

**Ashland Budget Committee
Draft Minutes
October 30, 2013**

Budget Committee Members – Present [9 voting]

<i>Mark Scarano</i>	<i>David Ruell</i>	<i>Fran Newton</i>
<i>Christine Cilley</i>	<i>David Toth</i>	<i>Ingrid Heidenreich</i>
<i>Mardean Badger</i>	<i>Sandra Coleman</i>	<i>Jeanette Stewart</i>
<i>Renee Liebert, Alternate (non-voting)</i>		<i>Normand DeWolfe, Alternate (non-voting)</i>

Board of Selectmen -- Present

<i>Jeanette Stewart</i>	<i>Normand DeWolfe</i>	<i>Phil Preston</i>
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Town Employees -- Present

Paul Branscombe, Town Administrator
Steve Heath, Fire Chief

Members of the Public -- Present

Eli Badger, Steve Felton

The Budget Committee meeting was called to order by Mark Scarano, Chair, at 6:00 pm.
[*Jeanette Stewart also called the Selectboard Meeting to order at 6:00 pm.*]

→ Review of Fire Department Proposed Budget with Steve Heath

A 2014 Proposed Budget Narrative for the Fire Department was written by Chief Heath and provided to the Budget Committee by Mr. Branscomb.

01-4215-10-390 – Ambulance contract: No change to the current contract. This is the final year of the contract – will need to renegotiate. This was a 3 year contract.

01-4220-20-392 – Fire Department Mutual Aid: Board of Directors vote on the amount. Figure of \$19,402.33 plus \$100 for Association Dues was from the last quarterly meeting. Board of Directors were meeting tonight and Chief Heath said that he would probably have the final figure the next day. The Selectmen had reduced the amount in their budget to \$18,530. Ms. Stewart said the amount should be \$19,502.33.

01-4220-10-110 – Fire Department Salaries: Chief Heath is requesting \$111,900.00. The Selectmen reduced the figure to \$95,000. The increase depends on call activity and is also due to a request to increase the Chief's hours to 32/week. Ms. Stewart commented that the Town has voted against having a full time fire chief. Ms. Badger commented that 32 hours is not full time. Ms. Newton and Ms. Stewart agreed that they would like to see an increase in the Chief's hours. Chief Heath remarked that the person who is in the position needs the time – the requirements of the position are the same regardless of the hours allotted and it is hard to keep up with only 11 hours/week.

Ms. Coleman asked how would the cost of increasing the Chief's hours to 32 compare with the cost of having someone called in to respond to a call. Chief Heath said that he ran the numbers and it's comparable to having someone come in to respond to a call and manage the equipment we have. He said that the Selectmen are receptive to different ideas. Ms. Coleman asked what the Chief would do if his time were expanded to 32 hours. Chief Heath responded that there are inspections that need to be done. He's supposed to visit every place of assembly twice/year, but he's lucky to get there once a year. He needs to file reports. Incident reports are to be done monthly. He could research and write grants. Equipment needs maintenance. Ms. Coleman asked how many hours the Chief currently puts in even though he is only paid for 11. Chief Heath responded that he doesn't keep track, but it is certainly more than 11.

Mr. Preston commented that the Selectmen did not want to obligate the Town to anything this year. This increase should not appear in the budget, but instead in a Warrant Article since there is some history behind it with respect to previous warrant articles for a full time Chief failing. The Selectmen don't want the Town to think that the

Board is making decisions for them. Ms. Stewart and Mr. DeWolfe concurred. Ms. Newton asked if there was a warrant article being written, and Ms. Stewart responded that they are working on figuring it out on how to have 32 hours for the Chief without an increase in the budget. Mr. Scarano asked if accommodations could be made. Chief Heath responded that the roof and ladder truck are paid off. Ms. Stewart stated that the concern of the Town is the cost, not the amount of hours, so if the budget doesn't increase, then it's a good idea. Mr. Ruell asked if there could be a warrant article for the \$16,900 difference. Chief Heath stated that the concern with a warrant article is that articles asking for money are often defeated. The last warrant article was for full time at \$80,000. Rental properties also vote against it because then he would have time to make the inspections of those properties. Mr. Scarano asked if the position would have benefits. Ms. Stewart said that since the position is not full time, it would not have benefits. Ms. Badger stated that there is value and importance in the equipment, in record keeping, in doing inspections – it is important to approve an increase in the Chief's hours.

With regard to salaries, Chief Heath remarked that there are no raises. Some of the money from that line is returned every year. Big events send it over. If there is a lot left over then it was a good year incident wise. Also pays for training, work details, inspections. Not many personnel are getting a step increase. Ms. Stewart asked how often the department personnel are evaluated. Chief Heath responded that it is supposed to be done annually and should be done more aggressively.

01-4220-10-410 – FD Electricity: Chief Heath said that he expects the same. They have a significant amount left over, but don't know what the rates will be, so it's hard to figure.

01-4220-10-620 – Uniform Protective Gear: Mr. Scarano asked why there was a \$1000 difference between the Chief and the Selectmen. Mr. DeWolfe responded that only \$2,688 had been spent so far this year. Chief Heath responded that he has spent more money since the figures on the budget worksheet were put together – he has spent \$4,279 as of this date and he has some outstanding. If something gets damaged, it needs to be replaced, so the money needs to be on this line. Ms. Newton asked about the grant to replace PPE older than 10 years. Chief Heath said that not all of our equipment is older than 10 years, so the grant didn't apply. They have changed the guidelines, so he will reapply. He did not know what the Town's portion of the grant would be. Chief Heath remarked that he got a grant in July for \$10,000 for rope rescue training. The Town's portion of that grant is \$500. Mr. Scarano asked if any other money would be spent before the end of the year. Chief Heath replied that there is a spending freeze, so maybe nothing more would be spent. Ms. Heidenreich asked about the cost to replace gear. Chief Heath replied that it's \$2600 for coat, pants and boots, and \$3500 for a complete set of new gear.

01-4220-10-635 – FD Vehicle Fuel: Mr. Scarano remarked that the figure was the same as last year. Chief Heath said it's hard to predict what rates will do.

01-4220-10-390 – Contract Services: Mr. Preston noted a big increase in this line. Chief Heath responded that the items on this line came out of other lines (equipment, buildings & grounds, chief's expenses & training). He felt it is more accurate to have these items under contracted services instead of their previous locations within the budget.

01-4220-10-681 – Physicals: Chief Heath stated that usually new people get physicals. Personnel should be getting physicals every 2 years, but we're currently not doing that. This line is used for EMT clinical experience – participants need to get inoculations prior to the program. It also covers flu shots. Ms. Stewart asked if physicals are required. Chief Heath said that he can require it. He doesn't anticipate any more spending on this line this year.

01-4220-10-740 – Equipment: Mr. Scarano remarked only \$4427 out of \$15,125 spent so far this year. The Selectmen have reduced the line from \$10,000 to \$7,500 – why? Ms. Stewart said that it wasn't spent, so they prorated it – trying to make cuts. Chief Heath stated that there's a lot that hasn't been done. He only replaced things that were in really bad shape. Has spent \$9,860.63 to date and had a gas meter replaced at about \$1700 additional.

Mr. Ruell asked about the cost of the Rescue Boat. Chief Heath replied \$4400 and stated that the Oceanid is very useful and can be used in water or ice rescue. The Zodiac (which we have now) is not good on swift water.

01-4220-80-650 Bldg & Grounds: Mr. Scarano remarked that there has been variability on this line. Ms. Stewart stated that \$5780 is to convert the exhaust system in the building. Chief Heath commented that they went with the low bid when the system was installed and there are problems with the system. They tried to hold the manufacturer of the system accountable, but to no avail. There are 7 units to fix, and they will begin with the ones on the upper floor this year and do the rest next year.

Mr. Ruell commented that they used to have a janitor. Chief Heath replied that they no longer have a janitor. The Chief and the department take care of the station. It's both fiscally responsible and promotes pride in the station

Mr. Scarano asked about sharing services with other towns/departments. Chief Heath responded that he is doing ladder testing with Holderness. Also does large orders for equipment with other departments when this presents a cost savings. Mr. Scarano was wondering about combining departments. Chief Heath responded that mutual aid is an example of towns working together.

Chief Heath said that currently salaries are December to December. He would like to change that to a calendar year to make it easier. Formerly the guys were paid once per year in December, then went to quarterly. The guys are more receptive to doing it monthly, and he can handle it with this year's budget. Will close out December in 2013 instead of 2014. Ms. Stewart agreed that monthly is better.

Mr. Scarano asked for Chief Heath's thoughts on a proposed Warrant Article asking for \$82,000 for a capital reserve fund. Chief Heath responded that he put together a plan and tried to prioritize. Need to inspect anything over five years old and to evaluate the truck. Estimate that a replacement vehicle will be \$574,000, but it will probably be less than that. Chief Heath said that there is no warrant article for a new vehicle this year, but they do want to replace Engine 1. Mr. Ruell asked if this was the only large expense over the next 10 years. Chief Heath said that they will also be looking to replace the Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA). Currently they are replacing parts that wear out, which is more cost effective. Mr. Scarano stated that he thought the CIP had recommended the SCBA be in the budget for 2016. Mr. Felton said that that had not been decided.

Mr. Scarano stated that next year there is a paving request with Park & Rec and the school for \$32,000. Mr. Felton stated that this was dependent upon coordination of the departments.

Ms. Heidenreich stated that the ladder truck is being paid off this year. CIP and Budget documents say that it will be paid off in 2014. Mr. Felton said he had July 2014 in his notes. Ms. Stewart asked Mr. Branscomb to please check. Mr. Ruell said that in the Annual Report under long term debts it says July 2014 – assuming that's correct.

Mr. Scarano thanked Chief Heath for his time.

Mr. Scarano turned to the proposed warrant articles, but Ms. Stewart said that the Selectmen had not had a chance to discuss them or vote on them. It was agreed to discuss the warrant articles at the following meeting.

Next meeting is on November 7, 2013, 6:00 pm, at the Elementary School Library. Water & Sewer will present their budget. Ms. Cilley volunteered to take the minutes at that meeting.

A motion was made (Ms. Cilley) and seconded (Ms. Stewart) to adjourn the Budget Committee meeting at 7:24 pm. *[The Board of Selectmen adjourned their meeting at the same time.]*

Minutes taken by Renee Liebert