they wanted to replace the officer. The Selectmen said no. It finally got to the point where it was a safety issue. It didn't matter whether there were hard economic times or not. It was a matter of the safety of the officer and safety of the public. They had to put an officer on. The other comment as Commissioners and Selectmen they make very hard choices. They don't always agree amongst themselves about the choices that they make. What they choose to do with that makes a world of difference. You can easily see the conflict the three of you are having and the disagreement you have on whether you should add a fourth person, whether you should keep the COLA down and the step down and whether you should have them pay for the insurance. You can agree to not agree and merely as Commissioners recommend a budget to the Budget Committee. The Budget Committee then tears apart that budget and it goes to people. You can at the table explain that budget explicitly. You can at the table say although we are not all in agreement with this budget we do see very good points that the Chief is bringing up and we would like to support the Chief. We are going to give you the budget as presented and you decide because we right now are at a conflict. Even though you don't all agree you can still present a budget to the Budget Committee. Discussion ensued.

Pat Consentino stated you don't have to agree on the budget but you can support the Chief. You say the Chief has presented you a budget for six months and six months only. Please be aware that the following year that it will be this much and it will be this. That is how you present it. That is what he is asking you to present it that way. She has a right to say here is a department head. He is trying to present a budget to you. Now you have a choice to present that to your Budget Committee and then bring it out to the people. You can agree on a budget. The Budget Committee can agree on the budget. You both don't have to agree on the budget but you can support the Chief. All you have to do is agree to say I will present it to the Budget Committee. The Budget Committee will present it to the annual meeting. If they agree we will put the fourth shift on. If they don't agree, the fourth shift comes out. Very simple.

Commissioner Clark stated it wasn't up to the Budget Committee on whether they put a fourth shift on or not. They recommend the monies. What he is saying when you look at the Chief's budget he is at \$806,946 just for salaries & wages and what he figured out is \$804,147. They are \$2,000 apart. It is certainly legitimate in terms of presenting it. How he wants those numbers presented is really important. Chief Ober stated that he figured it different. Commissioner Clark used an anniversary date while he used January 1st. That is the difference. If you look at the latest one he gave them, there is another whole difference in there. There is no COLA or step. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Clark stated he is not personally in support of adding a fourth shift. Is he willing to back down from the increase in insurance, he will take a look at that as well. Chief Ober stated on December 11th to bring a proposed increase in the contribution for medical to an employee that is going to take effect in about two and a half weeks is pretty bad. Those talks should have been started from this Board in September or October. You should be prepared for a negative backlash on that.

Commissioner Gallant stated he feels that it should not change as in effect it already is changing. The amount they are paying is going to increase. It is 10.7% increase in premiums. That 10.7% is not being absorbed entirely by the District.

Commissioner Clark stated we are paying 90 and they are paying 10. He will tell them that he thought that maybe they hadn't done their homework in flushing out in what they could get for a policy. He checked around. The numbers are right on.

Commissioner Clark made a recommendation that they present both the worksheet that he developed and the most recent one from Chief to the Budget Committee. Explain that they are at loggerheads right now. They haven't taken a vote. Go in and explain what the differences are. Chief Ober stated you are going to have to go in there and explain how our step and grade system works. You can't go in there and say how do you want us to do our step and grade. They are going to look at you and ask

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why you are asking us on how to run your step and grade system. Pick a way to run it and run it. You can't flip flop back and forth every year. Commissioner Clark stated he is not in favor of adding another shift. Commissioner Gallant stated either go anniversary or calendar. Chief Ober stated that is the difference. Your proposal has the additional firefighter on it. You can't go to the Budget Committee with two different proposals on step and grade. They are not going to understand. All they want to know is the bottom line. They don't care on what the policy says. They don't want to hear it. Don't waste their time. Don't waste your time.

Commissioner Clark made a motion for total salaries and wages not to exceed \$806,946.80 and it will be up to the Commissioners and Fire Chief to hammer out how they are going to spend that money in that particular area. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Gallant stated the Chief's narrative should cover the Chief's budget and needs the Commissioner's budget. The only thing that is going to differ in the whole thing is salary & wages and benefits.

Discussion ensued about year end actuals.

2013 Apparatus & Equipment Fund Budget

Line 760 Vehicles \$0

Commissioner Clark noted this line was zero funded.

Line 741 EMS Equipment \$22,000

Commissioner Auger asked about the decrease in the EMS Equipment line. Chief Ober explained the reduction was due to last year their being money in there for the mechanical CPR device.

Discussion ensued about EMS Disposable Equipment.

Line 740 Fire Equipment \$29,500

Discussion ensued about why the fire equipment line was decreased. Chief Ober explained part of it was for the Center Street generator and the SCBA. He recommends waiting and replacing all of them at the same time. He feels this is adequate for

Line 960.5 Rescue Equipment \$0

Discussion ensued about the Rescue Equipment. It covers things like the Hyrst tool and stokes basket. Firefighter Powell, who is in charge of the rescue equipment, feels we are in really good shape right now. That is why they are proposing nothing in this line.

All three Commissioners agreed with the Chief's recommendation of \$75,500 for this budget.

Other

Chief Ober stated we will update the Commissioners numbers in their line and update the narrative. The narrative will include the Chief's and Commissioners information. We will get it off to the Budget Committee either tomorrow or Thursday.

Commissioner Clark stated there is a lot of time put into this. He admires you much more greatly than he did a week ago in terms of the calculations and everything you have to go through.

Commissioner Clark stated it was very worthwhile to go to the Water District meeting. Discussion ensued about the meeting.

Adjournment

Commissioner Gallant made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Clark seconded the motion. There being no discussion, vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 19:21.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kathy Tobine
Administrative Assistant

Next Meeting Date, Time, Place: December 19, 2012 at 17:30 at Tilton Town Hall, Downstairs Meeting Room, 257 Main Street, Tilton.