
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: DON P. JOHNSON, TOWN MANAGER
FROM: FIRE CHIEF
SUBJECT: RESPONSES TO SELECTMAN ASHTONS BUDGET REQUESTS AND QUESTIONS
DATE: 1/8/2004
CC:

QUESTION: I would like to know 6/30/03 balances in all revolving, enterprise and gift accounts as well as anticipated increases/decreases in those funds for FY04, i.e., projected balances for 6/30/04. I know we use some monies from these accounts to help offset spending funded by taxation (as indicated in the budget book), but I am obviously interested in where these accounts are headed and to what extent we are depleting these accounts (or where more might be used.

RESPONSE: The two revolving funds that I can report on are the Fire Alarm Revolving Fund with a fund balance of \$72,423.00 and the Ambulance User Fee fund (ambulance receipts) which had a fund balance of \$44,427.00 as of 6/30/03. The Fire Alarm revolving fund would only be anticipated to increase slightly as new fire alarm master boxes are added. The fund balance in this fund has been requested to be utilized to replace our current fire alarm repair truck. The fund balance in the Ambulance User Fee would most likely increase if a fee increase is approved consistent with posted Medicare rates.

QUESTION: Manager's Message – p. 3: In order to put the \$23.4 million "Needs" budget into perspective, could you define the guidelines provided to staff in determining what "Needs" really means. For example, last year, you presented an estimate for the FY05 budget of \$22.1 million and now we are at \$23.4 million for FY05 – an increase of \$1.3 million. What explains the difference? Does this reflect any improvement in services, increases in demand, or inflation, or simply reflect the status quo, etc.?

RESPONSE: As to the question of "Need" I would begin with the operating budget. Regular salaries have been adjusted relative to required salaries as a result of position control and wage adjustments, including those derived from collective bargaining. Expenses have been level funded. The biggest concern is the need for adequate funding for shift vacancy coverage as accounted for in the Overtime salary portion of the operating budget. For the last several years this budget has been level funded despite negotiated increases and the fact that it did not allow for the covering of all shift vacancies in the first place. This year to receive a reduction in the level funded amount of 15% and to further compound the issue by not including a negotiated and anticipated wage settlement will have a dramatic affect on our ability to provide full shift coverage. Further, this may result in some fire station closings on an intermittent basis.

As to the need for the capital items requested, I had requested funds to provide hearing protection in the apparatus, which is a safety and operational issue. The Fire Prevention Officer was not requested as a luxury item, but as a needed item given the complexities and demands for such a position. The Fire Alarm repair truck replacement is a needed item to maintain a safe and reliable piece of equipment to maintain a substantial fire alarm network within the Town. Last but not least is the

replacement of an engine, that has been delayed for several years and which is needed to maintain a safe and reliable fleet of fire apparatus for fire protection and Emergency Medical Response within the Town of Acton.

QUESTION: Fire – Line 56080 – what is the “agency account” referred to as the source of payment for the Emerson ALS fee and how much is that fee for FY05 (\$45,250)?

RESPONSE: This agency account was created to allow for ALS (Paramedic) Fees to be collected as part of our ambulance fee for basic transport of a patient. The account allows fees to be collected and then transferred to Emerson Hospital for the paramedic services. It is a “pass-through” account.

QUESTON: Fire/Health -With regard to the capital request for an oil/water separator/floor drain – isn't this the same type of item as DEP required at the Highway Dept.? If different, please explain. It seems to me that there is a significant risk here and we ought to fund this item or institute a no washing policy. \$25,000 seems like a small price to pay to prevent the difficulties we faced with DEP over the Highway tight tank issue.

RESPONSE: This is the same general type of item that was required for the Highway Department. At the current time the fire department has been restricted from rinsing apparatus in the stations and has been restricted from any washing that utilizes soap. This budget request was to connect the floor drain system at the South Acton Fire Station into the municipal sewer system including the required oil/water separator. This would allow the fire department to have at least one compliant facility for the washing of apparatus until such time as all fire stations could become fully compliant with DEP requirements.

QUESTION: I note that the one recommended capital request for dispatchers is the last priority (#15) on the Chief's capital list. Indeed all of the non-personnel items could be funded for 2/3rds of the cost of the dispatchers. Please indicate why this is recommended by the Manager when it is the last of the Chief's priorities? If these are to be civilian dispatchers to replace the firefighters who currently perform this function, will the firefighters be laid off? Why can't we use either firefighter or others in this role? Can't police officers perform this function? If this is a “new service” as the program proposal indicates why can't it be delayed? Do we require this service 24/7, or could it be limited to first shift?

RESPONSE: I am aware that the Police Chief has responded in a separate memo and I am in concurrence with the majority of his statements. However I would like to specifically address several points made. First as to any layoffs of firefighters I would state that the premise of the joint dispatch right from the beginning as I understood it was to hire civilian dispatchers to allow trained firefighters and EMT's to be utilized for emergency response and regular fire department duties and responsibilities. At present one (1) trained Firefighter/EMT per shift is utilized in a dispatch function and does not respond to emergencies. Once again I would concur with the Police Chief's response regarding the utilization of fire or police personnel for dispatch functions. In addition to his statements I would also add that to utilize these emergency personnel for dispatch functions would also most likely trigger many issues relative to collective bargaining. As to the question of delaying this program, I do not see how that is possible given the concept and the implementation of initiating joint dispatch. Finally, I feel that there must be two (2) dispatchers on-duty at all times, given call volumes, issues relative to redundancy and the inherent obligations and responsibilities of operating a joint public safety dispatch operation.