

**TOWN OF RYE SELECT BOARD
MEETING
Thursday, October 12, 2023 - 8:15 a.m.
Rye Town Hall**

Select Board Present: *Chair Tom King, Vice-Chair Bill Epperson, and Bob McGrath (left at 9:55 a.m.)*

Others Present: *Town Administrator Matt Scruton, and Asst. Town Administrator/Finance Director Becky Bergeron*

I. Call to Order

Chair King called the meeting to order at 8:18 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Work Session

a. Staffing needs 2024

The Select Board reviewed the staffing requests from various departments, along with wages and benefit costs that would affect the overall budget for 2024. The Board also reviewed the numbers for the new staffing that was included in the 2023 budget, which included the Deputy Fire Chief, Public Works Assistant, and Recreation Assistant. It was noted by Finance Director Becky Bergeron that the budget for those positions will not be overspent in 2023. The Deputy Fire Chief position was filled as planned. There was a delay in hiring for the Public Works Administrative Assistant, which will work in the Town's favor budgeting wise. There has also been a significant delay in the placement of the Recreation Director Assistant, which is not yet in place.

There is a proposal for four new positions for the 2024 budget:

- **Police Department** – Animal Control Officer – move to Fulltime position
School Resource Officer
- **Building Department** – Building Inspector/Admin - Parttime
- **Finance Department** – Temp Staffing Service – Parttime

Animal Control Officer:

Police Chief Kevin Walsh noted that he submitted a memo to the Select Board about the Animal Control program and the reasons why the position should be fulltime. He pointed out that the current animal control officer also helps with parking enforcement during the summer, along with the animal control duties. In helping out with the parking tickets, the current ACO has accumulated \$4,950 for the Town. The ACO has also issued 17 town ordinance violations for various dog violations at \$961. Chief Walsh noted that the biggest complaint that the Select

Board and Police Department receives is for speeding vehicles and poor driving behavior. In looking at when the ACO was dispatched to a call, there were nine times between August and September that the officers were stopping cars at the same time. When the ACO is not available because of limited hours, the officer in the area has to respond to the animal control call. The ACO acts as an assistant to the Police Department's operation procedures to help match the expectations of the residents. Chief Walsh spoke about the possibility of training the current ACO to test water sites for bacteria, as discussed by the Select Board at previous meetings.

Selectman McGrath noted that the current ACO broke her ankle this past summer and it gave her some time to work inside the Department. It gave the ACO the opportunity to learn some of the other jobs in the Department. He pointed out that if the current Administrative Assistant to the Department was out for a day, the ACO could now cover that position very easily. At the same time, the ACO revamped the licensing program to know what dogs are being vaccinated, but not registered with the Town. Selectman McGrath continued that in 2018 when the ACO vehicle rolled up, it wasn't greeted well. There has since been an education process that it's not just about enforcement. Because of the current ACO's experience at the NH SPCA and the fact that she has carried on what has been started and enhanced it beyond, he doesn't want the Town to lose her. He knows that the residents like her and ask her advice. She also teaches programs at the SPCA for kids and has done this in town, which puts Rye a step above. Selectman McGrath pointed out that a year or two ago, one of the main management components at the SPCA vacated his job. The SPCA was encouraging Rye's current ACO to apply for that job. He had a conversation with the ACO. She said he loves it in Rye and this is what she wants to do.

Chief Walsh commented that when he does the police department and emergency management budgets, he tries to keep the budget level while providing a better service and maintaining that service. He understands it's tough to look at adding new positions and looking at increases to the budget. However, the ACO is generating some revenue. There may be a way to spread out services and find a way to generate some other type of revenue. He noted that the current ACO is a well-rounded and great employee. He also noted that the ACO position has morphed into something that is multi-department used and can benefit service to the residents.

Chair King stated that his concern is that this position would be going from \$49,000 a year to \$84,000 fulltime for the same job for eight more hours. It's been said that this person would be used in the evidence room and for handing out tickets. That is well and good, but this is a max of 8 hours more in this position for \$35,000 within 8 hours of work. Fiscally, he doesn't see it. If the Town needs all this animal control work, it would make far more sense to hire another 32-hour animal control officer for essentially the same price and get double what there is today. On a purely work for money aspect, he doesn't see the argument at all. He continued that creating a fulltime position for an employee is great, but that person will eventually leave. There will then be a position that was created for one person and it will not go away once they leave.

Chief Walsh pointed out that in 1994, when he started at the Department, the animal control program was an on-call position of about 10 hours per week. The program has grown to what it is today. If the current ACO was to leave, the expectations would be exactly the same for the

new person taking the position. He commented that this is the service that residents have said they want and expectations come with that for the Police Department when making animal control calls. He also commented that the job description has been adjusted and there's a task list for the ACO. The current ACO's outstanding quality of work is helping the Department to fine-tune that position to match expectations.

Chair King noted that this can be reworded in different ways. The current ACO could be given an increase in pay or a bonus versus a fulltime position.

Finance Director Bergeron stated that the Town tried this exercise with the Town Clerk's office. The argument was the same. The extra 8 hours percolated into \$35,000. The Select Board, at the time, didn't see the fiscal prudence in doing that. So, two 20 hour a week positions were developed, thereby, getting more coverage for less money. This didn't work. It ended up being a "revolving door" and hiring was constant for those positions. The difficulty in hiring two parttime people versus one fulltime person is that the Town ends up with a "revolving door," employees who are not committed and invested in the community, and it ends up being more cumbersome for the department head because of the need to constantly fill those positions. Also, the level of service is not there that the Town is looking for in a fulltime employee. Finance Director Bergeron continued that this position isn't being created for one employee. This position is being created to fill a need in the community to fill a number of areas. By happenstance, the individual in question happens to be just the embodiment of a team player. It's not just being created to retain this individual. The position is always going to exist. The Town is just extremely fortunate to have the individual that is in this position now.

Chair King commented that he understands the two positions of 20 hours in the Clerk's office didn't work. With 20 hours, it's pretty parttime, but 32 hours is essentially fulltime minus the benefits.

Selectman McGrath pointed out that usually when people apply for parttime, it's because they want a parttime job. When the current ACO came to Rye, she loved the fact that she could be doing different things with animals and also with people. Her other job at the time was with a nonprofit working with families with family issues, so she has training in that field. He believes that the nonprofit wanted her more; however, she chose Rye.

Chair King stated that he is not in favor of the request from a fiscal point of view. He thinks if the Town needs more animal control officer time, another should be hired. He just doesn't see it for 8 more hours. He commented it's different than a clerical position because there can't be two working at the same time, as there can be two animal control officers working at the same time.

Selectman McGrath commented this is a big buy-in and commitment. If in seven months the current ACO leaves Rye, he would want to revisit this position. He wouldn't want to just leave it at a fulltime position.

Chief Walsh noted that the current ACO's talent and skills has taught him that the position is much more. If this person was to leave, he would say the Town still needs a fulltime ACO because of the position and what the residents have asked for in service.

Chair King commented that the Town can get the same service for a lot less money.

It was noted that the four requested positions being addressed at this meeting would be roughly .04 on the mill tax rate. The ACO delta would be .01 on the tax rate.

Chair King stated that it's not that he doesn't agree that the current ACO is very capable and has taken the program to a different level. He's just saying that if the Town really needs more animal control hours, he thinks a second person should be considered. He pointed out that the current ACO could still be given a significant increase or bonus and it wouldn't cost \$35,000. If it's about keeping an employee, it's about pay and benefits, but he'd like to avoid the benefits. If it's about the program, another person can be hired which would give more hours.

Vice-Chair Epperson stated that he has observed a lot of people come and go in the time that he has lived in Rye. The people who are capable of doing a job and providing services are the ones the Town wants to keep. Taking the current ACO out of the equation, it's still a position that needs to be filled. This is a service that's needed in town. He would support the position and if the current ACO is the right person, he would support her.

Town Administrator Matt Scruton commented that he supports all the requests being made, this one in particular. He thinks this position is important to the community. He thinks when there is an exceptional employee, the fact needs to be considered that it's more valuable to the community and the department to retain that employee. Offering benefits is one way to do that by making them fulltime. He would rather have a fulltime employee, who the Town values, respects, and trusts to do the job, then to have multiple parttime employees with constant hiring and training because of the turnover.

Chair King noted that he is not in favor of the request for a fulltime ACO.

Motion by Bob McGrath to make the Animal Control Officer a fulltime benefited position. Seconded by Bill Epperson.

Chair King suggested phasing in the positions to alleviate the budget impact. He thinks that the animal control position could be put off until at least summer.

Selectman McGrath pointed out that dog licensing is due April 1st. It would make sense to start it then because part of the ACO's responsibility is getting people to comply with the dog licensing.

It was agreed that the fulltime position could start April 1st. The position will be included in the budget for 2024, which will be reviewed by the Select Board and Budget Committee.

Vote: 2-1 Opposed: Tom King

School Resource Officer:

Chief Walsh stated that the Department has started a program with Officer Jeannine Harrington going into the schools 4 to 5 hours a week. Officer Harrington has been communicating with the school staff and interacting with the students. She has been asked to attend the schools' open houses to provide security and guidance in the evening. She has also been following up with the schools' protocols to be sure they are being followed. Having Officer Harrington go into the schools everyday has dramatically improved communications between the schools and the town. He agrees the position should be parttime. It's to enforce school security and interactions between the schools and town. Chief Walsh explained that he is requesting to add hours to the budget to cover Officer Harrington going into the schools. This would not be hiring another person. He further explained that the Department currently has 20 hours a week on the schedule for part-timers. When leave time is requested by the fulltime officers, the parttime officers may work those leave times.

The Select Board agreed to support the request and have the hours added to the upcoming budget.

Building Department:

Building Inspector Chuck Marsden noted that the Building Department continues to remain busy and the revenue is right on track from where it was last year. The expansion of the offices has helped greatly. There is room to have consultations and the staff is not on top of each other. It also gives a better sense of professional service and being available to the public. He continued that the Department's hours have expanded. The office opens at 7:00 a.m., instead of 8:00 a.m. Contractors are now able to go into the office for permits before going to a job site and it's working out very well. Inspector Marsden noted that things are more complicated now. FEMA has been a lot more demanding in just the last couple of years. There are also other issues; such as, the Parsons Creek Watershed. He noted that he recently worked on a FEMA project and it took him the greater part of the day because of the research involved, along with the site visit required. FEMA has also started emailing about properties of concern that are under construction, which require reports to be submitted back within a certain timeframe. As more tasks are being given to the Department, it makes his position more of a review and research position. Inspector Marsden commented that the situation the Department has been in is reactive, which takes more time than being proactive. He is trying to shift things over to being proactive. This will also give the opportunity for the Department to become more organized and more efficient. Because of the lack of manpower over the last several years, the Building Department has become unorganized and less efficient with the workload that has changed over the last three to four years. He commented that the Department is really coming together, but there is a lot more that can be done.

Inspector Marsden noted that he doesn't do inspections anymore because he's doing research and review. The second building inspector is really busy with inspections. He doesn't have a lot of

time to do research. There have been some training challenges. There hasn't been time this year to do the training that should be done, along with certifications. This is a concern and the Department has to make time for this next year. Inspector Marsden pointed out that he has FEMA education credits that have to be maintained to keep certifications and he is behind. There is a lot of need for an extra person.

Inspector Marsden noted that construction in the past three years has doubled. From 2019 to 2021, the permit fee income went from \$366,000 to \$538,000., which is a difference of \$172,000 in two years. Between 2021 and 2022, the permit fee income went from \$538,000 to \$712,000., a difference of \$174,000. He pointed out that last year's income increased in one year what was done in two years previously. There is a shift now from a lot of new construction to rebuilds and remodels. The homes are large and require a lot of engineering and technical support, so the research is huge. The complicated permits for new homes have generated the increase in the permit fees.

There was some discussion about certifications that Inspector Marsden and Deputy Inspector Bauer should have and education hours that are needed.

Selectman McGrath commented that the economy runs in cycles and right now is the height. He asked how long it would take to be in a position to be ready to be on top of the next run.

Inspector Marsden stated that he has thought long and hard about this. He thinks that the Seacoast is in a little bubble. The year 2008 didn't touch Hampton at all. It just changed things. People weren't doing teardown and rebuilds. They were gutting their houses and remodeling. He doesn't see things changing for Rye. People want to live here.

Chair King stated that he thinks this is necessary for both constituent service and workload.

It was agreed by the Select Board to move the position to the budget for 2024. The position cannot start before April 1st, as the budget has to go to town vote in March.

Finance Temp Staffing:

Finance Director Becky Bergeron explained that currently, the Finance Department has one fulltime staff member and about 15 hours a week of another staff member. The Finance Department is responsible for overall budget administration, as well as wages, benefits administration for multiple departments, and reconciliations. There is a tremendous workload for one and a half people. The workload doesn't allow for ongoing professional development because there is no time for training. The goal is to be more proactive with analysis and the current configuration doesn't allow for this to be done. Director Bergeron noted there are great resources for accounting; such as, account temps who are trained professionals looking for diversification and not a traditional office environment.

Vice-Chair Epperson asked if the temp would be someone who would work for the Town on a regular basis.

Director Bergeron confirmed that this could be requested. The goal would be to have a long-term assignment held by one individual.

Chair King asked about hiring a parttime administrative assistant versus temp staffing.

Director Bergeron explained that the Executive Assistant is also the Finance Assistant. That person is processing credit card payments and all incoming revenues, and generally supporting the finance operation.

Chair King commented that the Executive Assistant is overloaded. He suggested having a finance assistant to the work and have more flexibility in the system with having an employee. He spoke in regards to the possibility of having a parttime 32-hour finance assistant. He pointed out that the Executive Assistant is overloaded. This would also provide a person that can help out in other areas. There is more flexibility in having an extra person for 32 hours on staff. The Finance Department can get 20 hours from this person and the Executive Assistant can offload the assistant finance work.

Finance Director Bergeron confirmed that they can certainly look for someone to fill a 32-hour position.

Administrator Scruton noted that the Finance Director puts in long hours, is dedicated, and efficient. He doesn't think there would be any pushback to increase the hours from 15 to 20 hours, as requested, to 32 hours. The Town could certainly utilize those hours. If the Select Board supports the 32 hours, the next discussion would be whether to go with a temp agency, which is generally more per hour, or offloading some of the responsibilities to a parttime person on staff. Administrator Scruton continued that he agrees someone is needed. This is a critical area and it affects all operations. As the Town grows, there are more transactions and staff, and the demands are really increasing.

There was some discussion about using the temp agency and the possibility of the temp person moving to the position under town staff. After discussion, the Select Board agreed to support the request. The temp position cannot start until April 1st. The Select Board authorized the additional help for a year to give time for evaluation and to determine how to move forward with the position. The position will be added to the budget under a contracted rate from a temp agency. The Select Board will also be given an hourly rate for a parttime staff member, so they can decide on which way to go.

III. Other Business

None

At 9:42 a.m., Tom King made a motion to enter Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II (a) Personnel. Seconded by Bill Epperson. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes; McGrath – Yes; King – Yes

At 10:36 a.m., Tom King made a motion to come out of Non-Public Session. Seconded by Bill Epperson. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, King - Yes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Bill Epperson to adjourn at 10:40 a.m. Seconded by Tom King. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger