

Minutes Holden Finance Committee, March 9, 2022, Remote via Zoom  
Fire Department Budget, Library Budget

Members Present: Paul Challenger, Joe Dolak, Chris Lucchesi (@7:25), Don Graves, Al Berg, Jane Titcomb, Stephanie Adams, Marilynn Foley

Member Absent: Dave White

Also Present: Peter Lukes, Town Manager, Stephanie King, Assistant Town Manager, Russ Hall, Fire Chief, Susan Scott, Library Director, Rick Bates, Selectman, various members of the Library Board of Trustees

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M.

Susan presented an overview of the Library Budget and answered questions from the Committee. Since the Library reopened after being closed for over a year or more because of COVID 19, circulation of materials has rebounded back to pre-COVID levels plus some more. The Library will conduct a study at a cost of \$20,000.00 in the Capital budget for window replacements. The windows are antique, the glass needs to be saved and the windows restored individually. The project must be approved by the Historical Commission. Specialists are needed to deal with this type of project.

The budget provides sufficient funds to qualify for continued state funding. There are no new staff positions being added. There has been a lot of turn-over in the staff this year, leading to a higher level of wage increases for some of the lower pay positions in order to be competitive with other employers, who have had to meet higher minimum wage standards. A question was asked about the large bequest the Library received last year and if it was earmarked. The library can only use the interest from the bequest. The family has indicated it would like it to be used for group activities like concerts and shows and for children, although this is not a requirement of the bequest itself.

Russ presented an overview of the Fire Department Budget and answered questions from the Committee. The SAFER Grant ran out in January 2021 and was very successful. The additional staff was crucial to getting through some periods when staff was ill, fulfilling military obligations or left for other jobs. Staffing has been a problem, as it has with other town departments, in competing with the private sector. The requirements to be a fireman have increased, including background checks, initial training and ongoing educational requirements. These have discouraged many people from considering worked for the Fire Department. This is a national issue, and not limited to Holden.

Repairing and replacing vehicles has been a problem also, because of the impact of COVID 19 on materials and supplies. The wait for a replacement vehicle may be over a year. An ambulance was out of service for months because of an unavailable part being required. ARPA (federal funding) will be used for purchase of a new ambulance. The ladder truck, which is very expensive and had been forecast for replacement in FY 25, has been experiencing significant decline and they now think a FY 24 replacement is more realistic.

FinCom expressed concern that the expected revenue estimated in the budget from EMS services may be conservative. Russ said there can be problems dealing with different insurance companies, especially from out of state insurance companies, and this makes it very difficult to forecast revenue. There is a new line item for the Adams Road sub-station for utilities as the DPW, which has been paying these bills, will be moving out of Adams Road leaving the bills to the Fire Department.

A motion by Joe 2<sup>nd</sup> by Stephanie to approve the minutes of March 2, 2022 was voted unanimously by roll call vote, Challenger aye, Dolak aye, Lucchesi aye, Graves aye, Berg aye. Adams aye, Foley aye abstained Titcomb.

A motion by Joe 2<sup>nd</sup> by Stephanie to approve the minutes of March 3, 2022 was voted unanimously by roll call vote, Challenger aye, Dolak aye, Lucchesi aye, Graves aye, Berg, aye, Adams aye, Titcomb aye, Foley aye.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marilynn Foley, Clerk