

Kingston Municipal Budget Committee
November 29, 2020 - Town Hall
Also Held Virtually via Videoconference (Zoom)

KMBC Members in Attendance:

Chuck Hart, Chair
Rick Russman, Vice Chair (attending virtually via Zoom)
Kim Donahue, Secretary
Marissa Federico, Recording Secretary
Gary Finerty (attending virtually via Zoom)
Heather Hanlon
James LaValley
John Pramberg
Annemarie Roth
Stanley Shalett
Kevin St. James, representative from the Board of Selectmen (BOS)

Absent KMBC Members:

Ray Donald

Other Parties Present:

Tammy Bakie, Town Clerk
Brad Maxwell, Trustees of the Trust Funds/Cemeteries
Graham Pellerin, Fire Department
Jayne Ramey, Treasurer

No members of the public were in attendance.

Chuck called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes

Kevin moved to approve the minutes from the meeting on 11/15/20. Heather seconded. All in favor.

Specific Budget-related Items

The updated budget has not been distributed yet as there have only been 2 changes: Highway Dept/Clothing Allowance (4312-02) and Human Services/PT Salaries (4414-S1).

Cindy has no budget changes at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

Representatives from the library and Conservation Commission will reappear before the KMBC at the next meeting on Wednesday, 12/2/20 to further discuss their budgets.

Discussion of Hampstead Compensation Survey:

At the beginning of this meeting, only one page of the study was available to the Committee. During the meeting, Tammy brought a full copy of it, and Kevin made copies for all present members. The survey utilized data from 2018 and was published in March 2019. Data from 19 towns was included from across the state. It was created by a third party consultant at the request of the town of Hampstead.

Kevin explained that in the past, the town decided not to do a wage survey. Instead, the figures from the Hampstead Compensation Survey were used to bring up the salaries of the police and fire departments due to high attrition rates. In this current budget season for 2021, this survey has been referenced by other departments for salary increases. The survey does not take into account the specifics of job descriptions or the number of years of experience. He stated the county does a comprehensive salary analysis for Rockingham county which considers cost of living as well.

John asked if this study has been used in past in budgeting discussions. Chuck stated that other towns have been contacted informally in the past to help determine salaries but have not used this specific study.

Heather asked if we could find out how many employees there are per department. Chuck believes we should be able to obtain this information as it is public.

Although Kevin thought the town paid approximately 98% of the share of health insurance per employee, Tammy believed it was 75%. Kevin will look into this for the purposes of this discussion.

Utilizing her real estate knowledge, Heather stated that many of the towns in this survey are not comparable to Kingston, so caution should be used. She also expressed concern that the data is from 2018 and that the town sampling does not include towns comparable to Kingston. Kim agreed and felt the sampling may not be sufficient, and we do not know if the job descriptions are the same. She reiterated that the police and fire departments had attrition due to low salaries.

Kevin explained that elected officials must request a salary increase from the BOS. An elected official's salary is not reviewed regularly by the town unless a request is made.

Chuck explained there are 3 employees with contracts: The police chief, fire chief, and road agent. Their salaries are negotiated by the BOS.

DEPARTMENT PRESENTATIONS

Fire Department

Chief Pellerin now discussed the budget for the Fire Department. His contract is currently being worked on but is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The actuals are low right now, but there are many pending bills that will be paid by the end of the year.

He explained that all salaries are up due to increases that will carry over to next year (4220-S1 through 4220-S5). The starter firefighter rate is \$28/hour, which equates to roughly \$800/week. There are 2 firefighters/EMTs on duty 24/7/365. The per diem rate is \$15/hour, and per diem employees only work 1 shift/week but receive holiday pay at time-and-a-half to \$22.50. He stated that overtime has increased due to higher call volumes due to COVID. In a prior conversation with Chief Pellerin, Jim

stated that the overall salary increase was approved by the BOS already. Kevin will confirm this information.

Heather asked if the All American Assisted Living facility has contributed to the increase in ambulance calls, and Chief Pellerin stated it has.

The department needs new computers as the existing ones are too old to be upgraded (4220-03). These computers are 6-8 years old.

There was a discussion about the Comstar budget (4220-04). Comstar is the billing company that handles the charges for ambulance calls. Chief Pellerin explained the fee structure for ambulance services which takes into account the treatment provided and the residency of the patient (a resident of Kingston or outside of Kingston). In the past, a revolving fund was setup to utilize the funds paid by non-residents toward new ambulances. In the future, the Chief is hoping to also use these funds for other needed emergency supplies, but this has yet to be discussed with the BOS.

The budgets for heat (4220-25) and electricity (4220-26) have increased as they are overbudget this year. The new fire station should be more energy efficient.

The budget for oxygen (4220-15) is up due to increased calls and due to COVID. In the past, medical guidelines stated oxygen was not to be given routinely, only based on pulse oximetry readings, which caused a reduction in the budget. With COVID, however, the need for oxygen is increased. The oxygen tanks are rented, which affects the budget.

Chief Pellerin stated every 10 years, all protective gear must be replaced (4220-16). Older gear in good condition can be used for per diem employees.

The budget for rolling equipment (4220-19) reflects work done on the fire trucks. There have been many repairs this year, so they will be overbudget this year. Maintenance costs overall have also increased.

The budget for self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA, 4220-20) went down. The tanks get tested every 5 years, which was just done.

Seminar and training (4220-21) spending right now is underbudget as COVID cancelled many of these opportunities. It is hoped that this will resume in 2021.

Jim explained that 94.8% of the budget increase is due to salaries.

Emergency Management:

This budget is level funded for 2021. Chief Pellerin explained that he, Chief Briggs, and Rich St. Hilaire are responsible for the emergency management in town. Radiological Emergency Response Program (RERP, 4290-03) reflects this spending. There are training exercises involved due to the town's proximity to the Seabrook nuclear station. Some of this spending is reimbursed from the state and from the Seabrook station itself.

Recreation/Parks:

Paul Butler was not present at the meeting. Annemarie is the KMBC liaison. Overall, the budget is down from last year.

Kevin explained that salary (4520-S1) is up as there are many events that need to be organized throughout the year. He noted that actual expenditure is off due to COVID.

The budget for fireworks (4520-17) has been moved out of this budget, and he believes it has moved into a Kingston Day fund. He will look into this to make sure this is the case. Any unused funds from this year goes back to General Fund.

He added that summer field trips (4520-10 and 4520-11) are self-funded.

Treasurer

Jane Ramey approached the Committee. She explained she has been the town's treasurer for 20 years and has not received a raise in 18 years. She is requesting a raise if possible (4150-S5). She works about 5 hours a week, so her pay works out to about \$30 an hour. She can choose a health insurance plan from the town but pays on her own without a financial contribution from the town. She does not have a pension. She explained she signs all the checks for the town and has a lot of responsibility and must be bonded to do her job. She does not have a deputy to help her out.

Chuck will take this under advisement and get back to her. Kevin will try to find salaries from other towns for comparison.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector

Tammy Bakie explained the wide scope of her responsibilities. She has no coverage for sick hours and has not taken her vacation, which cannot necessarily be carried over to the following year. She requested a salary increase and has reflected that in the budget (4150-S4). She utilized the Hampstead survey for guidance on this increase.

She used to have 3 full-time staff but now has 2 full time and 2 part time. One of the part-time employees is getting older, and when she retires, Tammy would like to replace her with a full-time employee. As this part-time position used to be a full-time position, she does not believe this change will require a warrant article. She has reflected this in the budget under Full-time Salary (4150-S6) and Part-time Salary (4150-S8).

Tammy stated even though the town hall was closed earlier in the year due to COVID, she and her staff were still processing transactions.

For computer upgrades (4150-14), she has not spent the budgeted funds from this year yet as they may be able to merge the computers they already have as part of this upgrade. This is expected to be completed next year.

Election & Registration

The budget for elections and registration (4140) is decreased for 2021. Tammy explained that there will be fewer elections next year. She is planning to request that the Supervisor of Checklist be paid by election, not by year.

Trustees of the Trust Funds

Brad Maxwell now approached the Committee and explained his duties. He is in an elected position and does not request a salary increase (4150-S1). There is a 5-person committee who handles approximately \$10 million in funds. He brought a list of funds that the Trustees oversee and will also send it electronically to the Committee. The town is required by the state to have fund managers as a third party to invest these funds. The town uses 2 fund managers right now.

He has a bookkeeper who coordinates with Cindy, the finance director, regarding any expenses. The budget for this will remain the same (4150-S2).

Cemeteries

Brad explained there are 5 cemeteries in town, 2 of which are active.

Part-time salaries (4195-S1) are up since they went overbudget for 2020. As his only employee is paid by the hour, if there are more burials, this costs the town more money. This is partially offset by fees received by the town. He has only 1 part-time employee.

He explained that the town sexton oversees the mowing contractor, who takes care of mowing the lawns, trimming, and does spring/fall cleanups. Because the contractor is slow to bill, the actual numbers do not reflect the true cost of maintaining the town's cemeteries. It is expected that the actual funds spent should be close to the budgeted amount by the end of the year.

In anticipation of possibly higher costs, the budget for contracted services (4195-03) is increased for 2021. This service is billed hourly. If the bid for 2021 comes up too high, he will send out for a re-bid. This contract will be worked out early next year. Kevin asked how often the contract is worked out, and Brad said this is usually done every 3 years.

The Millstream cemetery has a separate trust fund, so spending is reimbursed, including the management fee. The town uses the same contractor, but this is handled separately because of the trust fund.

FUTURE MEETING PREPARATION

Chuck stated the exact date of decision day will be provided at the next meeting, Wednesday, 12/2/20. There was a discussion about the procedure for decision day and voting.

There was a discussion about the challenges of holding an in-person meeting simultaneously with the usage of Zoom for decision day. Chuck will look into some options to keep this process smooth and accessible.

Chuck offered the possibility of holding an additional meeting before decision day to discuss budget items. Most members verbalized agreement.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, 12/2/20, at 5:30 p.m.

Chuck concluded the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Prepared by: Marissa Federico