

ALS Study Committee
March 1, 2018
7:00PM

Minutes

Present: Gus Murby, Chief Hollingshead, Chad Boylan, Brendan McNiff, Neal O'Connor, Jack Wolfe, Steve Caskey, Holly Rand, Kristine Trierweiler

Agenda:

Kristine will complete the outstanding minutes for the next meeting.

Review/Discuss FY19 Budget Requests

Committee discussed the override possibilities for the ATM including operating override and capital budget operating override.

Committee reviewed the FY19 Budget Request and associated costs for the addition of 4 Paramedics to Fire Department Staff.

Jack Wolfe asked if the current contract increases were included in the analysis. Kristine and Gus explained contract negotiations are ongoing at this time.

Currently the Town sends out \$87,000 in fees to mutual aid for Walpole and Westwood. If the town can bring that in house, we may continue to send some fees out, but we would capture more of that \$87,000. The Town can increase revenues including \$50,000 associated to changes in dispatch procedures.

Committee discussed revenue coming in and why that changes. Brendan said it should be about 70% ALS calls going forward. If call comes in today and says someone is on sidewalk and is unconscious at time of dispatch. Police can dispatch and bill ALS. The Federal Government said we are going to support cost of readiness at time of dispatch, we will pay for belief that call is ALS at time of dispatch.

Brendan has found lost revenue by not billing at ALS and then another town intercept takes the patient and they take 100% of the revenue, if Medfield take the patient with mutual aid medic on the truck then they take 50% and Medfield gets 50%.

Gus stated that he reminded the BOS that the ALS committee is looking at the most cost effective way of providing ALS in no less of a service than we had prior and we know that it has to come at a cost. There is \$150,000 identified in revenue that we did not discuss last year at Town Meeting.

Jack Wolfe stated the Warrant Committee is discussing that if all the over rides go through then it is minimum of 7.0% increase on home owner and \$850 increase to the tax bill with just those projects alone. School Committee has made it clear that they are at a 5.92% increase and will not come down. Warrant Committee is stating 4% increase. If you add all the operating school costs, plus school health care costs, plus the OPEB then that makes the school 68% of the town's budget.

Gus stated that this committee is the first to reflect how new hires will be calculated and shown when discussing personnel. If anything comes from this we will set the bar about how the Town looks at this.

Neal O'Connor asked what is the lag time of hiring? If there is approval why does it take so long to hire and fulfill this plan. Gus stated that first we would like a new Fire Chief to endorse this plan, finalize the contract for the Union, and then begin July 1 once appropriations would take place.

Jack Wolfe stated that Gus phrased it well that this is an insurance policy and Jack, unfortunately, thinks the cost is too high. Jack also thinks it's not okay for the new Fire Chief to not have seen this proposal before they are hired.

Steve Caskey questioned that if ultimately the end point is six (6) hires total, what if the State says you can't do the waiver. Brendan said it's a small risk, has never seen medical control not give or extend a waiver. Gus said it is 3-5 years out, we can't predict that, there will be some assumptions that have to be made. What if all of the Fire Fighters could take out health care and then we have underestimated that cost as well. Steve's concern is that what if we are forced to hire the 8th person without the swap for a retirement that we are planning on happening. Brendan stated that he feels with two medics and an intermediate it can be done.

Jack discussed the impacts on the budget today and going forward for the next 5-10 years. Gus stated that town's attempt to be pro active now dealing with the capital budget is going to have an impact. The issue is if we had that 10 years ago we would not have gone as many years with our older buildings, we would have put more money in our capital assets. Need to look at programming and private funding for some of the buildings. OPEB and pension is an outstanding liability that is going on the balance sheet next year. Warrant Committee is being aggressive on issues like ALS because we are looking at the total picture of the tax impacts.

Kristine stated she is concerned about the timeline so that the Committee has enough time to start presenting this information to the public.

Committee discussed the requirements of Region 4, which is two (2) medics in truck unless you get waiver, and everyone gets the waiver, good for 3 years, can be extended, at the end of the 3 years. We can ask that question of medical control.

Neal asked what happens if four years from now it all changes and have hires we didn't need to make. He suggested that we talk to the new Medical Director. Chad said that is too many what-ifs in the scenarios, and that it would not change as quickly as that.

Gus asked the Committee to look at the FY19 Budget Request; committee discussed the financial pressures on the Town when looking at this decision. If we have a good recommendation it should be presented. Look at first year and then the follow up. Committee will need to address what happens if the vote is no at Town Meeting.

Kristine updated the committee on response from the RFI. Armstrong bid first year for \$850,000 and Fallon first year of \$895,000. No other responses.

Gus has reached out again to Dover, it is clear they are not interested at this time. Sherborn is not interested at Selectmen and Town Administrator level but the Fire Chief is interested in a regional approach. At this time not pursuing other towns. Dover and Sherborn appear to be happy being served by intercept with Natick/Framingham and other neighboring communities.

Paramedic Labor Cost Model: 97,234.

Gus stated that for the first time this Committee looked at all the costs of an employee. At the last meeting, there was much discussion about Jack's letter that was read by Tom Marie. The hours spent on ALS calls versus the amount the new medics would be paid and the small amount of time delivering ALS services. I know there is more to this work than just ALS calls, Gus stated he would be willing to bet the call volumes with Walpole and Westwood would be higher than Medfield is now when they made their decision to go to ALS. They have commercial development so less demanding hurdle for those towns than it is for Medfield.

Gus stated he views it as a low probability, high risk scenario. The need for ALS may not happen to you but if it does then it's life threatening. It's a risk issue and an insurance policy. You hope you don't have to make a claim against any insurance policy. It is legitimate to talk about the rate of the insurance policy or make a decision not to carry said insurance policy.

Brendan asked if there would be a change to the ISO rating. It's a 4 rating now, and based on 3 factors, water, emergency communications and fire department. Chief Hollingshead reviewed the most current ISO rating and how it is established. The biggest deficiencies are credit for training and deployment, since only 2 FF/EMT's leaving the station. Committee should ask an insurance agent to discuss the reduction in insurance rates as a possibility if the department moved to three on a shift.

Holly Rand suggested we start having meetings for educating the public before the town meeting. Gus agreed, but we need a full endorsement of recommendations from the Committee before we do those meetings.

Jack explained that he has a deep personal interest because in 3 weeks he will be 80 years old. He wanted to acknowledge that he could be a regular user of ALS at some point, however he is opposed to the cost. Jack also stated that there is a majority of the Warrant Committee that is opposed to this as well.

Jack stated this is a difficult year and they are going to continue. Question is what do we want to pay for an insurance policy. Right now this is too high of a price. Jack stated he was one of the proponents that pushed this to a committee. Jack met with Chief Kingsbury and was told that it would be unlikely that the Town would lose mutual aid. There has been zero discussion about losing mutual aid from any administration, Jack hears it from the fire fighters but have we heard from any town that we will lose it?

Committee discussed Jack's concerns about utilization of the paramedics. Based on the calls the new medics will have under utilization of hours. Jack has a tremendous respect for the department but the new medics will only have a 13% utilization rate and he will have to tell Town Meeting that 87% of the time they will be under utilized. The issue is also skill level and with a low utilization rate based on ALS calls then how do you preserve those skills? Jack stated it works well for Walpole and Westwood to have them practice their skills in Medfield.

When the town hires people you are adding someone permanently. The Town does not let them go. It's a huge decision permanently on the tax rate, which is why the Warrant Committee wants to add people cautiously. All departments in the Town should be adding them judiciously.

Last year Chief Kingsbury told Jack that all his call and permanent fire fighters were very dedicated. Jack feels that moving to medics, it will diminish the use of the call fire fighters and we will lose them over time. Jack offered the following recommendation to the committee.

1. I am taking a risk to put this off on mutual aid, but take more time to regionalize. Why are Dover and Sherborn not in danger of losing mutual aid but we are in Medfield?
2. Second option is to ask Westwood to do it on mutual aid but pay per call, which would still be less expensive than this proposal.

Steve Caskey informed Jack that the Committee has gone down this road of regionalization. Steve personally went to the Town Administrators to present the options. He offered to meet with the Board of Selectmen of those other towns, and invited the Boards of Selectmen to our meetings. They don't want to come to the

table. Steve was skeptical about those reports so he met with them himself and he can concur they can't be bothered with regionalization at this time.

Brendan discussed why regional approach to ALS is actually lower level of service from what the town had. There is a longer response time; you are increasing the time for care to reach the patient, sometimes missing the critical access patient time. The town unfortunately missed the boat when Leonard Morse closed. It would have made sense for Millis, Medway and Medfield to join together for a regionalization approach. Dover and Sherborn just don't have anything to bring to the table to Medfield. The call volumes are low and they are not interested. Millis hired paramedics, one more hire in July and up and running at July. Millis will have a staff of 13.

Gus stated that he told the committee that the starting assumption was that ALS would be at or above the level we had in town. If ALS is necessary or not is not a debate for this Committee that is a question for Town Meeting.

Jack stated the Warrant Committee wanted consideration for operations and we did not say it has to be at the Norwood Hospital Level. Stating that the Committee was looking at ALS level of service is a shift in what the warrant committee expected this committee to do.

Kristine disagreed with Jack stating that the charter for the Committee was available at Town Meeting and it is clearly stated that the Committee will investigate ALS. the Charter was set out by the Board of Selectmen as the committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The make up of the Committee as well as the Charter was included on the fact sheet at the town meeting.

Gus stated the next step down from having ALS would be to continue the non-mutual aid option that we currently utilize. If we are told to find a no cost option in July, the only answer would be just keep mutual aid the way it is.

Chief Hollingshead and Jack discussed the numbers for further clarification. Jack would like to be shown exactly how the new four people will be utilized so he can justify the cost. Chad stated he wasn't sure what Jack thought the Fire fighters do in a day, they should be doing more than they are, put them back into the schools, the COA, there is training. Maintaining the building, apparatus, etc. are all duties that have to be done in a fire station.

Jack stated today we have a strong fire chief, strong call department, the permanent fire fighters are fully employed. He is not questioning that, but what will you do with the new Fire Fighters. It has to be put in numbers what they will do every day and how many calls. Chad stated that being a Fire Fighter is more than just the number of calls.

Gus thanked Jack for coming to the meeting, these are well thought out arguments, that the Committee needs to consider before Town Meeting. We recognize that when recommending to increase staff by 50% it raises questions.

Jack stated that the Committee would be asked to come to the Warrant Committee to discuss the warrant article and related funding request. Committee discussed the process of Town Meeting and how a change would occur to the operating budget going forward.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 PM.