

Finance Committee Notes  
April 13, 2022  
Town Offices  
12:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 12:05.

Present: Ginger Robinson, Joyce Muka, Glenn Caffery, Erica Jensen (selectboard).

Absent: Nate Messer, Michèle Higgins, Bill Glabach (selectboard).

Guests: Brian Pelletier, Chief, Leyden Fire Department.

Ginger said we'd wait to approve April 6 meeting minutes until the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Chair comments:

Public Safety meeting. Ginger attended and said Bernardston gave us a fair price, as seemed to be their intention she thought. They added some indirect costs, the real costs of hourly labor. Maybe around \$88k/year. Not much more than we have now (last year \$75k, not including indirect). She said they run a very professional operation over there. Interim agreement doesn't need a town vote.

School district:

School assessment: Not much more this year. Joyce said next year will be \$839, 838, up from \$801,218. (4.7% increase). She said the tech school assessment was \$17,945, but this year will be just a few hundred dollars.

Fire department:

Brian Pelletier, fire chief attended for preliminary discussion of budget.

Smaller expenses are covered with grants. Erica said that the \$300 FRCOG funds are still available for radios.

Radios.

Brian said radios are complicated in Leyden. State moved towns to 800mhz, which worked great in their (state) trials. But this meant our old pagers won't work. The state provided radios, but the towns have to pay for installation, antennas, cables. These new radios don't work any better in Leyden because radios are line of sight. Like before, the repeater can be used, but it is also still line of sight, meaning, for example, it works for the Department office, but not River Road. So, the Fire Department uses a variety of tools.

New cell tower in Colrain is going to help, but if Colrain is using it at the time capacity might be unavailable.

They are still keeping the old system running, but that will eventually have to be shut that down

Still a lot of bugs to work out. Motorolas and Kenwoods—two different systems. We've always had Motorolas. Waiting on other towns to experiment and work things out, and then Leyden will follow best practices.

All three trucks are up and running. The agreement states one radio for each of the vehicles, and one for the chief's vehicle, which we don't have. One mobile unit still in box.

Never put in for EMS radio. We were supposed to have one for every seat in truck, so there are three spares. All officers have their own radios.

Vehicles.

Vehicle purchasing will be the largest expense.

Leyden used to have five vehicles and now has three: squad, tanker, and engine 4 (which we are borrowing from DCR and is titled to DOD; we can register it).

Brian said the squad vehicle should be replaced. We need one pickup for rescue (a "quick attack vehicle") and one pickup for brush.

Erica said we can't get around getting three bids, unless FRCOG does the actual procurement. Michele G. can help with procurement questions. Ginger asked if the trucks would be between \$10,000 and \$49,999; Brian said they would.

Erica asked what was needed for the trucks. Brian said they don't need to be new or high end.

One-ton pickups are ideal, then retrofitted with skids. We just need the base trucks. One should have a plow to plow out the hydrants. (Hydrants are on Greenfield Road and a more difficult one on West Leyden Road.)

There was some discussion and lingering question about town plowing private property where the hydrants are.

Leyden's current one-ton squad vehicle would be sold at auction, perhaps for a couple thousand dollars. Because it is military surplus, parts are not designed to be repaired but replaced.

Brian said brush vehicle specifications have perhaps only ten pages of requirements in the code book. By comparison, vehicles for structural fires have much more extensive and detailed requirements.

The current diaphragm pump has been nursed for years. A new skid unit would cost \$8-10k, and is ready to go (a tank and a pump included). We already have the fittings and hose, now fully transitioned to flat hose.

Crew cab on both vehicles would be nice for inside storage.

Ginger asked Brian if she should look for trucks on the Municibid sites? Brian said yes.

Erica asked what is needed for the rescue truck. Brian said a crew cab would be great, and we can always buy a cap for it. EMT's carry their own stuff.

Both trucks would need 4WD. Both "could" be  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton, but both would be better if one-ton.

Air packs.

Brian has been trying to figure out the best way to replace the air packs.

Erica said she can't believe the air pack situation in town, and it makes her sad.

Brian said we currently need to replace five, costing \$8,000 per pack. Half have expired, and the other half will expire by the end of the year. He had applied for a FEMA grant, and it is still in review, but last year they didn't get it.

Brian said FEMA is looking more at mutual aid and shared resources. If we want a trailer to refill air packs, we could use it for mutual aid and then maybe FEMA would fund.

Erica said ARPA phase 2 and 3 could be used by fire department for air packs, but probably not for trucks.

Erica said we can apply for the Collins Center grant annually, which might be able to help with capital expenses. With Fire, EMS, EMD and regionalizing, we have more leeway for getting funding.

Brian shared an example of a washer that was funded because nine towns partnered. It needed connection to a graywater system, which had to be self-contained due to cancer causing substances on the clothing. Shelburne had their own wastewater system so that worked there. We share that now—Leyden gear gets sent to Shelburne.

Erica asked about used packs. Brian explained that every few years packs are hydrotested, after 15 years they are done. So the timing on used packs is tricky.

Brian said it is important to set the purchase of packs on a cycle, so Leyden doesn't have to drop this huge amount at once. Ginger said we can start staggering now. Brian raised another consideration for the timing of replacements. Might be better if the company that comes out to hydrotest is doing five at a time rather than two.

Tanker has five seats, so need five packs minimum. These need to be replaced. Brian later clarified that there is no place in the tanker to hang the fifth pack, so four might be the immediate need.

Engine 4 has four seats so needs four packs, and these are fine for now.

The squad pickup needs three packs, but since it is now strictly a brush truck, they technically aren't required at the moment.

Erica asked if the worst case is we need eight now, but Brian said we can get away with four because we can hold off on engine 4.

There was some discussion of Scott vs. MSA brand air packs, Brian saying that the Scott packs are superior and can use off-the-shelf batteries.

Erica asked if it is better if we dig for a grant? For eight? Brian said that they will need to build up to 14 or 15 eventually.

Brian summarized: trucks and air packs, the two expensive items, are what the fire department needs to fund. Smaller stuff they've covered with grants.

Administrative.

Brian doesn't know the current numbers for available funds, including from the three kinds of grants they have. There was some discussion of the difficulty he has had in getting a response from the accountant, and he hasn't been getting biweekly reports as expected.

Erica asked if an administrative assistant for the fire department has been considered. Brian said administrative stuff typically isn't a challenge. The difficulty is with trying to get radios installed, hydrotesting bottles, and the like.

Brian is still waiting to hear back on EMS certifications and contact phone numbers from the police department. Erica texted Officer in Charge Aiken during the meeting.

Ginger and Joyce asked if there is a state procurement plan for vehicles and pre-approved vendors. Brian said Steven might know more about this. Ginger said Michele would know something about this.

Erica shared possibilities of ARPA 1 being used for air tanks.

Brian said most of the classes people completed were uncompensated last year. Erica asked if there was room in the budget for when the first responders get on payroll.

Salaries.

Erica said the call rate and training rate must be the same, currently \$16/hr. for both, by law.

For comparison, EMTs receive \$21/hr. and police officers as first responders receive \$19/hr. Other first responders receive the minimum wage of \$14.50/hr. Police Officer in Charge Aiken receives his officer in charge rate.

Erica said we should equalize the first responder rate for police and fire to \$19/hr. Additionally, and by law, fire department personnel should be paid \$19/hr. for all hours worked: training, calls, and medical.

Erica asked Brian when last pay increase was for fire, to which Brian responded, "a long time ago."

Erica continued that she believes fire personnel are underpaid. By comparison, highway part timers are paid \$24/hr., except a higher amount for Dave. For firefighters, the amount of training and risk—what we ask of them—is out of line with what they are paid. She said the fire department seems undervalued. Salary, equipment, and other needs have to be looked at neutrally. Ginger said we are

more likely to need a response from the fire department than the police department in Leyden, especially if the fire is covering medical calls.

There was discussion about worries expressed by some about too many responders showing up on calls lack understanding of how calls work. There are so many different roles, and on any call, you only get a small percentage that can come out because responders have jobs and lives.

Brian shared that a big challenge is recruitment and retention. Fire department personnel can limit what kinds of roles they are willing to do (for example brush fires only, detail, structure...), all so that Brian has a pool of people he can draw on.

There was some discussion on equitable compensation and motivations of fire personnel. Brian asked rhetorically, "What would it take to get you out of bed in the middle of winter to do this?" Erica drew on her past experience as a fire fighter in a better-equipped and better-compensated department.

Erica suggested that someday there could be regionalization, Leyden maintaining a substation for example, "but for now we are not there and you need to have air [packs]."

Ginger said for the safety of the town, for aging in place, we need a good fire department.

There was a brief discussion on the role of councils on aging in other towns to communicate with seniors. Leyden doesn't have good data on residents with special needs. There are 18 square miles here, and several forms of communication, no one form covers everyone.

Erica said that less than 2/3 of town residents have broadband.

Ginger asked Brian what he thought would be a fair wage, but Brian said he'd leave that to the Finance Committee, FRCOG.

Regarding the fire chief salary, there was some discussion of regionalization. It is going to have to happen eventually, and the chief position would probably be full time. Erica said regionalization is a decent deal for us, but purchasing attack vehicles for Leyden would be good for that process and is good for now.

Ginger asked how many hours are projected for training, calls, and medical. Brian said he'd have to crunch the numbers. He'll figure it out. For training, 40hrs per year gets personnel the full stipend (in two installments for 20hrs each), and Brian pays them for additional training if they submit the paperwork. Personnel might be actually doing 104 hours of training for a year.

Ginger asked for an estimate of call hours. Brian said medical calls are always more than fire calls.

Erica said that Cindy McGoldrick, an EMT who works for multiple towns including Leyden, needs a lot of certifications. If she is being certified to work in multiple towns, cost should be shared. But currently Leyden doesn't cover any of the costs of her training.

Brian said \$1000 is his current chief's stipend. He still is paid his call out rate, but this is extra for chief duties, which he estimated take about 10 hours per week. Ginger pointed out that the is a \$2/hr. pay rate.

Glenn expressed confusion about seeing Brian listed as Officer-in-Charge on the Leyden website, not chief. Erica clarified that Leyden fire chief is a strong chief. This status goes with position. Brian is a fire

chief, under the strong chief law. We learned that chiefs and deputies are called “white hats” because they wear white hats on calls to be identifiable as leadership.

There was some discussion of a job posting by the selectboard determined to be about four years ago for a fire chief for Leyden with the stipend set at \$7,500. Brian was chief at the time.

Brian said he is under general oversight of selectboard, but that it would not be appropriate for the board to be involved in day-to-day decisions, especially given the urgent, dangerous nature of the work.

The fire department had a \$27,500 expense line last year. Not enough for air packs. Ginger said that the expensive items discussed are outside the expense line. Brian said the expense line is sufficient for operating expenses. The only expense to check for next year is if EMS gear spending needs to go up. Brian will check to see what they (Will, Cindy, Tina) already have in their bags.

Office:

Brian said his plan was to use the old selectman’s office as the EMS office. Erica said Brian should move into old selectboard office. Erica also thinks they should look into an assistant.

Brian was asked how much the town gets from the MIA grant. Brian said the cap is \$5,000, and last year they received \$2,100.

Brian said two years ago they had \$18,000 in grants and a \$17,000 in expense line.

Erica said two generators are on their way, having been voted on recently, funds coming from ARPA.

Glenn made motion to adjourn at 1:45. Joyce seconded. Unanimous.