

TOWN OF LAKEVILLE
Select Board Meeting Minutes
April 17, 2024 – 5:30 PM

Lakeville Police Station Meeting Room
323 Bedford Street, Lakeville, MA

On April 17, 2024, the Select Board held a meeting at 5:30 PM at the Lakeville Police Station Meeting Room. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chair Carboni. Members present were Chair Carboni, Member Fabian, Member Day and Member Donahue. Member Candito was attending remotely. Also present was Robert Nunes, Interim Town Administrator, Todd Hassett, Town Accountant, and Tracie Craig-McGee, Executive Assistant to the Select Board and Town Administrator. LakeCAM was recording the meeting for broadcast.

Also present for the meeting were Finance Committee Members: Darren Beals, Lawrence Kostant and Chairman Christopher Plonka. Finance Committee Chairman Plonka called their meeting to order at 5:32 PM.

FY25 Proposed Budget Overview/Update with the following Departments:

Animal Control

David Frates, Animal Control Officer, was present for the discussion. Mr. Frates said he has asked for a new truck to replace the 2002 truck he has due to the frame rotting away. Member Fabian noted that in the last couple of years there has been work done at the shelter and it looks pretty good. The vehicle is his only capital request. Chair Carboni said it looks like there is not much change in the budget and reviewed Mr. Frates' accomplishments for the year.

Town Administrator

Robert Nunes, Interim Town Administrator, was present for the discussion. Mr. Nunes said the Town Administrator's budget funded the five (5) Select Board members. There is \$165,000 for the new Town Administrator, subject to negotiations and a minimal increase to the bottom line. Mr. Hassett said the first line under Select Board expense is up \$10,000 because every other year we need an independent actuarial study done. We are subject to additional audit expenses regarding our Federal Aid through the ARPA program. Chair Carboni asked if the Town is in line with the \$75,000 for FY24. Mr. Hassett said we will likely need a transfer; have about \$16,000 left. Member Fabian said the Board should talk about the Town Administrator proposed salary. Chair Carboni reviewed the accomplishments for the year.

Mr. Beals said there is a big decrease in other contracted services. Mr. Nunes said he cut contracted services. Mr. Beals asked if that is for land lines. Mr. Hassett said he will ask the IT Director. Member Day said there is a redundant line at Town Hall so that may be it. Member Day said the Board discussed potentially having Town Counsel put on two (2) classes next year. Where would that come from? Chair Carboni said we will find out what the cost will be for Town Counsel to come in for those classes. Member Fabian said we get two (2) free every year. Mr. Kostant

said in other general government, the line for electricity and fuel is zeroed out. Mr. Hassett said we combined the utilities for Town Hall, Old Town house and Inspectional Services. Finance Chairman Plonka said the reserve fund was cut to \$75,000. Mr. Hassett said the Board does have an older policy that the reserve fund should be funded between \$100,000 to \$300,000. In recent years, State law has changed and allowed departmental transfers between May 1st to mid-July. We didn't have that several years ago, so our rationale was the extraordinary need from the reserve fund has diminished. The Board can consider moving this up to \$100,000, which is the policy minimum. Member Fabian said now that we can move between the lines we should look at the policy. Mr. Hassett said he has done a preliminary listing on needs for this year for transfer; there is about eight (8) items, one of which we have submitted a reserve fund transfer for. The other seven (7) we have funding from other budgets. At this time, we don't anticipate using more than \$11,000. Mr. Nunes said that \$11,000 is for the MRI Contract for the Town Administrator search. Finance Committee Chairman Plonka said the Finance Committee tabled this from the last meeting as we had a few questions.

Treasurer/Collector

Erika Correia, Treasurer/Tax Collector was present for the discussion. Ms. Correia said the salaries are either COLA or step increases. Under expenses: the banking services and printing costs have increased. We are using a new financial advisor which is a bit costlier. Chair Carboni reviewed the accomplishments. Mr. Beals asked about the Assistant Treasurer salary. Mr. Hassett said this year's budget the salary was put in a step lower than it should have been. It is underfunded this year, but properly funded for next year.

Town Clerk

Lillian Drane, Town Clerk, was present for the discussion. Ms. Drane said the Assistant Town Clerk stayed at Grade c, Step 6 with an increase. She has increased her wage line due to the election workers coming in to assist with vote by mail. Other contracted services had to be increased for shredding on site. She inherited the King Information System, where everything has been organized. They will come in and destroy things that need to go after retention is met. Her voting equipment expense had to increase for seven (7) poll pads and maintenance for six (6) voting machines. They are at least six (6) years old and will need to be replaced. Her registration fee went up, and there is a small increase in printing and paper. Mr. Hassett said we handed out a revised numbers list sheet tonight and there is a \$22,000 part time clerk was added to support the Town Clerk. That is a direct reduction in the floater position in Human Resources. Mr. Beals asked if that was permanent part time. Mr. Hassett said yes. Member Candito asked is the clerk strictly dedicated to the Town Clerk's Office. Mr. Hassett said yes. Ms. Drane said this is something that she was looking for four (4) years ago. Going forward her office is in good shape. Member Day asked about the ARPA capital project request. Ms. Drane said the tabulators are on top of the voting boxes. In 2030 we will have a 4th precinct. The machines are at the end of their life span. The new machines are faster with longer lasting batteries. Member Day asked if they should that be in the capital plan. Ms. Drane said she added it to ARPA. Member Day asked if ARPA doesn't work out, should we add them to the capital plan.

Ms. Drane said Ms. Marshall shared with her a comparison of the pay for Department Heads and Assistants. Her pay has not increased for 10 years; there has only been a COLA increase. Her requested pay increase is close to a 25% increase to keep it in line with the Department Heads. If you look at the population of other towns, their salaries are in the \$90,000s. She is bringing 10 years of experience and State and nationwide certifications. The complexity of her job has increased. In 2022 she brought forward for her position to be appointed and that needs to be looked at due to the complexity of the job. Looking at the past four (4) to five (5) years, you have attracted new employees with higher pay rates, but what about the people doing the job for a while. The class and compensation study was done in August last year, but she doesn't know where we stand with that. She has been a dedicated employee for 24 years and Town Clerk for 10 years. Every year she has asked for an increase, but it is told not this year, although others have received increases. It is time for her this year and feels she has been left behind.

Member Donahue said your pay seems rather low. Are you considering a warrant article regarding an appointed Town Clerk? Ms. Drane said maybe in the fall or April of next year. Member Day said there is definitely a discrepancy from a lot of other department heads and we all see you at Town Hall at nights or on weekends. He would like to discuss fixing this, perhaps spreading the increase out. Member Candito said she would like to see the study in order to see what it came up with for numbers and if we have something that we need to address we should be moving forward as soon as possible. Chair Carboni reviewed the Town Clerk's Office accomplishments.

Human Resources

Lacey Marshall, Human Resources Director, was present for the discussion. Ms. Marshall said salary increases was a step and COLA for the assistant and a 3% COLA for her. She has moved \$22,000 into the Town Clerk's budget for the part time clerk and there is \$8,000 for floaters in Human Resources. Payroll services was \$12,000; she put \$2,000 in to upgrade the services and databases. She listed the services that are under Contracted Service. Under training, her assistant is going to class in September and she is going to training herself. Postage has increased. Advertising went down as she is using LinkedIn; social media and the Town website. She left \$5,000 in for the Town Administrator Search. Office supplies is low, but she is hoping that is where they will stay. She left in state travel for training. Mr. Hassett said the expense budget in FY23 was larger for the classification and compensation study for \$25,000. Member Day asked why we carry a line item for office supplies for each department. Mr. Hassett said there are shared services for copiers, but for State reporting we have to report at a Department level. Ms. Marshall said in her budget she has enough money for the part time clerk for the Town Clerk's Office to start in FY24 and in FY25 that funding can be switched to the Town Clerk so she doesn't have to wait until July to hire. Mr. Hassett said the only risk is not getting the funding from Town Meeting. Chair Carboni reviewed the Department's accomplishments. The monthly newsletter should be added.

Veterans

Wilford Corey, Veterans' Agent, was present for the discussion. Mr. Corey said he used last year's budget to go from. He put in enhancements; his position should have 24 hours per week.

Lakeville is at the point with 375 more veterans that you would need a full time Veterans Agent. He will be retiring and will work until the start of August. Working with the State and Federal procedures is getting ridiculous. It takes 2/3 times the time to do the same job. Chair Carboni said you are recommending the hours for that position be increased to at least 24. Mr. Corey said once the population hits 12,000 it is State law for a full-time agent. Member Fabian asked is that regardless of the number of veterans. Mr. Corey said you could work with another Town to do a district position. Chair Carboni said it is hard to find a Veterans' Service Officer. Member Fabian said you must be a veteran. Mr. Corey said they must be certified as well. You could hire someone to get certified. Mr. Corey was thanked for his work with veterans. Member Day asked about the money from last year for the grave markers. Mr. Corey said he will be getting an invoice for that and will have them by the time he needs them. Chair Carboni said this is to replace those that needed replacement and new ones. Mr. Corey said there are locks on a few cemeteries so we can't get in there. He could use a key. Chair Carboni asked about the databases. Mr. Corey said the Federal government is going into a different system, so he has been using mail for the past year. They are supposed to have it straightened out. The State's system is ridiculous and is problematic and they are requiring more information. Chair Carboni spoke about the Agent's accomplishments.

Council on Aging

Lori Fahey, Council on Aging Director, was present for the discussion. Ms. Fahey said she has two (2) full time staff; three (3) part time van drivers and shares a part time outreach worker and two (2) volunteer SHINE counselors. Expense is level funded with no changes. The salaries show contractual step and COLA raises. She handed out a packet regarding enhancement requests. There is an enhancement for the Administrative Assistant; she is requesting a level increase from Level 2, Step 6 to Level 1, Step 5. The increase allows here another year with a step raise. She reviewed her reasoning for the level increase for her assistant and discussed the FY25 enhancement request form. She reviewed the justification for her own salary enhancement request. Member Fabian said there has not been a change in salary for a bit and as we hire new Department Heads, Ms. Fahey's salary has lagged behind. Member Day said Ms. Fahey was a bit of a victim of the previous Director's salary being too low and it was never reviewed. Member Fabian said the previous Director was given a \$5,000 increase and it is still low. Member Day asked about outreach worker. Ms. Fahey said in the previous year the grant money was used up. This year she requested additional funds. Mr. Hassett said we were at risk at not having the grant renewed, so we funded this line. Most of the outreach worker costs are funded by the State so we don't need the amount that we have in there. Ms. Fahey said we share the worker with Berkley and consortiums usually get the grant funding. Finance Committee Chairman Plonka asked are we allowed to reallocate the funds to cover other salaries. Mr. Hassett said the grant is very restrictive and only to be used for outreach. Member Fabian said she has been working with Ms. Fahey very closely and she has identified sources for funding. Ms. Fahey said formula grant funding was \$14.00 per senior and there are talks of \$15.00 per senior. This money has to benefit the seniors directly.

Member Day said do we anticipate an opportunity to review the classification and compensation study before the budget books are done for Town Meeting. Department Heads were told not to ask for enhancements, so we may get more. Mr. Hassett said we encouraged

enhancements, but told people it was going to be a tight year, but share with the Board what you would like. Mr. Nunes said at a Department Head meeting several weeks ago, he told Department Heads to advocate for their Departments. We have been working on the food pantry extension and \$250,000 has been approved from ARPA. Ms. Fahey said we can use the LeBaron fund with a balance of \$100,000 and formula grant moneys as long as it benefits the seniors. here should be plenty to construct and furnish a food pantry. The previous food pantry was in the custodial closet in the middle of the great room and did not offer any privacy. She hopes that the door on the outside will be locked with a doorbell or appointments will be made for the food pantry. The Friends of the Senior Center are willing to supply a refrigerator/freezer. Member Fabian said seniors are very proud and we need to respect their dignity and she wants people that are struggling to come forward. Ms. Fahey said we had 42 recipients of brown bags in the program before it was stopped. We would be able to start our brown bag program again once a month with the food pantry. Finance Committee Chairman Plonka asked about the funding. Ms. Fahey said she applied for ARPA funding for the construction. She has already spoken to another food pantry worker on doing food drives and we will use the Friends Group. Member Day asked do we need to talk about the assistant's increase now or in the future. Chair Carboni said at a future meeting. She spoke about the accomplishments at the senior center.

Fire Department

Michael O'Brien, Fire Chief, was present for the discussion. Chief O'Brien said salary and wages represents 90% of the budget. There are contractual increases and non-union increases and when salary changes, bonuses and overtime rates change. The budget that is submitted reflects the direct changes and we have trouble with the overtime and we correct programs. This past year, the Select Board was supportive and provided four (4) additional posting using ARPA funds. This budget is destined to be different. It is an analytical in nature budget. His takeaway was that he wanted to right size his budget and make it realistic and have a predictable number. Call volume is the #1 driver; staffing turnover also affects overtime expense, as well as, multiple calls. He does not have a sample size that is measurable; it is too small so he doesn't know what the savings will be. He is caught in limbo to make budget changes on a 3-month sample. Early reviews are positive; reduction in overtime for holidays and call back. If we have a long-term injury or a resignation, savings evaporate. He doesn't spend for the budget; he spends to the mission to protect lives and save property. He will work hard to provide surplus, but doesn't have enough data yet to provide a budget with certainty. He is asking for patience for a good data set and a good situational awareness to make a decent budget that is predictable. Member Candito said overtime has always been a black hole in the budget as it is dictated by necessity. When you spoke to the Select Board about the SAFER Grant and addition of staff, you said this would have a mitigating effect on the overtime. Did you have a new policy put into place in order to ensure you are able to deliver on asking for the new positions. Chief O'Brien said in the past, he maintained three (3) people on duty. Prior to the addition of the new position, anytime someone was absent, it cost overtime. Our off-duty personnel cannot reset and recuperate. With four (4) people on, not every sick day or injury or day off means overtime. It shows a 30% reduction, but there are so many other variables. Additional employees require additional benefits. There will be savings to the Town to help offset the cost of additional employees, but it is just a guess. He needs to analyze this and get it right. Member Candito asked it is the policy now only to replace three (3) employees and not the fourth when on duty. Chief O'Brien said yes. Member Candito said we didn't delve

in to the how it was achieved, but a policy gets us closer to the goals. Member Fabian said the Chief has done a very good job alerting the Board on large incidents in Town, especially with mutual aid. The fact that the fire last weekend did not spread to the adjacent duplex unit has a savings associated with it. When you get to a fire attacking it with four (4) people, the responsibility is on us to try to fund these positions going forward. Chief O'Brien said operationally it has been huge. Member Fabian said hope we get to the point where we see savings. Chief O'Brien said if multiple calls happen, we can now handle two (2) basic calls at the same time or one (1) major call.

Member Fabian said the Town received some opioid settlement money. There is an increase in EMS Supplies. Mr. Hassett said the Town received \$10,000. Member Fabian said is that money being applied anywhere. Mr. Nunes said met with Chiefs and Health Agent. Chief O'Brien came forth with a plan to expend \$5-6,000 to use some of the money prior to June 30th. Chief O'Brien said there is a medication we added to our protocol for overdoses. It takes away those symptoms so they are more likely to consent to treatment. He also wanted to fund leave behind Narcan when we leave the scene. That allows us to give a caretaker Narcan in case of another overdose. We would need approval from our local medical director to purchase the drug and do in service training. Member Donahue asked about contract specialization? Chief O'Brien said there are EMT bonus for the level of medical training: Basic EMT, Paramedic and Community Para Medicine. We are able to do medical screening. Member Donahue asked about a cap. Chief O'Brien said it is based on base pay. All of our employees are required to become paramedics. Member Donahue asked about the increase of \$20,000 per year. Chief O'Brien said it depends on the pay rates. It does not capture the four (4) new employees. When they are brought in there would be an adjustment. A discussion occurred regarding community para medicine and the cost and liability to the Town.

Member Day said on overtime FY 24 says \$150,000 but the budget before was \$110,000. Is it going to be \$150,000? Mr. Hassett said there was an amendment to the budget in the fall. When the tax rate was set that is where we say this is our original budget. There is always some budget that requires adjustment. Don't go by Annual Town Meeting; wait until we set the tax rate. Member Day said the last report said \$101,000 was spent by the end of March, which was 67%. He wanted to see a benefit in the budget. He recommends moving \$25,000 to the reserve fund with the policy that the Chief may have to come back. Chief O'Brien said he has not considered the specialization bonus for paramedics or if he loses an employee. His spending is based on the need to get out the door and do the job. He won't put people on or call people back in because he has money left. If you think the trends and data is adequate to make that sort of cut, he can't guarantee he won't be back looking for money. The mission is what drives the budget. Member Day said his recommendation is to deduct \$25,000 and put it into the reserve fund to see if the additional employees affect the budget. Chief O'Brien said he wants one year of wiggle room to figure out the budget. Chair Carboni said if we do end up moving the money into the reserve fund, we will be able to monitor it. When you are recruiting to fill positions, what is the level of training they have? Your line for training has gone up. Are we funding the Fire Academy? We did a payback program. Chief O'Brien said that became an obstacle to recruitment and retention and some did not accept the position. We don't have that many paramedics available. Member Fabian said we don't want them coming here to be educated and then leave. Chief O'Brien said in a normal job market it is beneficial, but in this job market it is an obstacle. Chair Carboni said

it seems that we may need to take a step back and look at the current situation for hiring. If this is what the market is looking for, what do we need to do to adjust to be able to attract candidates. Member Fabian said maybe it is time to revisit that; it is a 50/50 shot on whether they will stay. So many were leaving when we paid for training. Chief O'Brien said the academy is free; the cost is covering their position. That has been decreased by the staffing you gave me. The line item is overtime for training. Once a month the call firefighters and firefighters are paid 1.5 times for training. That line item has been stagnant for a time and the line item is out of whack to keep pace with the pay rates. That change is internal, taking away from call firefighter callback so that line has been reduced and been moved to training. Member Candito said there are incentives for training for different levels for continuous education. Chief O'Brien said there is a degree incentive; NFA certification incentive; and a sick leave bonus for not using it. Firefighters don't lose retirement time when they leave a Town. Towns bring them in at the same pay right and carry over retirement. Our Town does not pay for paramedic training and they must complete it within 24 months or they are dismissed. Our expense for new employees is equipment and covering shifts while someone is at the academy. Traditionally this was very impactful, but the expense has become significantly less.

Mr. Nunes asked about the ambulance fee estimate of \$1,000,000 a year. Chief O'Brien said we will hit \$1,000,000. The Board asked to reduce the number of trips of our ambulance going out of town, especially to Middleborough. When we revealed to Middleborough the revenue we made off of their residents, the private company they employ added another ambulance. We are down about 45% in our trips to Middleborough, but that is a significant loss to the revenue. We received a rate change and a rate change from the State in Medicare. Member Donahue asked would a successful community paramedic program reduce the ambulance revenue. Chief O'Brien said it would reduce the number of transports and workload, but it has to generate revenue. Chair Carboni reviewed the Department accomplishments. Chief O'Brien said we are on pace to have \$2 million in grant opportunities before the end of the year. Member Candito asked who was the primary grant writer. Chief O'Brien said Lt. Silvia works on Federal grants and he does the State applications.

New Business

Chair Carboni noted the budget meeting on April 18th and the Departments being discussed.

Old Business

There was no Old Business discussed.

Finance Committee Business

Reserve Fund Transfer

Finance Committee Chairman Plonka said there is a request to transfer \$11,000 from the Reserve Fund to cover the costs associated with the Town Administrator Search. Mr. Kostant asked why can't we do the search. Mr. Nunes said many communities hire search firms as they have a network and a larger outreach and contacts. We did solicit proposals and received two (2)

proposals and MRI was the low bidder. It is expensive, but they put in a lot of time. Member Fabian said it is really time restrictive to review 50 resumes. They go in and do the first look. The last time the applicants were reduced to 15-18. They will do a first interview and help with background checks and assign essay questions so you get a lot of information from those questions that you might not capture in an interview. Member Day said they know the current market and give salary information. They are also talking to people who may be looking. They cut down on so much legwork that we don't have time for. Member Candito said they also provide an unbiased opinion of the candidate. Mr. Kostant said they are still presenting multiple candidates. He sees this as a skilled survey situation. Member Fabian said they also attend the actual interviews and stress an equitable search. Chair Carboni said the pool of candidates is shallow. We want to make sure that the people that know the market can ask the question if they are interested. Member Day said they have a guarantee in case the applicant chosen doesn't stay for a certain time.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Kostant and seconded by Mr. Beals, it was:

VOTED: To approve the transfer of \$11,000 from the Reserve Fund.
Unanimous in favor.

Discuss possible vote for April 3, 2024 meeting minutes

This item was tabled.

Adjournment

Upon a motion made by Mr. Kostant and seconded by Mr. Beals, it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting at 8:05 PM.
Unanimous in favor.

Upon a motion made by Member Fabian and seconded by Member Donahue, it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the Select Board Meeting at 8:06 PM.
Unanimous in favor.

List of documents provided at the Select Board Meeting of April 17, 2024

1. Agenda page