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**COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND TAXATION
THURSDAY, March 16, 2023 7:00 PM**

**School Committee Conference Room, Stoughton Public Schools District Office
31 Pierce Street, Stoughton, MA 02072
PUBLIC HEARING**

Agenda items may be taken out of order at Chairman's Discretion

1. Mr. Vaughan Enokian, Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM .

2. Mr. Enokian asked all to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Mr. Anzivino made the motion to open the public hearing, seconded by Mr. Hansen. The motion passed.

Present: Vaughan Enokian, Chair, John Anzivino, Vice Chair, Dianne Dolan Secretary, Eric Anderson, Robert Desmond, Laura Gunn, Elliot Hansen, Adam Iacabucci, David Lurie, Dr. Jess Miner, Mark Struck, Joel Wolk

Absent: Chet Collins, Kerry Marrocco, John Walsh

4. Town Budget- Public Health (FY24) Article 8 Public Health Enterprise Fund (FY24) p. 59
Ms. Janiece Bruce, director explained that the department has been busy during the covid period. She said the state emergency relative to covid ends May 11, 2023. She explained that there were operational and medicare reimbursement changes during covid. She said changes as of January 1, 2023 had impacted some patients negatively.

Mr. Mark Struck asked about the increase in the in-service training line from \$573 to \$4,000. Ms. Bruce said the change was the result of the new assessment form, impact of OASIS, and staff increase.

Mr. Bob Desmond stated that Avon, Randolph, and Easton have added additional insurance companies,

Ms. Bruce commented that Stoughton has done the same, adding Aetna. She said she is trying to add Blue Cross, Blue Shield.

Mr. Anzivino noted that the employees numbered the same, but the salary line showed a decrease.

Ms. Bruce said there had been two retirees.

Dr. Jess Miner asked for a general explanation relative to the negative trend of needing a subsidy.

Ms. Bruce responded that the department is recovering from covid, the entire industry is experiencing difficulties. She said the department is still learning about the medicare reimbursement model. She said the department has increased marketing and is having meet/greet events in local hospitals.

Mr. Calter commented that he, Mr. Tisdelle and Ms. Bruce believe the current model to be sustainable. He said funding comes solely from medicare. He added that the consensus of the Select Board is the importance of offering the services. He said it is difficult to break even.

Mr. Anzivino, said in 16 years, this is the first year the department has requested a subsidy. He noted the many years of subsidy to the golf course.

Ms. Dianne Dolan thanked Ms. Bruce for her work. She asked if assistance with billing was available from medicare.

Ms. Bruce said it was done in-house. She continued stating that billing is not the issue. She said the department is service-oriented and costs depend on utilization of the services.

Ms. Dolan asked if information could be obtained other than the website.

Ms. Bruce said newsletters, visits to elderly housing, ads in the suburban shopper.

Mr. Tisdelle said for the last 2 weeks he had shared the office, and he said it is extremely active. He said the department receives ARPA funds.

Mr. Enokian asked for a definition of contract services.

Ms. Bruce responded these are the home health aides. She said in the past this service had been contracted out. It was determined using a third-party was more costly.

Mr. Enokian asked if actual costs were available for FY23.

Ms. Bruce said not yet. Mr. Enokian asked if any clients had been turned down because the department had not yet obtained the services of Blue Cross.

Ms. Bruce said no, clients are referred to other VNA's.

Mr. Anzivino said in the last budget, \$68,000 had been available for contract services, but only \$11,000 had been encumbered.

Ms. Bruce said she would be comfortable reducing the request for FY24 to \$50,000.

Ms. Cynthia Walsh, 1096 Park Street suggested using cable tv ads to reach the seniors, who surely watch a lot of television.

5. Article 26 General Fund Operating Budget (FY24)

a. Library Mr. Chris McGhee, director explained that there was little change in the budget.

Mr. Adam Iacabucci asked if inflation had impacted the services of the library.

Mr. McGhee responded that the library is not too affected by inflation. He said yes, books cost more, but funds come from the State for library supplies.

Ms. Laura Gunn commented on the wide range of activities offered for the young to the old. She said the library is important to socialization of young people. She asked if the director was comfortable that the library could maintain and grow services.

Mr. McGhee said there is an effort to maintain high-level programming. He said the library has the assistance of the Friends of the Library.

Mr. Joel Wolk asked if there were any capital improvements expected.

Mr. McGhee answered that at some point, the library would like to add a generator.

Mr. Wolk commented that \$34,000 was remaining in the funds appropriated for the library.

Mr. McGhee responded that would be insufficient for the purchase of a generator.

Mr. Mark Struck said he had heard that the book selection was insufficient.

Mr. McGhee said new titles are published frequently. He noted also that the library cooperates with a library network in providing titles.

Mr. Anzivino asked if the generator had been included in the original appropriation.

Mr. McGhee responded yes but current estimates for the generator are in the range of \$150,000.

Mr. Wolk said the DPW does have a portable generator for use.

Chief Michael Carroll said he understands the need, and that his department is working with NEMA (National Electrical Manufacturers Association). He said there are grants as the library could be designated a warming/cooling center in emergencies. He said the grants are very competitive, but the department is submitting an application.

Mr. Wolk said currently only the library conference room is wired for generator use.

Mr. Anzivino asked about the availability of a warming center at Freeman Street.

Chief Carroll responded yes but the very best location is now the senior high school. He said creating a shelter in the event of emergency is a heavy lift.

Ms. Dolan thanked the director for the e-books available and asked if OCPC was still involved.

Mr. McGhee said yes, but he didn't know at what level financially.

Ms. Walsh, 1096 Park Street suggested the installation of a suggestion box at the library to gather public input.

b. Veteran Services Mr. Sean Butrica, Director p. 43

Mr. Butrica said that his budget was conservative and focused on military connected veterans.

Dr. Miner asked about the increase in the veteran's benefit line.

Mr. Butrica said it is a statutory increase, an EDDBS (Enrollment Database Service) recommendation. Mr. Butrica said his department now has 500 veterans enrolled, expecting to become fully enrolled at 700. He said veterans are reimbursed at 75% and homeless at 100%.

Dr. Miner inquired about 1.6% raise. Mr. Butrica said for a assistant.

Mr. Anzivino asked if the position moved to full time, cost of \$54,692, Mr. Butrica said the position is shared, and the Veterans Budget pays half.

Ms. Shropshire confirmed that the other half of the salary is paid from the Assessor's budget.

Mr. Calter commented that this change will be footnoted. Mr. Anzivino urged full definition and clarity.

Mr. Struck asked about outreach.

Mr. Butrica responded that his office takes full advantage of services offered by the VA Administration, he said there are work studies, flyers available. He said the coffee hours are mainly for socialization and attempts to reach non-participating veterans.

Mr. Iacabucci remarked that through January, \$145,000 of the \$350,000 budget had been spent. He asked how to create better communication.

Mr. Butrica said Massachusetts is the only State that offers Chapter 115, a benefits/safety net program. He said his department is mandated to respond and does what is essential to maintaining eligibility for reimbursement.

Ms. Dolan said she would like to see a sign at the town hall recognizing the availability of services for the veterans.

Mr. Mike Pazyra, former Veterans Director came forward to urge the finance committee to support the request.

Mr. Anzivino asked if .05% raise was a typo.

It was determined to discuss Article 41. Accept Chapter 59, Section 5 Clause Twenty-Second G (Veterans Tax Exemptions)

Mr. Anzivino made the motion to hear out of order, seconded by Mr. Wolk. The motion passed.

Mr. Butrica explained that this Article opens the opportunity to offer abatement to disabled veterans whose property has been put in a Trust.

Ms. Dolan asked the definition of Trust.

Mr. Butrica responded, any Trust.

Mr. Pazyra, former veteran's agent, stated that this was an opportunity long available but not enforced by the Town. He said there were errors under the previous assessor and asked if applications, previously denied, could be reviewed. He said if this article is approved, it would affect surviving widows. He said, in addition, veterans should be encouraged to re-apply if previously denied.

c. Recreation and Youth p.47 Mr. Matt Cauchon

Mr. Cauchon noted a salary increase of 1.6%, result of the resignation of a counselor. He said the department has an intern, a licensed social worker offering free counseling to youths and their families.

He said the program facilitator line is zero, the duties are now the responsibility of the program administrator (title change). He said programming is now being done in-house. He remarked that the spring/summer guide was just published. He said the elimination of the 3rd party programmer is a savings. He noted an increase for landscaping due to costs and the addition of Glen Echo.

Mr. Cauchon stated that new programs are being added: an adult clay class, pre-school and teens programs. He said Ames Ponds offers swimming lessons for 60 to 70 kids.

He listed accomplishments: irrigation at Halloran, the completion of Glen Echo, the rehab of the varsity baseball field.

Mr. Struck asked if the department could work with the YMCA to offer swim lessons in the winter.

Mr. Anderson asked sources for first aid materials. Mr. Cauchon said they are paid out of the revolving fund.

Ms. Dolan asked if the lifeguards at Ames Pond are red cross certified.

Mr. Cauchon responded yes. He said there is a push to find lifeguards.
Dr. Miner asked why the Program II Coordinator is paid more than the Director.
Mr. Cauchon said it is a question of tenure.

d. community events Mr. Cauchon p. 49

Mr. Cauchon noted the line item of \$50,000 set aside for the 300th celebration. He said there will be an article presented to town meeting to fund parades, police details.

Mr. Cauchon announced that the fireworks display will be July 2. He thanked all who had assisted in last year's celebration of the 4th. He said he was pleased to state the fireworks company was very impressed with his staff.

Mr. Desmond asked about the increase in the budget. Mr. Cauchon said it included the cost for the fireworks.

e. Council on Aging p. 42 Ms. Janiece Bruce

Ms. Bruce stated that the budget, salaries, and expenses are less this year. She said van drivers have left and the new hires are hired at a lower salary. She noted that people are coming back to the center as covid lessens. She said trip offerings are back and the Center is offering a wide range of activities. She said the bottom line of the budget shows a decrease.

Mr. Wolk asked if any capital improvements were expected.

Ms. Bruce responded no, but she was hoping to get a state grant for the installation of a pickle ball court.

Ms. Walsh 1096 Park Street asked the finance committee to consider a third full time driver.

Ms. Bruce said this can be done within the budget.

Mr. Anzivino asked how many vans belonged to Stoughton.

Ms. Bruce responded that Stoughton has 1, BAT has 3. She said the town is better-positioned due to the high ratio of the senior demographic.

Ms. Dolan asked the capacity of the current vehicles.

Ms. Bruce answered 12 passenger to 16 passenger.

f. Substance abuse and prevention p.45 increase in OASIS \$440.00

g. Health and Human Services p.40 Ms. Bruce noted that this budget increased to include her stipend.

Ms. Cynthia Walsh, 1096 Park Street expressed concern over Ms. Bruce's workload.

Mr. Calter took this opportunity to announce that Ms. Bruce had announced her intent to retire this year in August after 34 years. Mr. Calter said Ms. Bruce had agreed to work two days a week to assist with Seniors. The room applauded Ms. Bruce for her efforts, her devotion, and accomplishments.

h. Commission on Disabilities p. 44 Mr. Tisdelle explained that the Select Board had requested the addition of a line item for outreach and marketing.

Ms. Walsh asked for attention to the building ramps, which are often inadequate and, in some cases, not well lit.

6. Article 26 General Fund Operating Budget (FY24) Public Safety

a. Police Chief Donna McNamara

Chief McNamara said the department has 10 vacancies. She stated that 6 candidates from the civil service list will be interviewed next week. She said 140 emails sent to residents had resulted in additional 6. She explained that she had 5 reserved places at the Police Academy scheduled for August.

Ms. Gunn asked if candidates were not passing the requirements for the Academy. She stated that there are special challenges to hiring in Stoughton. She asked what was being done to make the town more attractive.

Chief McNamara acknowledged the town's standing was part of the problem, but even more so was the national climate and attitude toward the career of police officer. She said we have improved since 2016. In response to Ms. Gunn, Chief McNamara responded that the pay scale is in the middle of surrounding towns.

Mr. Calter said significant changes are essential to improvement of the department.

Dr. Miner asked if the negative focus was an issue.

Chief McNamara said there is an impact but because of the work ethic, integrity of the force, new hires understand they are joining a professional force.

Dr. Miner asked about in-service/training. Chief McNamara said this is a high priority.

Mr. Struck asked about outreach and noted the success of programs such as the "haunted house", and coffee with a cop.

Chief McNamara responded that they do all of that plus citizen's academy, school visits, toy drive, math events, reading in elementary schools, and letters for elementary schools.

Mr. Anzivino asked if the department still held a food drive. Chief McNamara said yes. Mr. Anzivino asked about a budget item cost 146,036 for a deputy chief.

Chief McNamara said the department's goal is to implement body cameras to build public trust. Storage, maintenance, training will be the responsibility of the new non-union deputy chief.

Mr. Anzivino asked for clarification of the \$190,000. Mr. Calter explained that it represented 6 months of current deputy's salary plus 60,000.

Mr. Eric Anderson asked about the pay-line from academy to service.

Chief McNamara responded officers do not receive full pay until a year after completion of the academy.

Mr. Anderson asked the ideal staffing level. Chief McNamara responded 54 police officers. She stated response times are hampered by the high volume of mental health issues. She noted that

DPH could hire a social worker through a grant. She noted that she was cooperating with OASIS and Ms. Stephanie Patton.

Mr. Wolk asked how the 54 officers were split.

Chief McNamara responded 6 full time detectives, remainder officers and SRO.

Mr. Desmond asked for a breakdown per shift.

Chief McNamara responded 5 patrol officers plus 1 supervisor weekdays and nights. At midnight, 4 patrol officers, 1 supervisor. She said staffing is increased on the weekends.

Dr. Miner asked if alternatives to hiring a social worker had been explored, perhaps building staff in the area of mental health.

Chief McNamara said there are some OPIOD funds available, but first priority is police calls. Chief McNamara commented that call volume could increase justifying the request for a full-time mental assessment officer.

Mr. Lurie offered his support for the leadership of the department. He mentioned that the previous Chief, Chief Shasteny left a very strong recommendation for the hiring of Chief McNamara. Mr. Lurie said we are seeing the fruit of her efforts.

Mr. Anzivino said some towns have left civil service. Chief McNamara said such an action causes significant labor relations issues.

Ms. Cynthia Walsh, 1096 Park Street, said she is biased having siblings as police officers. She said it is unrealistic to expect towns to hire police officers and mental assessment officers. She said the State should offer help. She said perhaps this availability could be regionalized.

b. Animal control Chief McNamara said the current animal control officer is doing great job. Mr. Struck asked if there could be coverage for the weekend.

Chief McNamara said the animal control officer is doing additional duties. Mr. Tisdelle said she has done some code enforcement.

c. Central Dispatch p.23

Chief McNamara said there was an adjustment to this budget, as 4 positions were moved, and the budget was reduced to \$294,234.

Mr. Anzivino reviewed the requests for adding police officers, first it was 9, 4 were taken away, then 2 added by the Select Board. The cost, \$204,484.

Chief McNamara responded that she would apply for a grant of \$106,000.

Chief McNamara explained her objection to regional 911. She stated her belief that Police/Fire and PSAP should remain in her department under the same roof.

Mr. Calter said that he, Chief Carroll and Chief McNamara had discussed this move. He said the fire department had done a great deal of research. He stated that he and the Chiefs had visited the

regional 911 in Holbrook several times. He said he asked the Select Board to suspend the decision pending further information. He explained further that the town will have to spend millions of dollars in technology improvements to maintain a local 911. He said this information is confirmed by the staff of Regional 911 that visited Stoughton and assisted in the assessment of the needs of the town.

Mr. Calter explained that as the police and fire departments receive more information about the regional 911 there has been more excitement about the move. He said the town may receive substantial funding. He said the legislature within 5 years may mandate regional 911.

Mr. Calter discussed also that 911 regional had been offered the use of the Armory. He said now Stoughton does not a back-up to the 911 system. Joining regional 911 would provide that redundancy.

He said there will be a public forum to fully explain the benefits to the town. He mentioned there will be negotiations with the unions and bargaining to resolve any impact of the change on the officers. Mr. Calter said he is working very hard to convince regional 911 to locate in Stoughton at the Armory.

Mr. Anzivino clarified the request , originally the request was for 9 dispatchers, number was reduced to 4, including 2 filled and 2 unfilled positions.

Mr. Wolk asked the location of regional 911, the response Holbrook. He asked the financial responsibility. Chief McNamara responded that the town doesn't pay for 3 years, expense to be borne by the State. Mr. Calter added that funding in some part would be on-going from the state. He said after the 6th year of participation, 100% cost would Stoughton's responsibility. He said the employees who decide to go to regional 911 become employees of the town of Holbrook. He explained the letter he held known as the Letter of Attestation, once signed would begin the negotiations. He said if the town joins, there will be an inter-community agreement.

Mr. Lurie spoke to leadership changes, and changes in the finance committee. He suggested the formation of sub-committees to help iron out details. He said sub-committees are instrumental in the training of future leaders.

Mr. Calter acknowledged the obvious frustration with closing the budget. He said Stoughton is not stagnant, it is very much active with many events occurring that impact the budget. He said there are many challenges that must be addressed.

Annual Town Meeting Articles

7. Article 48 Police Capital

a. Police Station upgrades:75,000 Chief McNamara said this article would fund upgrades to the community room, improve technology and add wi-fi.

Mr. Wolk asked for back-up documentation for the facilities budget/locker rooms.

Chief McNamara said this information was available and would be emailed from Ms. Bruttaniti.

b. cruisers 3 at \$200,000

Mr. Anderson asked about the logic of upgrading the cruisers instead of replacement. Chief McNamara explained that the policy for replacement is every three years, at 80,000 miles.

Mr. Lurie asked about the strobe lights and their intensity.

Chief McNamara explained that the vehicles are state-of-the art, industry standard. She said the public does not yield to the police vehicles.

Mr. Anzivino asked the Select Board policy of replacement of cruisers.

Mr. Enokian responded 3 cruisers every year.

Ms. Dolan asked about buying and outfitting the current vehicles.

Chief McNamara said it is difficult to get vehicles in a timely manner. She said the department has switched from explorers to tahoe's. The vehicles have to be ordered in July.

Mr. Wolk asked if the department had tried electric vehicles. The response was no.

8. Article 26 page 25 General Fund Operating Budget (FY24) Public Safety, Fire and Rescue

Chief Michael Carroll explained that the department has begun a cancer screening program for all firefighters, cost \$300 per firefighter.

Mr. Enokian asked about the additional cost of \$20,000. Mr. Struck asked about the cost of box fires (7) and boxes (33) out-of-town increased usage, and the cost for the fire alarm cable.

Chief Carroll said this item was delayed because of covid. Deputy Chief MaComber said the department is transitioning to wireless. Mr. Struck asked about the NIMO training (National Incident Management Organization). Chief Carroll responded that it went very well.,

Mr. Iacabucci asked about capital expenses. Chief Carroll said the number was \$12,000 now but next year replacements will have to be made.

Dr. Miner asked about staffing. Chief Carroll said there has been significant turnover due to retirements, and the ineffectiveness of civil service. He said 390 candidates applied, 4 were signed. Chief Carroll said high school internships have been established as the goal is to hire as many Stoughton residents as possible. Deputy MaComber added that the last 4 were Stoughton residents.

Dr. Miner asked about the use of chemicals? Chief Carroll said PFAS is in the gear, in the stitching. He said there is an awareness and mitigation is in progress.

Mr. Desmond asked about the collections. Deputy MaComber said the department is on track to bring in \$1,000,000 additional dollars.

Ms. Walsh, 1096 Park Street commented that the Firefighters are suing the National Association to get rid of PFAS.

9. Article 49 Fire Capital

Mr. Anzivino asked for backup documentation for the article. Mr. Struck asked the reason for purchasing pick-up trucks. Chief Carroll said this is the trend in the industry, trucks are more effective in bad weather or rough terrain.

Chief Carroll continued stating that the trucks had a tow package and could provide electrical help.

Mr. Anzivino made the motion to continue the public hearing until Thursday, March 23, 7:00 PM at the School Committee Conference Room, Stoughton Public School District Office, 31 Pierce Street. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hansen. The motion passed.

Mr. Anzivino made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Anderson. The motion passed and the open meeting for the Finance Committee was adjourned at 11:00 PM.

