

EAST LYME BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING OF FEBRUARY 17, 2021
MINUTES

This meeting was held via Zoom online meeting services and was available for the public to view, listen and participate via videoconference and dial-in options. This meeting in its entirety, as well as all the budgets discussed during such meeting, are available to view by visiting the East Lyme Town Hall webpage.

PRESENT: Mark Nickerson, Kevin Seery, Marc Salerno, Rose Ann Hardy, Paul Dagle and Dan Cunningham

ALSO PRESENT: Finance Director Anna Johnson, Public Works Director Joe Bragaw, Deputy Public Works Director Bill Scheer, Chief Mike Finkelstein and Lieutenant Mike Macek

Mr. Nickerson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Budget Review

109 IT – Mr. Bragaw reported that last year we started taking all the departments' IT line items out of their individual budgets and moved them into this one, which has made this budget much more transparent. He stated that we continue to improve our IT processes, but we still only have one person on staff and with the new public safety building coming online we will need to continue to improve. Contracting with Star has worked well this past, first bridge year, and we are ramping up the contract with Star to include 24/7 coverage for dispatch and the new public safety building. He reported that they have recently created an IT Steering Committee, and it is recommended that this upcoming year be the second bridge year as emergency services moves into the new building. He stated that we currently only have one IT person on staff that has no experience in emergency services. It will be necessary to hire an additional IT person, who specializes in emergency services systems, who will be dedicated to the new public safety building and our emergency services personnel and systems. Mr. Bragaw reviewed each item under 200 Services Contracted/Operating and noted that the increase in line 216 Licensing/Hosting is due to the purchase of laptops for employees to take home to work during the pandemic and does not include any IT costs for the police department, emergency operations or the Fire Marshal's office. Mr. Bragaw reviewed the individual items included in line 221, noting that the major increase comes from requirements due to the new Police Accountability law and for support needed for the new public safety building. Line item 221 Police/EMD/FMO IT Support reflects an increase for Star Computer's contracted IT services, and Mr. Bragaw stated that the \$22,000 increase from previous years' contracts is because Star Computers is raising their rate from \$81.88/hour to \$100/hour. He noted that this is the first time in quite a while that Star has increased their rate for the Town and is still much lower than the going rate. The Chief stated that although Star is doing a great job of supporting them through these changes and upgrades, it is necessary that we hire a dedicated, in-house IT person that specializes in emergency services. Mr. Salerno inquired if we hire an IT Director as has been considered, will the Town still require a dedicated IT person for emergency services, and Chief Finkelstein responded that yes that would still be required, or the Town would have to continue its existing contract with Star Computers. Mr. Bragaw noted that they have been talking with the Board of Education on a possible shared IT Director position, so there are options that will need to be considered over this next year, which is the second bridge year, and it was foreseen that we would be faced

FILED

March 2 2021 AT 9:10 AM/PM
Karen Mullen
EAST LYME TOWN CLERK

BOS Special Budget Meeting
February 17, 2021

1 of 4

with these decisions. We will know more as the move into the new building gets closer, and all the changes and upgrades required by the Police Accountability law are made.

214 Emergency Management – Chief Finkelstein reviewed the list of items in the budget and explained that the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Staff Activation line is to pay staff for various joint events they hold yearly with Millstone. He stated that they had proposed adding a soft version of Everbridge as a better more effective way to communicate to the public, such as when we have a road closure, special event, or weather event. He explained that although the First Selectman supports the addition of this type of communication tool, he thinks it should be put off as a future expense if grant money cannot be secured. Chief Finkelstein reported that they are pursuing alternate ways to fund this expense sooner and stated that they have included this item to be funded by this year's EMG grant issued by Millstone. Mr. Nickerson stated that this is a great tool, and he looks forward to getting it funded to bring it to our community. He noted that the anticipated revenue from various grants is \$54,233, and he stated that 45% of the Chief's salary is not paid directly from East Lyme taxpayer dollars, but from these grants.

215 Dispatch – Chief Finkelstein reported that line 212 Dispatchers salary is up 2.25% in line with contractual salary increases. He stated that they employ six full time dispatchers, and several part time employees, but that pool is diminishing over time. There is an increase in the overtime line because full time dispatchers are required to cover shifts if part time coverage cannot be secured, and this is a frequent occurrence due to lessening part time dispatcher availability. He noted that this results in a reduction in the part time dispatcher line and reminded everyone that every shift needs to be filled 24/7. There is an increase in the uniform line as the dispatchers will have more interaction with the public at the new public safety facility. Mr. Seery inquired if there will be two dispatchers on the overnight shift at the new public safety facility; the Chief responded that this not the plan currently, but that the Police Commission has been discussing the need for that. Having two full time dispatchers on staff on every shift is the best scenario. Mr. Nickerson stated that there has been some discussion about regionalization of such services, so there may be more discussion on that in the future. Ms. Hardy asked if there will be any State funds available for reimbursement of the Police Accountability Law expenses, and Mr. Nickerson stated that they are all unfunded mandates except for the 30% reimbursement on body camera costs.

216 Police – Present to speak on this budget were Chief Mike Finkelstein, Lieutenant Mike Macek, and Board of Police Commissioners Chairman Dan Price. Mr. Price explained that the Police Commission supports and is recommending that the police department hire two additional police officers each year for the next six years to reach the recommended minimum for number of police officers per people. East Lyme is currently the seventh highest in the state for housing growth and the fifth lowest in the state for full time officers. We currently have 1.3 officers per 1,000 residents; the state average is 2.07/1k and the highest is 2.88/1k. To get to the average we would need 39 officers at the current population; we are proposing 36 officers over a six-year period which would be two officers per year to bring us to 1.9 officers per 1,000 residents, at the current population. With the need to grow the force, upcoming retirements, and the move to the new public safety facility, this is a good time to focus on the development of the police department staff. Chief Finkelstein stated that proper staffing has a direct correlation to the officers' ability to protect the community. He reported that currently they are reactive because of the lack of staffing and need to become more proactive. Having more officers on each shift will allow for an officer to remain on scene of a car break-in if there is an incident someplace else in town because we will have the manpower available to fully protect and serve the public; he asked that the Board support this plan of adding two officers per year for six years. He reviewed each of the line items in this budget, including new items such as additional

taser equipment and supplies, and prisoner expenses that are estimated because these expenses are new and come with the move to the public safety building. The Training line has increased to include additional training required as part of the Police Accountability law. He stated that the Facility Rental line item shows a reduction because they will be moving into the new building in the spring and we will no longer need to make a rent payment to the Waterford Police Department. Uniforms, Professional and Business Expenses, have increased to accommodate the addition of two additional officers; Training Supplies has increased to better equip all officers with non-lethal methods of dealing with situations. He stated that Prisoner Expenses is a new line item and is an estimate which will cover items such as blankets, meals and other supplies for prisoners being held. Chief Finkelstein stated that the Testing/Accreditation line item is also a new line item and encompasses all the new training and accreditations that are required due to the Police Accountability law, including additional psychological testing and CALEA accreditation. All the Selectmen agreed that this is a necessary plan, and it has been laid out reasonably and responsibly by getting the department up to adequate staffing in a gradual, effective manner. Mr. Nickerson stated that it is the Board of Selectmen's primary responsibility to watch out for the welfare of the residents in our town, and that includes public safety, and includes the welfare of our police officers. Chief Finkelstein noted that the amount listed under testing/accreditation is a preliminary cost for this year to get started, and that there is a separate line under the general legal line item which covers the estimated legal costs associated with the CALEA accreditation and is spread out over two years.

226 Animal Control – This budget has a slight increase due to contractual salary increases only. Mr. Nickerson commended the Animal Control Officer and the Assistant ACO for doing such a great job in taking outstanding care of our animal friends. They work very well together in making sure that every shift is covered 24/7, and they work well with our regional partners in caring for animals throughout our region.

217 Niantic Fire Department – Chief Jim Barone and Deputy Chief Mike Nebelung, both volunteers, were present to speak on this budget. It was noted that there is a reduction in line item 612 due to a miscalculation possibly in a previous year's budget. Assistant Chief Nebelung stated that this line item was increased to add additional hours to ensure 24/7/365 coverage as per the agreement made between the two former fire chiefs and the first selectman. It was discussed that also in line 612 it is noted that this amount was reduced by \$18,420 and Ms. Johnson noted that this was a difference in how the amounts were calculated and not an error on anyone's part. She noted that the original total included all the sick, holiday and vacation time that is paid out to employee if it is not used, and the \$189,830 reflects the correct calculation without those unpredictable amounts included. Ms. Johnson noted that as of right now this budget is 56% expended so it is right on target. Mr. Nickerson stated that they are doing a great job of managing this budget.

218 Flanders Fire Department – Volunteer Chief Chris Taylor was in attendance to speak on this budget. Mr. Nickerson stated that he wanted to point out that the East Lyme Ambulance Association and the Town have a very special partnership that the Town does not take this for granted. Most notably the East Lyme Ambulance Association provides fuel, as well as two full time fire fighters and IT for both departments for many years; and he noted that these things are not guaranteed, and that the Town is appreciative of the Association's continued support. Chief Taylor noted that the overtime line item is up and one of the reasons is that one of the paid full-time fire fighters is on active duty and should be returning soon. Balancing the overtime and part-time line items continues to be something that they will work on.

224 Fire Marshal – Fire Marshal John Way was in attendance to speak on this budget. Mr. Nickerson noted that line 211 is higher than the expected 2.25% due to an oversight in not giving him the proper GWI increase last year. Mr. Way stated that the supplies line item is up due to the reorganization of this office and the cost of splitting office supplies and equipment. He reported that they are keeping very busy with all the inspections scheduled along with all the new construction and rehab work in town. It was noted that the Administrative Assistant is now paid for out of the Emergency Management budget, and there is no longer a transportation allowance because the Fire Marshal has a Town provided vehicle.

MOTION (1)

Mr. Salerno MOVED to adjourn the February 17, 2021, special meeting of the East Lyme Board of Selectmen at 7:01 p.m.

Seconded by Mr. Cunningham. Motion passed 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Sandra Anderson

Sandra Anderson
Recording Secretary