

Town of Ludlow, Massachusetts
Finance Committee

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TOWN OF LUDLOW

Minutes of January 15, 2025, Finance Committee
Meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

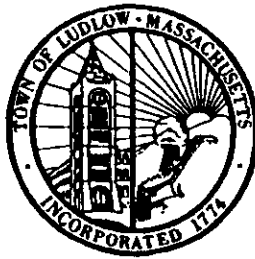
Members Present: Tony Sanches, Aneta Lombardi, Susan Boyea, Mike Kelliher, Dolly Cincone, Matias Goncalves
Also Present: Marc Strange

6:00 p.m. Pledge of Allegiance

NEW BUSINESS

- Chief Valadas and Chief Pease – Dispatch Department presentation

Chief Valadas and Chief Pease attended with dispatcher Ashlee Korny, Lt. David Irwin, Lt. Michael Brennan, Tracey Martowski and Deputy Chief Jeff Lavoie. The dispatchers started under a general grant in the 1990's and before that it was police officers. In 1996 it was staffed at 1 per shift. In 2017 it was decided to merge Police, Fire & ALS. It was approved in Town Meeting and was delayed due to Covid. Testing for the system took a week and now the whole town is covered. Chief Pease said the system is second to none and does not see the sense in going to central dispatch to save a couple bucks. Ms. Korny read her statement in favor of keeping the Dispatch Department. In the year 2024 there were 7,759 9-1-1 calls, 35,855 business line calls, 21.6% were emergency 9-1-1 calls, 53,769 Fire Department radio transmissions, 71,665 Police radio transmissions, 6,596 Police Winlock radio transmissions and 1,441 Fire Winlock radio transmissions. Chief Valadas stated Dispatch is a nerve center and we cannot get rid of it. Ms. Cincone stated 15 years ago she was on the Board of Selectmen and it was discussed then to potentially go out of Amherst and it didn't make sense then. A lot of money was spent on this system. Chief Pease said the estimated life of this system is 15-20 years. Chief Valadas stated this year the State is giving us \$95,000 and it goes up every year because the volume is not shrinking. Mr. Kelliher asked if we would lose all the money invested if we went to the new system. Chief Pease said he does not know because we don't know what they would be able to integrate. Mr. Kelliher asked about the possibility of Ludlow becoming a small regional center. Mr. Strange said there is a moratorium on new regional dispatches. We are not considering regionalizing dispatch. He asked if the officers are getting overtime for this. Chief Valadas said no some are comp time. Mr. Sanches said this was brought up at one point and this was informational for the committee and public.



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Ms. Cincone asked about the salary's percentage. Said they should all be the same and are not. Overtime training is at 104% halfway through the year. Fringe benefits get paid in August and we got paid what we were owed for last year. We won't pay again until FY26. There is also a 97% expenditure for software and Chief Valadas said that is the RMS contract which also gets paid once a year. Vehicle repairs and maintenance have gone up. This year they are asking for 2 patrol cars and 1 specialty car. LPD has 42 full-time police officers and 19 special police, all are fully certified. Mr. Sanches said dispatch overtime is 194%. Chief Valadas said they keep that low because they know they're going to get the reimbursements. Lt. Irwin stated you apply for funds in October or November, State 9-1-1 reviews it and they award it. The contract date starts on the date it is awarded. You can only submit for the funds after that date. You take a month's worth of salary and apply for the reimbursement. About 30 days later you get notification you are awarded the money and it goes into your account in the general fund and it's supposed to go back into the line item. Chief Valadas stated last year the police department received \$204,000 in grants. Line item called LPD cameras are for the 5-year contract for the plate readers. Town Meeting passed the article with no funding source. They found the funding this year but next year they will be asking for funding. He also stated if he were to ask for a new position it would be to put an SRO in the middle school depending on Superintendent and a lead dispatch supervisor.

- 2026 Budget Process Discussion

Mr. Strange stated in no way, shape or form was his comment on public safety service. It is completely and totally about budget. Mr. Sanches stated there is going to be a 15% increase in insurance. Mr. Strange stated that due to limitations of prop 2 ½, our limitations on raising revenue via property taxes is 1.3 million. We need to come up with another \$200,000 just to cover health insurance and then pay for everything else. Our total increase now is 3.2 million so almost half of that is health insurance. Right now, we are at a 2% increase for non-union COLA's and unions that are in negotiations, the School Department is at 3% and town departments are at 2.75. If you factor in employee benefits the total increase is around 4% for the Town. We are at a \$200 trash fee. We backed out the lifeguards for Haviland Pond. We backed out some reclassifications. We reworked some of the debt service because the debt service for Harris Brook is debt excluded. With the 15% health insurance increase we're just over a million dollars in the hole and there aren't many more places we can go. His suggestions to the Board of Selectmen, our top 3 options, are job cuts, increasing the trash fee and if that is course of action his suggestion is to crate an enterprise fund, and the last option is health insurance. We met with MIIA today to talk about reconfiguring our plans. Another option is infusion of free cash, which is not a good option. We could propose an override, which is not likely to pass. Or we could do a



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small bond. Mr. Kelliher asked if we would have enough time before Town Meeting to work on setting up an enterprise fund for the trash. Mr. Strange said after discussing it with our accounting consultant they suggested we set up the bones of it letting it work for a year as a trial and it would be effective fiscal 2027. Mr. Kelliher said the health insurance would not see any benefit right now so it comes down to trash fees or cuts. Free cash for FY24 has not been certified. Mr. Kelliher asked how we handle cash flow because the 3rd quarter tax bills did not go out on time. Mr. Strange stated last year bills did not go out on time for a different reason and cash flow was fine. Bills should go out February 1st. We will do another robo call to let people know.

- Governor's Budget Proposal – 4th Wednesday of January

Mr. Sanches said the School Committee put their budget together and it's on the website. 73.5% of their budget is salary. They're anticipating 10% cost increase in transportation and something else.

- Chairman to sign invoice from Mass Municipal Association for Annual Dues

Motion made by Ms. Lombardi to approve invoice for \$304 for Mass Municipal Association for 2024 dues. **Ms. Cincone second. All in favor. Motion passed 6-0.**

Motion made by Ms. Lombardi to approve minutes from December 18, 2024, as written. **Mr. Kelliher second. Motion passed 5-0-1.**

Motion made by Ms. Cincone to close meeting at 7:38 p.m. **Mr. Kelliher second. All in favor. Motion passed 6-0.**

