



Ware

MASSACHUSETTS

Finance Committee
126 Main Street
Ware, MA 01082

Finance Committee Meeting

Meeting Location: Selectmen's Conference Room
Ware Town Hall – 126 Main Street

Meeting Date: Thursday, April 1, 2021

Meeting Time: 4:00 pm

Due to the outbreak of corona (Covid-19) virus, the Governor has announced an emergency order temporarily lifting the requirement of the Open Meeting Law mandating public access to the physical location of the meeting, provided there is a means of remote access.

The instructions to join the meeting virtually or by phone (via Zoom) are:

Virtually:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83932551477?pwd=RWx0NXhYcUh4WnFLV2NhRjVkwWTEvZz09>

By Phone: +1 929 205 6099

Meeting ID: 839 3255 1477

Passcode: 376997

Meeting Agenda items to be discussed:

1. Police and Fire Department Budget Discussions
2. Review and Vote on Articles for April 24th STM
3. Approval of minutes from March 25th meeting
4. Review of e-mails or correspondence

At the time of posting of this meeting notice and agenda the above items were the only items known. Should an additional item be brought forward, unless of an emergency nature, it will be placed on a future agenda. The general public is invited to this and all meetings of the Ware Finance Committee.

Submitted by

Lynn Nenni
Finance Committee Chair

April 1, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Lynn Nenni, Devin Peterson, Ken Willette, Terry Smith

Guests: Stuart Beckley, Town Manager; Tracy Meehan, Town Accountant; Sean Crevier, Police Chief; Chris Gagnon, Fire Chief

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 pm on April 1, 2021

Item 4) Review of e-mails or correspondence was discussed first:

The committee had expressed interest in discussing ways to present the Town Budget to taxpayers to improve the understanding of spending. Ideas discussed were:

- a) Limiting the use of Special Town Meetings to approve additional operating appropriations during the year.
- b) Approving additional appropriations for capital expenditures in the annual budget instead of at a STM.
- c) Establishment of a special account to capture the budgetary impact on overtime to the departure of Mary Lane, or any other one time event, so that these extraordinary costs were not carried forward from year to year as part of the operating budget.

The Town Manager and Town Accountant explained that in the past the Town had waited until free cash was certified in October after the annual budget was passed, to ask for additional appropriations for capital items, unexpected operating budget shortfalls and transfers to stabilization funds. A variety of solutions were discussed including:

- a) Providing a multi-year capital plan in the annual budget document, utilizing the capital stabilization to fund current year capital expenditures, which has not been done in the past, along with related timing for replenishing the capital stabilization fund. The committee also discussed the idea of including a debt schedule in the budget document that showed the repayment schedule and detail of capital purchases that are paid for through borrowing.
- b) How to establish an account that could be drawn during the year, without convening a STM, to cover extraordinary costs, such as overtime, and how to approve withdrawals or charges to the account in the Annual Town Meeting article.

Everyone agreed that further research and discussion on these topics was required.

Item 1) Police and Fire Department Budget Discussions:

The Police Chief reviewed his budget proposal with the committee. Highlights of the discussion included:

- a) The current staffing level is at 20 positions with a request for a new lieutenant position mid-way through the year.
- b) There was no provision for additional expenditures for changes due to a pending police reform bill legislation or for the departure of Mary Lane.
- c) An expected start date for WestComm Regional Dispatch in January 2022 will improve dispatch for both Police and Fire. This service will be funded through grants for the first three years and increase to \$180,000 in year five.
- d) Capital requests included: One cruiser replacement for each year 2022-2027 at a cost of approximately \$60,000 per year. Replacement and update of PD computers, replacement cost uncertain, however last time the computers were replaced the cost was approximately \$13,000. New fingerprint equipment at a cost of \$30,000. Body/Cruiser camera's at approximately \$27,000 per year for five years. Security camera's for the PD at \$30,000.

The Fire Chief reviewed his budget proposals for Fire and Ambulance with the committee. Highlights of the discussion included:

- a) 18 total staff including 16 fire and emergency medical services, four staff for every shift. No new positions were requested
- b) The impact of the departure of Mary Lane on EMS operations was discussed. The Chief estimated overtime costs would increase due to longer drive times by approximately \$40,000, which was factored into the overtime account as well as an additional \$5,000 for supplies that were previously replaced by Mary Lane. He also discussed that contract negotiations were underway with Hardwick and that if they did not renew that the loss of revenue of approximately \$75,000 was not factored into the budget. There was also discussion of the possible need for a new emergency management plan.
- c) Capital requests over the next few years included: The purchase of a new and smaller fire truck that would replace one of the two existing trucks purchased in 1985 and 1994 and could more easily accommodate narrow streets and spaces in the downtown area at an approximate cost of \$675,000. One new administrative vehicle at an approximate cost of \$65,000. An electronic PCR/EKG monitoring system at an approximate cost of \$10,000. The Chief also mentioned the replacement of the fire department alarm system in the next few years, but did not have an estimate of the cost.

The committee thanked the Police and Fire Chiefs for their presentations.

Item 2) Review and Vote on Articles for April 24th STM

This item was tabled as the meeting was running long and the committee had several questions for the Town Manager, who had to step out to attend a public hearing.

Item 3) Approval of minutes from March 25th meeting

Motion for approval: Ken Willette

Second: Devin Peterson

Unanimously approved.

The committee agreed to meet April 8th at 4:00 pm, and review the April 24th STM and water, sewer and public works budgets.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15.