

TOWN COUNCIL OF NEW CANAAN
Special Meeting
Tuesday, March 24, 2009
7:30 PM – Town Hall

Final



MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark De Waele
Kenneth Campbell
Paul Foley
Christine Hussey
Elizabeth Jones
Kit Devereaux

Stephen Karl
Johnny Potts
Tom O'Dea
Dick White
Tucker Murphy
Penny Young

ALSO PRESENT: Jeb Walker, Ex-Officio member; Gary Conrad, Chief Financial Officer; Fire Commissioners Roger Williams, Sven Englund, & Jack Horner; Neil Budnick, Board of Finance; Chief Ed Karl; Assistant Chief Jack Hennessey; numerous paid and volunteer firemen and numerous members of the public.

Dr. DeWaele convened the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Item 1 – To Hear Budget Presentation for The Fire Department including recent union discussions.

Mr. Williams stated that after the Board of Finance meeting last week, they met with Gary Conrad, Cheryl Jones, members of the union and had a special meeting of the Fire Commission. Mr. Williams went over the attached Fire Department Power Point presentation.

Mr. Williams noted that the requested budget of \$2,760,702 is a 1.8% increase over the estimated actual amount of spending for the current year (\$2,710,662) which equates to about 2.34% of the Town's overall spending for 2008-2009. From budget 2004-2005 to present the percentage has varied between 2.16% and 2.45%.

Mr. Williams stated that for each 6 man shift, we have 1.4 men on over-time filling in and that is driven by contractual obligations regarding holidays, sick days and vacation days.

Mr. Williams stated that as long as the TC approves the BOF budget for the Department (\$2,760,702) the Union has agreed to reductions in OT callbacks and Hazmat budget lines which amounts to approximately \$114,000 in savings.

Mr. Williams addressed the Town Council's request that the Department look to get to the original Board of Finance number of \$2,663, 883. Mr. Williams stated that the current BOF number of \$2,760,702 is tight and they can not get below it without jeopardizing public safety as the non-labor lines are as low as they can go. Mr. Williams stated that the current BOF funding (\$2,760,702) is an achievable number with full exposure of over-time.

Assistant Chief Hennessey agreed to give back his \$3,000 raise to help with the budget.

Ms. Hussey noted that the union agreed to reductions in OT call backs and Hazmat budget lines, what is the amount of the Hazmat savings? Assistant Chief Hennessey stated it save fees and dues to belong to the regional team, saves in training and OT, or between \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the year.

Dr. DeWaele inquired about whether our currently trained Firemen could attend to a spill. Assistant Chief Hennessey said as first responders they would be able to respond.

Mr. O'Dea inquired if we joined the Regional Hazmat team with 2 people instead of 5 it would cost \$3,000 in dues and \$3,000-\$7,000 more for stipend and OT for training for the 2.

Mr. Foley asked about the last Hazmat incident and it was a mercury spill at Saxe. Mr. Foley also asked what would the potential spill cost? Mr. Hennessey stated that \$10,000 is a fair estimate. Mr. Hennessey also stated the person who causes the spill is liable so the only time the town would be exposed would be on Town owned property when not caused by a private citizen.

The commission and Department felt the Hazmat savings was worth the risk.

Mr. O'Dea pointed out that the Fire Budgets have not been met in the past, without casting blame as there is plenty to go around and that the goal should be a budget that the Department could meet or beat. Mr. O'Dea mentioned that former Commissioner Reddin was a strong advocate for realistic budgets. Mr. O'Dea inquired whether the Fire Commission was confident it could meet this budget (\$2,760,702) without having to come back for additional funds, which Mr. O'Dea did not want to have happen. Mr. Williams said it was tight but they were confident they could stay on budget and would be keeping a close eye on it monthly.

Ms. Young inquired about where the union was regarding the COLA increase. Mr. Williams stated they were at the full 4% but that if all the other unions agreed, there may be room for discussion. Mr. Williams stated that he did not know whether extending the contract was a good idea or a bad idea but that the COLA was not adjusted in the current budget proposal. Mr. Williams also pointed out the Union has agreed to concessions. The full 4% COLA is worth only \$96,000 for the entire Department. No matter what happens regarding this budget, Mr. Williams recommended looking at what can be done from a contract negotiation standpoint.

Mr. O'Dea reference the International Association of Firefighters web site which identified a number of Connecticut Towns that obtained concessions from the fire unions, including in Bridgeport which agreed to a wage freezes for 2 years & 7-10 day furloughs; Torrington agreed to wage freezes and eliminate pension plans for new hires; Milford Firefighters Union became the first of 8 city bargaining units to accept wage freeze in exchange for no lay-offs; in Farmington the Fire Union agreed to a pay freeze. Mr. Williams pointed out that the union has agreed to significant concessions that exceed the entire COLA budget and the only condition is that this budget we're talking about (\$2,760,702) is the one that the Town accepts.

Ms. Jones noted that with Police, Public Works, and Teachers, it is not the Town Council's job to negotiate union contracts. The Town Council's job is to fit budgets to contracts and not to renegotiate what we're already obligated to do.

Ms. Murphy suggested we see the Department monthly or quarterly to see where we are on the budget so that we can avoid the Department coming back for more money. The BOE does that. Mr. Williams agreed and suggested the first one be a pancake breakfast at the firehouse.

Ms. Hussey inquired about surrounding Towns. She stated that the Ridgefield Firefighters are getting a 3% COLA raise. Chief Karl pointed out that Ridgefield has an 8/6 staffing. Mr. Gaeta stated that none of the surrounding towns are laying off any firefighters.

Dr. DeWaele inquired about staffing in other towns. Assistant Chief Hennessey stated that the last presentation had staffing identified.

Mr. Foley stated that he supports the current budget and staffing of 6/6 over 6/5.

Steve Gaeta spoke in favor of 6/6.

Jim Cole, Chair of Police Commission stated that a couple fire or injuries could create a problem with the budget.

Russ Kimes, Jr., a volunteer firemen, spoke against any further cuts as it will affect morale and equipment. Mr. Kimes stated that the requested budget can be met but not if there are any other cuts.

Mike Socci, Union President, 26 years in the Department, spoke against any further cuts. The Union asked people to give up a lot to make the current budget work and the Union is willing to work with the town. Mr. Socci is willing to discuss a COLA give back if all the other Unions are involved.

Ms. Hussey passed out a handout to the Town Council regarding what surrounding Towns do for volunteers. See attached.

Fireman Dave DiPanni spoke against any further cuts and in support of the current budget.

A local volunteer fireman stated that he is at the firehouse 35-40 hours a week and spoke in favor of the budget and against any further cuts.

Chief Karl, Commissioner Williams and Chairmen DeWaele spoke in favor of the paid and volunteer members for their outstanding service and dedication.

Chairman DeWaele suggested a monthly or every second month report to the TC regarding where the Department is regarding the budget.

After inquiry by Ms. Hussey, Mr. Williams stated that this budget is accurate based on historical data and best estimates and that he is confident the Department can meet it.

Mr. Foley noted that last year's budget was very close to accurate when the money taken out by the BOF was put back in.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom O'Dea Secretary