

Woodstock Board of Selectmen Minutes

Wednesday February 9, 2022

4:00 pm

Town Hall Room 1

Special Meeting

1. Call to order: First Selectman Jay Swan called meeting to order at 4:01 pm.

- a. **Present:** First Selectman Jay Swan, Selectman Chandler Paquette, Selectwoman Charlene Perkins Cutler
- b. **Others Present:** Finance Director Karen Fitzpatrick, Mike Dougherty (BOF Chairman), Emergency Management Director Dave Elliot, Fire Marshall Richard Baron, Several Fire Department Members including Travis Blair, Eric Young, Will Skene, Mark Collins, Members of the Public Woody & Dottie Durst and Recording Secretary Amy Monahan

2. Meet with Woodstock Fire Protection Association and Woodstock EMS to discuss FY 23 Budget Requests

- a. Board of Finance Director Michael Dougherty introduced the budget request presented to the Board of Selectmen as self-explanatory. He did explain that the original request had a \$30,000 increase but went back to the departments involved and the increase was cut to \$10,430 creating a total line-item request of \$529,060
- b. Director of Finance Karen Fitzpatrick explained that due to it being a revaluation year and the town under Prop 46 the entire town budget increase cannot exceed \$547,615 including the education budget. She also explained that there are 53 pay periods in FY 23 and that health insurance is set to increase 8% and the cost of pensions increased \$50,000. The government budget increase requests are currently at \$354,000 and only \$109,000 is available. The FY 2023 is a very challenging budget.
- c. First Selectman Jay Swan stated that the Board of Selectmen would look at the budget and decide the best they can but that there are no guarantees.
- d. Emergency Management Director Dave Elliot requested that the Board of Selectmen listen to the plan for the following FY Budget because of the operational changes with WFPA and EMS in the future. Due to the aging membership and decline in volunteers, changes must be made to avoid local departments from closing.
- e. Deputy Chief Travis Blair of Muddy Brook presented the following plan for Fire Services and EMS

Case Need-

It has come to a point in our community that the need for paid fire/EMS personnel has arrived and, in order to provide adequate Emergency Services, steps need to be taken to move forward with a modification to the current stipend program to continue the level of service that we have provided for many years

The main factors that have contributed to the urgency of moving forward are: declining numbers of volunteers, current members aging out and retiring faster than new members are coming in, increased time demand to obtain and maintain certifications, call volume steadily increasing annually, demographic of town residents changing: more people work out of town, typically leave in morning and return at night and are unable to leave jobs in town to assist- these demographic changes make it impossible for people to volunteer even if they want to.

Woodstock Board of Selectmen Minutes

Proposed Plan-

- Add (6) 10 hour shifts per day during the week (5 weekdays): shifts would be 7am to 5pm with 2 personnel at each station. This would cover the majority of time that volunteers are at work and unable to respond to calls.
- FF/EMT minimal level of training – this will provide back up EMS personnel in the event that there are multiple calls simultaneously
- Second ambulance would be housed at station 77 or 75
- Personnel will work a maximum of 3 shifts per week to limit hours to under 30/week or follow state labor laws to stay under part time employment threshold
- \$10,000 stipend for each chief (3 chiefs to work 10 hours per week committed to administrative functions)
- Daytime EMS would be fully covered by FF/EMT personnel
- Funding allocated to daytime would be re-allocated to evenings and weekend EMT shifts
- Emergency Services Administration position would be absorbed by Chiefs and eliminated from budget

Cost for Services as proposed-

- \$20/hr stipend per FF/EMT times 6 positions times 10 hrs/day times 52 weeks/year
 - Total= \$312,000 per year
- \$10,000 per chief
 - Total= \$30,000
- \$8,000 for incidentals, Uniforms, Gear, etc
- Total cost to town as proposed is \$350,000 per year

- f. It was noted by Chief Eric Young that there were 22 no response calls and 2 no response to 2nd call in the Town of Woodstock in the last 4 months due to no personnel. Since the departments have started tracking personnel hours (part of this 2021), there have been 786 hours in town with no EMT on duty and 411 hours with no driver available. The rate paid for EMT has already been increased to \$17.50 and is still not competitive with other towns & job opportunities.
 - i. The potential lawsuits would far exceed any cost that will be spent on providing service.
- g. It was noted that to have a Fire budget in New England less than \$1-1.2 Million is very rare and the Town of Woodstock has been very fortunate.
- h. Under the new plan the fire departments would transition to and operate under one budget instead of 3 separate budgets.
- i. Fire Marshall Richard Baron mentioned the Safer Grant program as an option in the future that could pay 100% of budget for up to 3 years and would allow for building a financial foundation to keep the new plan sustainable.
- j. Director of Finance Karen Fitzpatrick mentioned the option of creating an internal service fund account as a way for the town to save money to start new Fire/EMS program.
- k. Emergency Management Director Dave Elliot mentioned the possible option to earmark marijuana tax monies for Fire/EMS budget.
- l. All present in the room discussed the current lack of volunteers and public/civic engagement and how that impacts our local government as well as possible ways to make changes in the future.

Woodstock Board of Selectmen Minutes

3. Public Comments

- a. Dottie Durst offered her assistance with public relations to the Fire and Rescue Service for the transition and Woody Durst shared that he learned a lot about Woodstock Fire & EMS from attending this meeting.

4. Adjournment

- a. Charlene Perkins Cutler made a ***Motion** to adjourn. ***Seconded** by Chandler Paquette. ***The motion passed unanimously**. The meeting adjourned at 5:31 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Amy Monahan, Recording Secretary. DISCLAIMER: These minutes have not yet been approved by the Board of Selectmen. Please refer to next month's meeting for approval/amendments.