

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING HELD AND BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2020 AT 6:30 P.M. VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (PER EXECUTIVE ORDER OF THE GOVERNOR OF CONNECTICUT)

Public access made available through live streaming on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4_xey3QiJmwe57R_6K94Dw
Public comments accepted at Comments@cheshirect.org and at 203-271-6638.
Video will be available on Channel 14 and on demand at www.cheshirect.org as soon as possible.

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Timothy Slocum, Vice Chairman; David Borowy, James Jinks, Sylvia Nichols, Peter Talbot, David Veleber, Donald Walsh.
Staff: Sean M. Kimball, Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Asst. Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director; Fire Chief Jack Casner; Police Chief Neil Dryfe; Deputy Police Chief Brian Pichnarcik; Keith Darin, Building Inspector; Louis Zullo, Asst. Town Manager/Personnel

**3. Proposed FY 2020-2021 Operating Budget, Annual Capital Budget
Five Year Capital Expenditure Plan**

Chairman Oris opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Budget Committee Chairman Borowy welcomed everyone to the meeting, and stated the meeting would begin with a follow-up on matters from last week's meeting.

Town Manager Kimball explained that there were questions related to health insurance claims with respect to COVID-19 related claims. The Cigna consultants did analysis based on population and trends, and gave a preliminary estimate.

Town and Dept. of Education COVID-19 Estimated Cost Impact through August 4, 2020

Mr. Zullo reviewed the consultant's analysis using a model with numbers put in, covered employees, geographical cost factor and industrial factor, infected rate, infected population. Mr. Zullo cited Column C - \$395,000, Column B - \$13,000. Cheshire (Town and BOE) is at the best estimate; there is no employee or family member hospitalized. People are avoiding procedures, i.e. hip replacements and other types of surgeries). For three (3) months the Town has avoided costs; June, July, August could see some claims. The recommendation is to proceed cautiously, and the time line is the end of May. The April claims report will be ready in May; March report shows no variances; April could be the first month with numbers. People are still getting prescriptions, are still being hospitalized. With postponement of elected surgery we will wait for the April numbers. Cigna may run a special COVID report showing related claims and doctor coded. Cheshire is in the optimal group; the data is Town and BOE; 725 employees are covered; there could be activity in the first quarter of 2020-21.

Concierge Proposal and Tel-A-Health

Mr. Zullo reported the Concierge Plan is not being seen much in the public sector. There is an increase in telephone health time, and people seem comfortable with this procedure, as there is no time off from work and interaction time is convenient. There is a provision in the Cigna coverage for tel-a-health and it is less costly.

Regarding the Concierge Plan, Mr. Oris did not expect there would be much use as compared to the private sector, which has seen benefits and significant savings. He asked that staff check into larger companies using this plan and get information for the Council. Mr. Oris thanked Mr. Zullo for looking into this plan.

Mr. Zullo advised the consultant believes there are high administrative costs to the Concierge Plan. Town staff will continue to research the plan and report to the Council.

POLICE DEPARTMENT, CHIEF DRYFE AND CHIEF PICHNARCIK (page 79)

Chief Dryfe informed the Council of a CPD retirement as of May 23, 2020.

Overview – CPD has 48 police officers; 3 officers are still in training; 49 officers have been requested since 2006, but never funded; CPD has 13 civilian employees, 8 dispatchers (1 still in training); 1 Administrative Assistant, 3 Records Secretaries, and 1 I.T. Coordinator.

CPD maintains membership on two (2) joint regional teams – Emergency Response Team (Cheshire and Wallingford); and Accident Reconstruction Team (Cheshire/Naugatuck/Wallingford/Wolcott/Watertown/Plymouth/Middlebury).

Budget Breakdown - Salaries - \$5.568M in salaries; 92% of the budget; Non-salaries - \$495,072, 8% of the budget; Total \$6.063M; 5.82% increase. CPD switched CAD vendors last year, and no maintenance fees were charged (vs. prior vendor fees of \$63,000); this year the fee will be about \$24,000.

Elim Park Gift Account – contribution of \$165,000 annual gift; these funds are used to cover some expenditures, all of which would have to be made up from the General Fund. This gift account supplements the department expenditures including:

- Supplemental vehicle budget/equipment/lighting etc.
- Taser/weapon replacement and training
- Supplements training costs; out-of-state training
- SRT-ammunition/new vests/equipment
- Building Maintenance
- Bike and ATV Patrols equipment
- AED and Narcan
- Community Engagement Activities (RAD, Police Explorers, Citizens Academy, DUI Prevention Equipment and Education, Fall Festival items, Coffee w/a Cop)

Police Vehicle Rentals – CPD rents cruisers to vendors w/police officer on duty at construction and other work sites at \$25 per hour. Revenue last year \$120,000; projected revenue FY 20-21 is \$140,000 or just a little less. Construction season work has decreased; CPD officers are working on RT 10 where the State has begun a milling project. Chief Dryfe stated vendors are more comfortable having a police cruiser (w/blue and white lights flashing) at their work site w/a police officer.

Capital Budget – Chief Dryfe stated the CPD fleet is in good shape. He reviewed the requests in the first year of the CEP, and commented on the significant issues with Ford Motor Company for police vehicles, including price increase, some recalls. Four (4) vehicles; four-wheel Chevrolet Tahoes police package; cost is less than \$500 of the redesigned Ford Police Interceptor; last year four (4) vehicles were approved; two (2) Tahoe SUVs arrived last Friday at CPD; The Tahoe has larger passenger area and storage capabilities. (photographs displayed) The Tahoe will be marked and outfitted into the patrol fleet; Police Officers will drive the new Tahoe vehicles, provide input and feedback on performance etc. This will help CPD make a decision on whether to go with Tahoes rather than a Ford vehicle. Chief Pichnarcik clarified that the Ford Explorer is an all-wheel drive platform; the Tahoe is electrical two-wheel/four-wheel, and there should be gas mileage improvements with the Tahoe vehicles.

Potential COVID-19 Impact –

- CPD has seen a drop in revenue from cruiser rentals and reduced work sites hiring officers and a cruiser.
- Shift to 12 hours per shift work schedule; this shift change has not been undertaken yet; cost estimate is \$60,000 to \$80,000 overtime
- As of now, no police officer has tested positive for COVID; there have been some family members (wife) symptomatic; tests results took 9 days and were negative; officer this past week became ill w/flu like symptoms, was tested and had negative results in 3 hours.
- Crossing Guards are not on duty at schools crossings; savings of \$1,663 per week.

ANIMAL CONTROL

Chief Dryfe cited the budget information for this department; one full-time employee and one part-time employee; salary budget of \$103,895; non-salary - \$8,700.

CPD is staff liaison to the Prison Advisory Committee and Public Safety Commission; total budget of \$2,200.

In response to a question on the retirement and potential savings with hiring a lower paid police officer, Chief Dryfe said the difference is \$24,000 annually, and this is already in the salary line on page 84.

Mr. Oris wants a minimum budget and financial impact on taxpayers, and asked about savings without affecting public safety, and delay in hiring the 48th police officer.

Chief Dryfe explained that CPD extra items come out of the gift account with 92% of the operating budget related to salaries. Some small things could be cut from the budget, and Mr. Kimball already made cuts to the CPD budget. The hiring of 48th officer will not happen right away. The Police Academy is closed until June; all entry level testing is cancelled; Academy is conducting virtual classes; and CPD will not have a newly hired police officer in the first quarter of the new fiscal year. Until the retired officer does not show up for work on his retirement day, CPD will not hire a new police officer. The budget assumes the salary difference, but does not include the gap.

School Resource Officers – SROs are redeployed; some are working at the school where there are activities; they are also out on patrols.

Chief Dryfe noted people are cancelling vacation time; there would usually be family vacation time during school breaks; some sick time was used a few weeks ago, with a 14 day quarantine; this is being tracked as a COVID related expense for possible reimbursement.

Overtime – this is trending in the right direction; people are not taking time off; vacations are cancelled; the projections will show a little savings in overtime expenses.

Two police officers graduated last year, both started work July 1, 2019; CPD was three (3) officers short; these two officers were on the books, but were at the Academy and unavailable to work patrol; they are still in field training, cannot work overtime or take a cruiser out alone.

Gas/Diesel Line Item – this line item is reduced to \$60,000, and Mr. Oris asked about further savings. Chief Dryfe explained the Town purchases gas for CPD on a calendar year contract. Mr. Jaskot said the contract is through a consortium; it goes to the end of the year; he will check prices and compare to current pump gas costs, and provide information to the Council. The Town does not pay taxes on gas.

Chief Pichnarcik reported that CPD is short four (4) police officers as one (1) is deployed for military duty for 18 months.

At the next Council meeting at Town Hall, Chief Dryfe will have one of the new Tahoe vehicles in the parking lot for Councilors to look at.

CHESHIRE FIRE DEPARTMENT – CHIEF JACK CASNER

Chief Casner thanked the Council and Cheshire residents for their continued support of the CFD.

CFD Budget – Chief Casner noted there is a zero increase in the department CEP budget. Next year there will be a \$147,000 expenditure in the capital budget.

Salary Line Item – increase of \$31,750, 6.65%; Non-Salary Line Item – increase of \$15,996, 2.36%; total increase of \$47,746, 4.14%.

CFD \$180,000 from the Elim Park Gift Account for non-salary expenditures/equipment. Chief Casner expressed appreciation to Elim Park for their gifts to CFD.

Salary Increase – Chief Casner said this is for the part-time Fire Inspectors; the request is for \$20,000 more in order for CFD to keep up with inspection requirements.

Current staffing levels are lower than in 2000; CFD has 5.14 full-time equivalents for the past 20 years; call volume and responsibilities continue to increase; and CFD is not meeting State mandates for inspections. Due to COVID-19 the occupancy in buildings and restaurants will be cut in half, with inspections by CFD and the Fire Marshal. The additional part-time inspector will enable more inspections to be done, and the position is without benefits. The non-salary increase is low as it can go without affecting services (\$15,596, 2.36% increase). The Town Manager removed one non-salary item.

Proposed Merit Based Program – Chief Casner reviewed this stipend program, which is an incentive program for volunteers; the cost is about \$26,250; CFD per call payment is \$6 per call, and is lower than other similar communities which are at about \$10 per call.

COVID-19 Impact – Full time staff can work from home, but all choose to come to the office, and staggered hours are underway. On-line permitting is going well. Anything related to financial transactions will be done with social distancing. The 2nd floor of the fire headquarters is closed to visitors; all deliveries are on the first floor, and held for three (3) days before opening.

Volunteer Staff – Steps have been taken to suspend training requirements, points requirements, p.e. requirements, junior program, no one is at the station unless responding to an incident, fire alarms are modified to one engine response, all equipment and trucks are wiped down and cleaned after a response, call volume is reduced with severity increased, there was one house fire last week for a solar panel fire.

COVID estimated savings could result in a \$15,585 surplus; the list was given to Councilors; the estimate was to be over \$13,000.

Chief Casner stated CFD is ready to protect Cheshire residents and families, and public safety of homes and properties should not be a worry for anyone.

Regarding the part-time Fire Inspector, Mr. Slocum asked about background and scheduling of this work...i.e. each day or few days a week.

It was explained by Chief Casner that some of the CFD volunteers are career firefighters in other fire departments, work shift hours, and are available to do fire inspections if the funding is approved. The State prescribes the schedule of how many times an inspection is done for a business. More staff is needed to keep inspections done within a reasonable time frame. In Cheshire there is still lots of construction ongoing and inspections are required.

Mr. Slocum asked about the stipend for individuals, how many, what the stipend represents, and \$26,000 funding needed.

There is a spreadsheet for this information, and Mr. Kimball will forward it to the Council members.

The stipend program was explained by Chief Casner. There are job performance measures and qualifiers involved to receive a check.

Mr. Jinks asked about the volunteer staffing status at full contingency, or short, and recruiting in the next year, and officer training

At the current time, CFD has 60 volunteers vs. 125 volunteers in past years, and Chief Casner said the number is trending down. The per call pay is \$6 and more volunteers respond to calls. CFD officers have greater responsibilities. A CFD Lieutenant has responsibility for a fire truck and crew, gets more pension credits, but no more than the \$6 per call...the same as other volunteers. The intent is to push people to officer status with additional training. CFD has a strong core of senior staff, Captains with 7-8 years of experience, two (2) are career firefighters in other cities with experience on the front lines.

Mr. Jinks commended CFD for its quick response to a recent neighbor's fire call.

Mr. Veleber asked about volunteer numbers and people's interest in being recruited for CFD, the \$6 per call pay, this number increasing to \$10 per call and better call response...and the potential cost of a full time paid fire department. He also asked about officer training.

The current line item for per call expenditure is \$84,000 annually, and Chief Casner said it would increase to \$100,000 with a \$10 per call pay. He believes there would be more responses to calls at \$10 per call payment. Officer training is paid 100% by the Town with mileage costs paid, with training on the time of the volunteer. A Captain must be a certified firefighter in Connecticut.

CIVIL PREPAREDNESS

Chief Casner stated there is a \$15,000 request for additional contractual services for hydrant maintenance.

There must be a stockpile of equipment, cots, water, N95 masks (5,000) in the coming budget in anticipation of another wave of the Coronavirus...and the Town must be better prepared.

Town Manager Kimball advised that Civil Preparedness is tracking all the COVID-19 expenditures for all equipment and needs for FEMA reimbursement. This budget will be significantly higher than in the past.

Getting right pricing is difficult and Chief Casner said some funding must be in this account and equipment in storage for future needs.

Ms. Nichols commented on Cheshire being fortunate in not having large fires, and asked what would happen if a large building had a fire with low volunteer response. She questioned how this is managed...i.e. call in volunteers, neighboring fire departments for help, and if there is insurance fire hydrants are functional. There is a significant issue if hydrants are not working...and they must be kept working and funding in the budget.

Most of the new buildings in town are in the Industrial Park, are non-combustible and have sprinkler systems in place. With a large fire everyone turns out; there is reach out to neighboring towns (Southington/Cheshire have a response agreement) for mutual aid. There is no guarantee a hydrant will work and there is a \$15,000 request for investment in hydrant maintenance. CFD is prepared; every apparatus has 1,000 feet of 5 inch hose; CFD trains for these instances, over adapts well to overcome situations.

With regard to the increase in inspectors for CFD and union involvement, Mr. Talbot asked about this aspect and the protective clothing as part of the CEP request.

It was clarified by Chief Casner that Fire Inspectors are part-time, and not part of the union. In FY 21-22 there is a request for equipment purchases, \$145,000 recommended by the Town Manager. This is not out of the Elim Park fund, and is a CNR expense.

BUILDING DEPARTMENT – KEITH DARIN page 107

Mr. Darin informed the Council on the status of the Building Department, which has three (3) Inspectors, one (1) Clerk. There is ongoing construction in Cheshire with new and larger buildings and the department is busy; demolition permits are ongoing, including a Route 10 and north end properties. Permits will be coming at \$75,000 for the new three-story medical/surgical center on East Johnson Avenue. CVS and Stop & Shop plan interior renovations; Bozzuto is working on a pallet system; school projects

are stalled; a new subdivision will require permits; 32,000 S.F. building on West Johnson Avenue will be coming in with plans. The department is functioning well throughout the pandemic; staff is taking field inspections, and staying out of family dwellings; people are taking photos of interior work for inspection in lieu of personal inspections; people are being accommodated to keep business going; commercial inspections are ongoing with most being outdoors; the robust solar panel industry is doing lots of work with photos taken; all inspections are being honored so residents are not at risk. Whole Foods has an 8,500SF addition (\$16M project) almost completed; this is a large permit fee with good property taxes for the town. The 280 South Main St. project will also bring in large tax revenue.

Revenue – Mr. Jaskot said the five year average revenue is \$425,000; last year it was \$513,000; for FY 20-21, Mr. Darin has increased this number of \$570,000 with larger projects that are coming in, and is comfortable with this number; there could be another \$30,000 increase bringing total revenue to \$600,000 based on incoming projects and permit volume.

Mr. Slocum asked about photographs of interior work and their being part of the permanent record of the projects done.

According to Mr. Darin these photographs are taken with an inspector on site, and they will be part of the application record.

Overtime – Mr. Walsh asked about overtime with inspectors going back to a property where work is not done correctly, how this is handled, and how bad is this issue.

For larger projects such as the medical/surgical center, Mr. Darin explained that these plans are sent out/subcontracted to a third party for review. The cost is about \$4,000. With average projects there are sometimes language barriers, people are not aware of the building codes, and they are assisted by department staff with getting work done and approved/closed out. Mr. Darin reiterated that building inspectors do not have much experience with medical/surgical buildings as they are complicated construction requiring specific review.

PUBLIC HEALTH, page 185

This budget involves a few components...Ambulance Service, Chesprocott (Cheshire's share of dues).

Ms. Talbot reviewed this budget which also includes Northwest Public Safety Communications, backup emergency communication required by State; cost is \$6,000.

Ambulance Service Contract – was signed last year; first year of the contract was \$217,200; next year it will be \$228,458; prior to this contract it was about \$220,000 to \$224,000. These costs are holding steady.

Chesprocott Health District – the increase is \$296,167; this includes a \$13,000 increase for Cheshire’s share of a potential new building purchase, which is now on hold. The total net is about \$511,625.

Mr. Kimball said staff will be reviewing the potential purchase with Director Maura Esposito, but the purchase is on hold at this time.

According to Ms. Talbot, Chesprocott may have additional costs incurred based on the pandemic...either this year or next year.

PPE Supplies – Mr. Walsh noted Chesprocott had gone through its supply of PPE, and costs split three ways between the three towns, in addition to costs cited in the budget.

There was communication from OPM with respect to federal funding, and Mr. Kimball said there will be a survey of expenditures and it included public health expenses. There are funding sources being pursued which could reimburse Chesprocott.

Mr. Talbot asked about further assessment for COVID response and whether it will be reimbursable.

Mr. Kimball is in constant contact with Chesprocott; they are on budget with staffing; supplies are either purchased or donated; the numbers will be forthcoming.

The ambulance contract is the final amount, no variables, and it is paid each month.

Chesprocott per capita cost per resident is \$900 per person.

Proposed Building - \$13,000 is Cheshire’s pro rata cost for purchase of a building. Mr. Kimball understands it is a purchase, not a lease, and Chesprocott will be using some of its reserves for the purchase.

Chairman Oris talked about the potential purchase of a building with more information needed on the decision making which is assumed to be through the Board of Directors. He said the taxpayers pay a good portion of this entity, and there must be assurance a wise investment decision being made.

The Council was advised by Ms. Talbot that there is a State Statute which authorizes a Board of Directors of a health district with the statutory right to purchase a building. She questioned if Mr. Oris wants town staff to contact this BOD on the building purchase.

Mr. Oris is not questioning the BOD’s right to do this, but he wants transparency for the decisions so Council can explain to the taxpayers funding a good portion of this organization that it was the right decision to purchase a building rather than a rental.

COVID spreadsheet is being prepared by Mr. Jaskot, which will be shared with the Council.

Gas Prices – Mr. Jaskot reported on the gas contract through a regional consortium, at a price of \$1.93 per gallon; the BOE has a similar contract; discussion could be held on variable fixed pricing, i.e. \$2.00 a gallon; there could be opportunities to blend or force the contract out another year.

2020 Revised Estimated Revenue (increase or decrease)

Property Taxes – the percentage of collection rate has been decreased to 99.5% (from 99.7%); \$186,000 in lost revenue

There will not be a lien sale this year; decrease of \$25,000 revenue.

There is no difference in State revenue.

Projections for the lower interest rate program will result in decrease of \$25,000, and runs for months of April, May, June. If taxpayer does not make a payment they forego the lower interest rate advantage.

Town Departments - revenue decrease of \$215,000. Mr. Jaskot reviewed the departments and their revenue status which is listed in the report.

Investment Income – the projection was \$776,000; it is now at \$713,000; \$63,000 decrease.

BOE tuition account decrease of \$36,067.

Total revenue decrease of \$525,201; this is a revenue decrease from one month ago.

The quarterly report will be done at end of April.

Mr. Kimball informed the Council that final numbers could be available next week. There is critical decision making ahead. BOE is discussing their current year projections.

Mr. Jaskot commented on concerns with the pool and Recreation budget; he has \$159,279 more and pool subsidy of \$190,000. He will have more information on revenue and expenditures coming to the Council for this year and next year. There is a struggle with next year's revenue numbers, and Mr. Jaskot said the question is how long this situation will go on.

Surplus – Mr. Oris realizes the surplus will not be to the extent he expected; next year it will be difficult to plan due to not knowing what the economy will be like.

Mr. Jaskot explained that before COVID started the surplus projection was \$1.2M; the adjustments of \$500,000 reduces the surplus; cost savings numbers will be ready later this week and taken into consideration. At this time, Mr. Jaskot said he is comfortable with the numbers he must use.

Mr. Talbot questioned the Council looking at a worse case scenario...\$524,000 decrease in revenue and savings from expenditures. He noted the Council has not yet seen the BOE budget, and BOE is not a revenue generating department. It's possible savings in the \$500,000 range could be see with the BOE budget.

The Council discussed the surplus issues and concerns, BOE having a possible \$500,000 savings and looking for more, another \$24,000 savings from Town departments, and there could be a wash. Mr. Oris said Council was hoping to expand on the surplus being budgeted to be used to mitigate a mill rate increase going forward. This is not happening to any great extent, and this is a concern.

Mr. Kimball commented on justifying budgeting from that surplus from one fiscal year to the next as revenue...last year it was \$1M...this year he has it at \$800,000.

Mr. Borowy stated Council is trying to lessen the mill rate this year; the surplus will not be as much as projected; there will be a look at next year's revenue loss...the first quarter through August.

There was a brief discussion about looking at the rehire of new hire positions requested and the determination to be made. Mr. Kimball noted the vacancies are into next year; some are internal transfers; and there could be some retirements forthcoming. He will be taking a look at staffing and vacancies.

Budget Meetings – Tuesday, April 28th public hearing and Budget Meeting; Thursday, April 30th, Budget Meeting with Board of Education.

4. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Borowy; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

MOVED to adjourn the special meeting at 8:45 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk