

## FARMINGTON SELECT BOARD

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

6:30 P.M.

The conduct of the meeting included remote access by telephone, video, and electronic means. The public could attend in person or by viewing the live stream at <http://mtbluetv.org/program-live-streamfarmington-selectmen.html> or Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MBTV11/> or calling 578-7395.

Selectman Matthew Smith called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. with the following members present: Stephan Bunker; Joshua Bell; Byron Staples; and Dennis O'Neil. Erica LaCroix, Town Manager; Fire Chief Tim Hardy; Terry Bell; Director of Public Works, Phil Hutchins; Assistant Director of Public Works, Leia Durrell; Police Chief Ken Charles; Leah Giusti, Executive Assistant; Members of the press and public participated remotely as authorized by PL 209, c.617.

### **ITEM 1: Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag**

Selectman Matthew Smith led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

### **ITEM 2: To Review the 2024 Budget**

Erica LaCroix addressed the Select Board. Public Works Director Phil Hutchins spoke with Pete Coughlin from the state regarding LRAP. Last year was high at \$190,000, it is usually \$160,000 which is what she put in, but Coughlin stated it is safe to put in \$190,000.

The state published revenue sharing figures which are down to \$1,500,000, coming out to a \$80,000 decrease in revenue.

Concerning the school budget, Wayne Kinney does not believe the increase will be as large. Aiming for 3% but after discussion will probably be 5% and using that as a placeholder holder is a good idea. It doesn't help that much to go down one percentage point.

### **Police Department**

Chief Ken Charles approached the Select Board.

Selectman Bell asked, regarding motor fuel, what was the per gallon price used? Chief Charles stated that the total went up \$7,000. They averaged \$3/gallon for the budget. The cost fluctuates a lot, average last year was \$2.83/gallon. They will not lock in a price on unleaded, only on diesel.

Chief Charles stated that he understands there was some discussion about capital appropriation for a computer server. Chief Charles reached out to our computer technician, George Saucier, for his thoughts as well as other vendors who handle government servers. It appears that it will be a significant expense, around \$7,000-\$10,000. A portion of this line item also covers the PowerDMS program which is used to maintain policies, track training, etc. It is a robust

program whose uses are only limited by creativity. They are in the early stages of preparing for the next accreditation cycle. They have had discussions about expanding use throughout the town and how that could be beneficial. The cost \$3,700 to add the rest of the town. Ms. LaCroix thinks should be considered sooner rather than later. It is not easy locate all of our documents and policies currently, working with an old outdated system. PowerDMS would allow for a central depository that everyone can access. Selectman Staples agreed that PowerDMS would help structure-wise, you get out of it what you put into it. For those employees who do not have a work desk, an old computer could be set up in a central area at no additional expense.

Selectman O'Neil asked who makes up their part-time employees. Chief Charles stated that there are no part-time officers. Jocelyn Kelley, the office assistant, is part-time, as well as Drew Holston who works parking enforcement, and Drew Holston, who works animal control. Selectman O'Neil inquired about the \$8,000 difference in the FICA payments. Ms. LaCroix stated that the police department have special benefits that do not fit into a line item, including education and military stipends, clothing allowance, and vehicle and phone stipends at varying levels in addition to any health insurance opt-outs.

Workers' Comp line – decrease from what was budgeted, did their rates drop substantially, based on rates estimated payroll turned in as well as adjustment came up with difference of approx. \$24K, split between departments is based on current bill and what they have identified. The bill itself dropped significantly overall. Adjustment based on what was actually paid out.

Selectman Bell asked about vehicle repair and maintenance. Chief Charles stated that they do not have a contract with any vendors at the moment, but they could look into it. Selectman Bell noted that the vehicle reserve will have \$89,000 and the department plans on buying two vehicles. He asked how much each vehicle will cost. Chief Charles stated that there are a few options other than the interceptor, including the F-150 and Chevy Tahoe. Per vehicle they are looking at around \$62,000 each. The oversized brakes and heavy duty alternator needed for police vehicles make them more expensive.

Selectman O'Neil asked if purchases are always capital expenditure line items. Ms. LaCroix stated that vehicles, major equipment, and buildings are all considered capital, as well as items over a certain price.

### **Fire Department**

Chief TD Hardy approached the Select Board.

Selectman Staples asked if there is a place in the budget where we will see the Town of Industry reimbursement for service. It did not get put in this budget specifically, it goes into a special account, paying for a stipend for the chief, paying for reimbursement of sending out employees or staff, also staffing on Saturdays. Haven't had a full year yet of providing these services and they are still working it out.

Selectman Bell confirmed that the Select Board voted to set up an account to draw off. Chief Hardy confirmed that it is a special revenue account that did not close out at the end of the year. It will be wrapped up at the end of March, then they will have a better idea of how was used. They have not overdrawn the account, and there have been no big calls. They have not had to

commit a lot of resources. Regarding the balance of the special revenue account, Chief Hardy believes Industry has paid \$22,500 so far with one more payment due at the end of March. He believes they have used around \$13,000 of those funds to date. They have been tracking and logging everything used concerning that account.

There is no money added to capital equipment this year. Ms. LaCroix noted that the decision was made that nothing was going to be needed this year. There are monies if equipment/public safety if needed.

There was a discussion about LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program), a supplemental retirement program for firefighters. It is funded through the federal government, the State of Maine, and individual municipalities. It costs nothing to enroll in the program. Chief Hardy and Ms. LaCroix had a meeting with financial advisor, Stephanie Fecteau, who will come up to enroll eligible employees into the program. The Town does not have to put any money into the program. Firefighters enrolled will have an account that would gain points depending on what is contributed. It was created as an incentive to combat the issue of recruitment of volunteers. The program uses a point system that is a compilation of how long they participate, how many calls, trainings, and meetings they attend, which then indicate if they have met minimum participation.

We don't have to put anything into it as a town, employees have to qualify based on the point system. The state has \$500,000 to distribute across those enrolled who made 30 points. All fire department employees will be enrolled, but looking for guidance from the Select Board to see if they are open to designating monies. It will be a heavy lift administratively. Someone will need to keep track of everything and compile information. Will need to take total hours eligible vs. what they worked and have to come up with 30 points to qualify. Can calculate back up to five years. We can decide at any time what we want to do as a municipality. The big thing initially is to get everyone signed up. No cost to the town other than time, which could be significant but no budgetary cost until and if the town decides to supplement.

Selectman Bunker stated that he hopes the Board will consider it. He will continue to try to promote the program, he is also a board member. We need to know the Board's appetite for funding it and, if we decide to fund it, will need to decide how it is divided up among individuals. To determine what each person gets, there will need to be a policy.

Selectmen O'Neil and Smith stated their interest in funding and would like to learn more about the program.

S. Clyde Ross addressed the Select Board. He stated that firefighters historically have been volunteers, who are expected to do the job with little or no compensation. There is now an opportunity for volunteers/per diem to work less. Where do you draw the line?

Ms. LaCroix noted that the call force is extremely important. When you talk about incentives, everyone is in the same amount of danger when answering a call. He is not advocating that call or per diem employees are any less valuable.

Chief Hardy said that the biggest thing is to get it started.

## **Public Works Department**

Public Works Director Phil Hutchins and Assistant Director Leia Durrell approached the Select Board

Selectman Bell asked how many line items take money out for road construction and noted that it can be hard to keep track of them all. Mr. Hutchins noted equipment rental uses road construction money as they are used for regular road maintenance. Road maintenance is a funky line, it gets used to stock materials for spring repairs, and for regular road maintenance and repairs.

Selectman O'Neil asked about the \$53,000 spent on rentals for the year. Mr. Hutchins stated that a lot of this was due to the disaster declaration events and will eventually be reimbursed by FEMA. Ms. LaCroix noted that going forward, she suggests each major project and disaster have its own individual account to better track spending.

Selectman Bell inquired about the ground maintenance line. Mr. Hutchins noted that was for "flowers and aesthetics" which is now maintained by Parks & Recreation. The \$3,000 should cover the supplies necessary for Public Works to provide.

Selectman Bell would like to see a line item in the budget specifically for cemetery stone repairs. There are a lot of old stones lying down. UMF is working on an inventory for Fairview Cemetery regarding the need for stone repair. Last year, Mr. Ebert was able to repair between 20-30 gravestones. They would like to have him back again this year. The Historical Society volunteers one Saturday a month for stone cleaning. Public Works provides D12 cleaning solution. Mr. Hutchins mentioned that he met a company at MMA that clean and repair old stones, he will get more information.

**Selectman Bell made a motion to change Cemetery Maintenance line to read Cemetery Maintenance/Stone Repair and add an additional \$5,000 from the operating budget; Selectman Smith seconded.**

**VOTE            AFFIRMATIVE        5            MOTION CARRIED**

Selectman Bunker would like to make greater use of the cemetery endowment interest to offset costs. Ms. LaCroix noted that using the \$37,000 in interest accrued last year into a line item for perpetual care would result in a difference of .06 mils.

Selectman O'Neil asked if the overage spent on road work is going to be paid by FEMA. Mr. Hutchins stated that it will be, eventually. A separate account has since been created for the December 18<sup>th</sup> event. Selectman O'Neil asked if there was an inventory of Public Works equipment. Mr. Hutchins stated that there is, and he will provide it.

Selectman Bell asked if Public Works was planning to put line striping out to bid prior to Town Meeting. Mr. Hutchins said he will be putting line striping, cemetery mowing, and engineering out to bid after the budget is passed. He is only allowed to spend so much money from the budget prior to it being passed at Town Meeting. They will be ready to go as soon as the budget

is approved.

Concerning equipment, there will be roughly \$42,000 budgeted for a truck with around \$20,000 left over for a new plow truck. Ms. LaCroix noted that going forward they will include preplanning. Ideally looking at a schedule for replacements so that it can be planned over the years. Selectman Bell stated that he is comfortable with the \$115,000 but would like additional details about the sidewalk machine and encouraged Public Works to reach out to other communities to see what they use and their experiences. Mr. Hutchins said that he has been doing this.

Selectman O'Neil asked how many employees are in Public Works. Mr. Hutchins stated there are 15 employees total. Two salaried employees, 13 hourly, and one part-time. The increased budget is due in part to new hires. Mr. Hutchins explained that the overtime process including assigning two employees per week from November through April. If more is needed, they ask for volunteers. This year was particularly high on overtime due to the storms.

Parks & Recreation will appear at the February 13<sup>th</sup> Select Board meeting to discuss their budget.

**Selectman Bunker made a motion to adjourn at 8:37 p.m.; Selectman Staples seconded.**

**VOTE            AFFIRMATIVE    5            MOTION CARRIED**

Minutes respectfully submitted by Leah Giusti.

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Byron Staples - Secretary