

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, May 17, 2023

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair
(joined via Teams)
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Bryan J. Lake
Andrew M. Madison

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Donald Farquhar, Fire Chief
Marty Fiske, Library Director

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM. Councilor Remy stated the reason he is joining remotely is that he is traveling for work in Maryland. He stated he was in a hotel room alone at the present time but that might not be the case for too long. The request to join remotely was granted by the Committee.

1) Fire Department – Page 96-103:

Fire Chief Donald Farquhar addressed the Committee first. The Chief stated the supplemental increase for the department is \$572,513. A little over \$500,000 of this request is for contractual wage increases and for four new firefighter positions.

Page 101 – The first supplemental item is for medical \$36,915. This line item is for firefighter physicals. In the past, the fire department had used a company from Florida but due to internal circumstances they were not able to provide this service. The City sent out an RFP and found a company in Georgia. Once Keene signed on with this company other fire departments signed on as well which gave the City a slight discount.

The Chief next addressed the grant match request for \$15,110. He indicated this is non-reoccurring and is a one-time ask to cover the AFG grant the department received last year.

Page 102 – The only cost not associated with staffing increase is for supplies and protective clothing. Chief Farquhar added this will mostly be non-reoccurring and will be a one-time investment and should be back to a normal cycle.

Supplies and Disposable Equipment – This is specifically for EMS. In the past, the department was able to offset the costs of this expenditure with grants (Covid, etc.) but those grants are no longer available. The department also brought on some new equipment which is expensive.

The Chief addressed the next increase which was for grant match for \$15,570 this is for a training class.

2) Library – Pages 104-108

Mr. William Stroup Chair of the Trustees was the first to address the Library budget. Mr. Stroup stated they are pleased to be able to have 5% of costs covered by Friends of the Library and the Trustee budget. Friends donated \$65,000 last year for programs, equipment maintenance, museum passes, and wages for a Maker Space intern. Trustees paid over \$44,000 for programs, collection, staff training, and other memberships. Mr. Stroup noted the proposed budget is in support of the goals identified in the library's long-range planning, especially emphasizing the library as a commons environment, a place for public discourse, community issues, creative partnership, assisting local businesses, remote workers, and more. This strategic plan is set to be adopted by the Board at its June meeting and at that time the Manager and Council will have a copy of public comments regarding this process as well as the plan itself.

Library Director Marty Fiske addressed the Committee next. Ms. Fiske stated the operating budget for the library is level funded for all non-personnel lines except for \$900 for telephone and communication lines. Their focus is on converting three part-time positions into two full-time positions. Ms. Fiske explained the tight labor market is causing a fast turnover in part-time positions which make up 60% of library staffing. If this request is approved the total number of hours at the library won't change. The primary goal is to keep these positions consistently staffed by quality personnel, reducing staff work for continuous recruitment. The continuous turnover makes it difficult to staff the expanded space at the library and the continuous turnover is costly and is estimated to be twice the annual cost of a salaried employee.

Ms. Fiske stated since Covid they are getting about 28 hours of volunteer assistance but volunteers take extended time off which causes staff recruitment, training, and management issues. One of the positions being requested is a Librarian 1 in Youth and Programs. This combines a Library Aide Programming and Meeting Room position (28 hours) with a Librarian 1 in Youth Librarian position (16 hours). Both these part-time positions are currently vacant and both positions have seen a high turnover with most individuals staying only four to nine months. The most recent person stayed only four shifts before he went on to a full-time job. Conversion to full-time will provide the library with a loss of six hours per week. This position requires a Bachelor's Degree and specialized knowledge in youth literature, child development, audiovisual and computer equipment.

The second request is for a Librarian II, Collection and Development (currently qualified at 32 hours). This will gain the library the six hours previously mentioned. This position requires a Master's Degree and professional experience in cataloging and managing collections in various formats. This person will also take on the management of the periodical collection and will take on some of the adult technology programs.

3) Parks, Recreation and Facilities – Pages 109-125

Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director Andy Bohannon and Youth Services Manager Alyssa Bender were the next two speakers. Mr. Bohannon noted their supplemental items are listed on Page 11.

He noted the changes to the budget and indicated there is a new full-time Maintenance Aid I included in this budget; in 2011 due to retirement this position was lost and this will bring the department back to its original capacity and help with the additional responsibilities with the Dog Park, Russell Park, and Disc Golf.

Revenue detail is outlined on Page 118 and operating details are on page 119.

Mr. Bohannon stated Covid impacted their programming quite a bit and they are now trying to rebound from that. He indicated they have started offering spring sports which have become a welcome addition to the programming.

With respect to workforce development, the department is in good shape. The department hired a social marketing person to focus specifically on social media to focus on program numbers. The department has hired 14 lifeguards (three still need to be certified) which Mr. Bohannon stated was a good number. He added if the State's minimum wage of \$7.25 gets adjusted the City will be impacted as it relates to staffing and programming.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the department has an incredibly talented park staff who have done an incredible job in keeping the City's park facilities in good order.

Trails – Mr. Bohannon noted Pathways for Keene has donated over \$700,000 over the past 20 years and has brought other partners on. The Monadnock Conservancy has donated \$50,000 and is on a campaign for an additional \$100,000 for the Transportation Heritage Trail.

Cemeteries – Mr. Bohannon stated the department will be working on a Master Plan for Monadnock View Cemetery in the near future.

Facilities – Mr. Bohannon referred to a rendering of the new front of the Public Works Department which he felt staff have done a good job on.

Mr. Bohannon stated facilities is always looking for grants to supplement their costs.

He noted there are supplemental requests included in the budget which are significant and this relates mostly to the library. Page 123 outlines the cost of electricity and added this is the full year since ribbon cutting and post-Covid this facility has been in operation. The Public Works building and the Rec Center building are also seeing these electricity costs.

With that, Mr. Bohannon turned the presentation over to Ms. Alyssa Bender.

Youth Services – Ms. Bender stated the mission of Youth Services is to reduce adolescent problem behavior in the community and to encourage youth to make proper decisions. She stated they focus a lot on providing positive and engaging opportunities for youth in the area and helping those who have fallen into behaviors such as delinquency and substance abuse. Ms. Bender noted their case for juvenile court diversion and youth intervention programs have both increased in the area in the last year. With the youth intervention, they are able to have more of a presence in schools and have increased partnerships with Keene High School and Keene Middle School. She went over some of the programs they have been able to put in place through Monadnock Youth Coalition.

Ms. Bender spoke about the Summer Youth Program from last year. Students from 11th grade were involved with various City departments. Nine have signed on so far for the upcoming year.

Mr. Bender stated Youth Services was also able to partner with other City Departments such as the Keene Police Department to organize a Dodge Ball tournament for youth in the area. Bring in ICAP which is the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and introduce K9 Niko to put on a presentation regarding the dangers of the internet and how to be safe on it – she noted this dog is a great resource in New Hampshire. The department also organized a Mental Health Awareness day and other such events.

There are also other new programs the department has been able to offer such as a prevention program in partnership with Monadnock Coalition. Currently, this program is with Gathering Waters Charter School, and are planning on introducing it to other schools. There is also the Alternate to Suspension program specifically introduced at the High School. A wellness program was introduced at the Middle School.

Mr. Bohannon added the City Advisory Boards and Committees the department works with such as the Human Right Committee, Ashuelot River Advisory Board, Goose Pond Stewardship Committee, and Juvenile Conference Committee. These entities bring grants and donations and work collectively with the department.

Councilor Lake noted the electricity cost which has a \$60,000 increase and stated he anticipates his bill going down next year based on the work the City put into this item and asked why there is an anticipated increase. Mr. Bohannon stated the City facilities are large buildings, the library for instance begins operation at 7 am, Public Works, Police and Fire Departments are a 24/7 operation and hence don't anticipate a significant drop.

The Manager added, as mentioned by Mr. Bohannon staff hadn't appropriately estimated the expanded facility at the library being open, especially with Covid and the library hours being reduced. In addition, a domestic consumer might see a decrease but City has been bidding out its prices for a long time and are getting a favorable rate, but prices do increase.

Councilor Chadbourne asked why only nine youths have signed on for the upcoming summer program and asked whether the department would be able to accommodate more than that number. Ms. Bender stated the number was reduced in the last few years so the youth can get a

more meaningful experience. She added the cap this year will be 10-12 and the number will depend on where the youth can be placed.

Chair Powers asked how much a lifeguard would make this year. Mr. Bohannon stated they start at \$14 an hour.

4) Police – Page 126-133

Police Chief Steve Stewart was the next to address the Committee. Chief Stewart stated their proposed budget is only up by 1.9% with no supplemental requests. The increases are due to contractual issues. Both unions are in contract negotiations right now. He added there were slight increases to Fleet and PC costs as well as for the contract prosecutor.

Chief Stewart stated the department's primary mission is to enforce laws, investigate crimes and prosecute those cases in Court. He added their mission statement is what guides in how they interact with the public; protect life and property, and maintain order within the City while ensuring fair and respectful treatment of everyone.

The department has authorized 44 sworn officers, 11 full-time non-sworn, and 14 part-time non-sworn officers. Currently, the department is operating eight sworn officers short, which he indicated is significant and recruitment is one of their biggest challenges. Last year they were short three officers, however, have lost four officers to retirement and two others to other counties. The department is gaining two who are finishing at the academy. Recruitment is nearing crisis nationwide. The City is doing all it can to boost the department via social media and can accomplish its mission statement currently but the increased workload on the current personnel is causing burnout which adds to other issues. This also reduces proactive actions. The Detectives also are half staffed and performing double duty. He noted the City is battling issues with out-of-state criminal gangs who have set up shop and are selling drugs and they are violent individuals and the department has to stay on top of this.

The other large items the department is working on this year are body cameras which will be implemented this summer. The department is fortunate to have this item paid through a federal grant. The Chief stated the department is also looking at hiring a social worker for the department which position will be paid for through grant funds. He added the department has received close to \$90,000 in grants to supplement expenses related to the department. He added the department will be looking for additional funding for training next year based on the requirements placed by the State.

Councilor Lake clarified the social worker position is not in the budget. The City Manager stated the position is being included in the salary ordinance with the hope the City would be successful in receiving the grant.

Councilor Workman requested that the position of the proposed social worker be removed from the Police Department and be placed with the Human Services Department which she felt will make people feel more comfortable reaching out for help.

Chair Powers noted the issue with recruitment is not a problem unique to Keene it is a nationwide problem. The Chief agreed.

5) Airport – Page 136-140

Airport Director David Hickling addressed the Committee and stated the airport continues to be busy serving all types of clientele (private and recreational, medical, law enforcement, military operations, and business). All hangars remain full and there are about 20 individuals on the waiting list. There are new developers looking to construct additional hangars. Mr. Hickling stated considering the demand for hangars, a rate increase seems prudent which would increase revenue by \$20,000 annually. There is also a proposal to change the landing fee structure. Aviation fuel is also trending up and the airport has been able to increase that line item as well as increase to terminal and land leases.

Mr. Hickling added by leveling out those lines which were over budgeted in the past he has been able to keep expenses level-funded as a result the increase to the budget is only \$4,656.00. He indicated the airport has a very small staff who believe in working frugally and keeping expenses down and reducing the impact on the tax base.

Councilor Chadbourne stated every time the Committee hears from the airport it is on an upward trend, which she felt was encouraging.

6) Community Development – Pages 141 -145

Community Development Director Jesse Rounds was the next speaker. Mr. Rounds stated the department is presenting an unchanged budget from last year. He indicated this past year they have worked with the Fire Department in integrating fire-related permitting, permit review, and inspection into the Community Development permitting system. This would mean that the public can come to the department for all development permits.

On the planning side, they have completed a significant update to the land development code and completed a housing needs assessment partly funded through a grant. The department also provides support to the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Historic District Commission, and other Boards and Commissions. Most recently supporting the Congregate Living and Social Services Licensing Board.

In the coming fiscal year, the planning team will be exploring some long-range planning projects which focus on neighborhoods and hope to update the master plan based on this project. On the revenue side, the department will be looking at fees to make sure it is keeping up with the amount of work staff does but also being fair to its customers.

Mr. Rounds noted for this fiscal year the department has issued 14 new single-family home construction permits, 70 renovations or additions to single-family homes, 4 new commercial

construction permits, 4 change of use permits, and 336 other permits. On the planning side completed 7 subdivisions approved, 8 boundary line adjustments, 17 major site plans, and 4 major historic district reviews.

Chair Powers noted the Committee will be back for budget review on Tuesday, May 23.

There being no further business, Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Terri M. Hood, Assistant City Clerk