SANDWICH FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING  
SANDWICH TOWN HALL  
MARCH 1, 2022 7:00 PM

Others Present: Police Chief Peter Wack, Deputy Chief Jason Keene

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Crossman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of February 15, 2022 were deferred pending additions.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Dunham reported that we will have the final health insurance numbers to use next week for the budget.

POLICE DEPARTMENT PRESENTATION

Sandwich Police Department Budget Review and Dispatch Supervisor Position – Police Chief Peter Wack and Deputy Chief Jason Keene

Chief Wack began the discussion by talking about current staffing numbers and specialized assignments within the Police Department; there are also two shared positions with the Fire Department. There are 4 people out ill, one pending retirement and one person about to attend the Police Academy. He then presented a slide of numbers and types of calls from 2011 to 2021. In response to a question about numbers of calls in the 2021 column not matching the total, he explained that the calls listed in the breakout are the ones of most interest to businesses and residents; the last number is the total number of service calls. Calls that are not broken out include all ambulance calls, juvenile assistance, civil matters, school resource activities, mental health, and wellness checks among others. Regarding the budget, he is asking for increased amounts for equipment repair and maintenance, equipment, cruiser replacement, and office supplies. These reflect increased costs, especially for the cruiser replacement and items associated with being in the new larger building. He actually could use $200,000 for the cruisers, as car manufacturers change designs frequently and the old equipment cannot be used in a vehicle with a different design. Otherwise, he is not asking for any large capital items.

Questions/Comments About the Budget

In answer to a question about transitioning to more energy efficient vehicles, Chief Wack said they are much more expensive – more than $20,000 additional per vehicle. Regarding staffing, the Chief responded that additional staffing, if needed, comes out of the overtime budget, but the department is currently in good shape. There were some questions about hiring and retention. The department is in the Civil Service system, so must hire according to the State list. He would like to hire more Sandwich residents, so the department maintains a list of residents who might be interested. Retaining communication people is more difficult, as some use these positions as stepping-stones to other Town positions. Prior to Covid, the Chief conducted an introductory criminal justice course at the high school to promote interest in policing. They try to reach out, especially when hiring dispatchers. Community policing is a department priority, with funds allocated to specific positions, such as school and community resource officers, specific community activities, and collaboration with the COA. The pattern of crime generally decreased during the pandemic, but there were increases in domestic and mental health issues. The police have worked consistently and successfully over the years to reduce crime.

Communications Supervisor Position Request
Deputy Chief Keene provided an overview of the situation leading to this request. Currently, the lead dispatcher has been both handling calls and performing a wide variety of managerial functions (e.g., hiring, 911 issues, grant applications, making assignments and keeping track of certifications, bidding, quality control, compliance and employee concerns, among others). The work is funded by stipend but has become overwhelming for one person. The person in the new position would work a five-day workweek with regular hours managing the center and articulating with the emergency operations team when activated. Responsibilities would include those previously mentioned for the dispatch supervisor. The department would run with nine full-time dispatchers providing 24-hour coverage; this position represents the addition of a 10th certified person, but dispatching will not be in the position responsibilities. Because fire dispatching is different, regular communication with the fire department will be essential.

Questions/Comments
There was a question about why the cost for this position would not appear partially in the fire department budget as the person would be collaborating with the fire department as well. Also, could the police department have an enterprise fund using revenue from tickets issued. Chief Wack responded that the decision was made years ago when the dispatch centers consolidated to have the expenses in one budget for easier accounting. Regarding an enterprise fund, he said that it is dangerous to have “policing for profit”. When asked about using civilians for detail work, the Chief said that the detail work is paid by the private companies who use it and not the taxpayers; using civilians would require training in such areas as traffic control.

Golf Course Capital Project – Assistant Town Manager Heather Harper, Finance Director William Jennings
Ms. Harper began the presentation by reviewing some information about the property including the purchase in 1999, rationale for the purchase (open space and recreation), and condition of the irrigation system (then 26 years old). The course has had many advantages for the community, is used by people of all ages and offers various golf programs. In addition to the golf course there is a restaurant, the Clubhouse Grille, a croquet field, and the nationally known Jane Frost golf school. At the time of purchase a consultant group, golf Realty Advisor Inc., believed the course was adequate for daily fee-based municipal play; however, the irrigation system should be updated. At this point, the irrigation system is obsolete, and it is difficult to obtain parts if the system breaks down. The irrigation system is a top priority to address in order to keep the course in playable condition and prevent deterioration (see slides in the agenda packet). Ms. Harper then addressed the rational for undertaking this project at this time: 1. There have been record revenues the past few years that have built up in the Enterprise fund; 2. This is a unique golf market, as retirees move to the Cape; 3. Capturing increased interest allows for reinvestment and course improvement. Ms. Harper talked about the project approach including a professional estimate of design and cost based on actual market conditions, professional evaluation of water resources, increasing water use efficiency, potential need for a back-up well, and some new equipment purchases. The most important piece is the irrigation system as costs are increasing.

Mr. Jennings then addressed the financing mechanisms. The project is advantageous at this time due to several factors: There are sufficient retained earnings in the Enterprise Fund ($750,000), the proposed solar canopy (pending results from a study by Eversource) will save approximately $55,000 annually, and interest rates for borrowing are currently low (2.5% conservative estimate). The project will require a 20-year bond to be paid by minor increases in golf course and cart fees (85% of revenue is from fees), the retained earnings and the electricity savings – all of which would come from the Enterprise Fund and not from taxation. Some money will remain in the Enterprise Fund ($300,000) for unforeseen emergencies. Mr. Jennings believes that, although there is a small element of risk, the Enterprise Fund can support the project. If there is a bad revenue year, the operating budget will need to be decreased; Mr. Dunham reported that since 2000, there was only one year where operating costs exceeded revenues. When asked whether the increase in revenues might be related to Covid, he responded that the revenue growth began before the pandemic but has really increased.
the last two years. Mr. Jennings believes that estimates are conservative; two additional safeguards include retirement of land purchase debt in 2031 and a 50% set-aside of room tax revenues for debt-eligible projects.

Questions/Comments
Concern was expressed that this would add to debt in a climate of inflation and taxpayers could not afford more debt. Mr. Jennings explained that this would be paid for out of the Enterprise Fund and would not hit the tax bills. Additionally, the Town’s debt is decreasing annually. At a member’s request, Mr. Jennings discussed how bonding works. He also explained that undertaking debt, especially for infrastructure management, positively affects the bond rating and can result in lower interest rates when projects are bonded. Mr. Jennings and Mr. Dunham clarified the funding details and reassured committee members again that the project will not impact the tax rate and is timely for capturing increased interest in golf and for improving and maintaining a valuable municipal asset. Ms. Harper addressed the time-line – begin in the fall 2022 and work done in the off-season. The course in its current condition is the result of the inability to maintain the system appropriately because of its age. Maintenance of sprinkler heads and other maintenance can be done in-house, a new irrigation system will result in more efficient use of water and will facilitate improved appearance and more enjoyable play.

At this point Ms. Crossman allowed a public comment from a resident who said that young people have become members and are bringing others with them; the irrigation system is the main cause for the course being in its current condition. There is loyalty among members, who have also tried to keep the course looking as good as possible.

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion of Upcoming Meeting Schedule
Mr. Dunham stated that there is no change. The meeting next week will be with Roger Forget, Upper Cape Tech Superintendent, and Dr. Gould and Jon Nelson, School Facilities Director, will be in with consultants about the school capital project. The budget for Upper Cape Tech seems clear; they might be looking for more funds for capital expenses. The following two weeks are open for discussion. Mr. Dunham suggested that Dave Mason could come in and update the Committee on the bigger picture of wastewater issues. The budget has to be approved by April 1st. The final report on the pavement management has been received and is not much different from the draft.

Other Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated for Old Business
None.

NEW BUSINESS

Other Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated for New Business
None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Shea moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Anderson seconded. Approved unanimously.
The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM

Note: Finance Committee meetings are recorded and available for viewing in their entirety on the Sandwich Community Television website: https://sandwichcommunitytv.org

Respectfully submitted,

Susan James

Supporting Documents:
Minutes (3 pages)
Meeting Schedule (1 page)
Police Department (13 pages)
Golf Course Capital (16 pages)