



**Beacon Falls Board of Selectmen
Beacon Falls Board of Finance
10 Maple Avenue
Beacon Falls, CT 06403**

**Joint Budget Workshop
March 19, 2024, MINUTES (Subject to Revision)**

1. Call to Order / Pledge to the Flag: G. Smith called the BOS workshop to order at 7:04 PM. K. Brennan called the BOF workshop to order and G. Smith led the assembly in the pledge.

Members Present: G. Smith, M. Krenesky, P. Betkoski, K. Brennan, S. Leeper, W. Giglio, K. Lembo, B. Catanzaro, J. Carroll

Members Absent: None.

Others Present: N. Nau, B. DeGeorge, Cal Brennan, Jeremy Rodorigo, J. Delenick, one other member of the public

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes – **S. Leeper made a motion to approve the 3/5/24 Budget Workshop minutes. J. Carroll seconded the motion. All ayes. M. Kerensky made a motion to approve the 3/5/24 Workshop minutes as presented. P. Betkoski seconded the motion. All ayes.**
3. Public Input – Webform submissions – J. Delenick sent a webform asking about groundwater contamination of Carrington Pond with PFAS chemicals, as reported to IWWC. How much is the town budgeting for future testing, remediation, and filtering water entering and exiting Carrington Pond? Region 16 did the groundwater contamination survey. The Boards will defer to IWWC to review the study and make their recommendations and include Parks & Rec in the conversation.
4. Department Budget Review:

Fire Marshal:

Operating budget: B. DeGeorge noted he is requesting a stipend increase for his position and a 3% wage increase for the Deputy and Admin positions. Everything else is good. Uniforms tend to be an expense every other year. The Fire Marshal will need a new uniform this year and then there will be a lapse. He noted the part time average compensation for Fire Marshal throughout the State is around \$45,000. Many towns are going to full time Fire Marshal. G. Smith asked if the salary request is in line with similar communities around us?

N. Nau asked about Fire Marshal revenue and billing for Plan Reviews which flow through the Land Use/Building offices. B. DeGeorge noted that they are working on communications with Land Use, so the Fire Marshal is not brought into the game in the bottom of the ninth inning on Plan Reviews. N. Nau asked if the office is on a schedule to complete annual inspections for each commercial location. B. DeGeorge noted that every commercial building in town has been inspected.

Capital Projects: They are requesting a Fire Marshal Vehicle, which is a basic vehicle to have all their gear separately stored in the back of the truck. The current vehicle is the 2007 Colorado which is coming to the end of its life.



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Fire/EMS:

Operating Budget: B. DeGeorge noted that BHC is asking for a pay per call structure for responding Firefighters, to be proactive in retaining volunteers, as there are recruiting issues statewide. Retaining members is an issue and they hope to offer \$8 per call per Firefighter. This is a new program which they have not done before, and they are enacting it because it is harder to keep people. G. Smith asked how they came to the \$20,000 budget number. C. Brennan noted that it is based on average number of calls per year (300 calls) x \$8 x 8 firefighters per call. Are any neighboring towns doing pay per call? Watertown and Middlebury do pay per call based on rank. M. Krenesky asked if we are paying per call, do we have employees so we would not be considered a volunteer department, and would they be paid from the town payroll? Jeremy Rodorigo noted that strictly based on Workers Compensation, first responders are Beacon Falls employees when they are on a call. The Boards asked how EMTs are paid, and they currently receive a 1099. 1099s are for independent contractors who are free of direction and control of the payor and carry their own insurance. J. Carroll noted that there is an issue with 1099 issuance for EMT/EMRs, as they are under the direction and control of BHC. Those EMR/EMTs should be treated as employees and issued a W2, with employment taxes, etc. N. Nau asked if the pay per call would be based on training/rank. B. DeGeorge noted everyone who responded would be eligible. N. Nau asked how many are typically riding out on a fire call. 7-8 was the response and this is an impressive number of responders. Members only get credit for the call if they return to BHC after the call. N. Nau asked if anyone is responding in their personal vehicles. To get credit, they would need to return to BHC. N. Nau noted that from a grant standpoint, based on BHC's total membership (volunteer versus paid), the program may change grant status to combination department. What percentage of responders live in Town? C. Brennan noted that 75-80% of the members are Beacon Falls residents. Out of town members do not receive the Town's tax credits, so this is a way for them to receive a benefit.

Likewise, Jeremy Rodorigo is presenting a new proposal for the EMS service. He is serving on the Governor's task force, working on ways to address the shortage of EMS responders across the State. Daytime staffing of BHC and pay per call are one of the ways BHC has addressed EMS shortages. Both the full-time staff members are primarily EMS, but they do go on Fire calls. The statewide shortages have led to ambulance services going dark and in the age of less volunteerism, how are we going to staff the EMS Service? He noted there are communities lacking services, which has brought about the term: EMS dessert. Beacon Falls is in decent shape and there are a lot of people around during the day. Our EMS/Ambulance service is the best in the area, but it is tenuous. The proposal to pay per shift is an effort to stay ahead of the curve. He noted there are 64 active Fire volunteers, with 250 calls per year, but EMS must cover 1000 calls per year. B. DeGeorge noted that Beacon Hose has always had great equipment, and now need to focus on staffing. Naugatuck is now competitively paid, and Oxford ambulance just started hiring part time employees, so surrounding towns are responding to the need.

J. Rodorigo continued by proposing the following EMS Budgetary changes: Volunteers are doing more with 838 ambulance calls last year and over 900 the year before. This includes mutual aid calls. The State's EMS protocols are also increasing demands on EMTs. The proposal is to create an incentive system that keeps EMRs/EMTs active. Currently, they receive \$25 per call for an ambulance call. BHC is reimbursed \$300-\$1000 for billing each call and they only bill when they transport. J. Rodorigo is proposing paying people for 12-hour shifts and then adjusting the pay per call. The proposal is \$50 for a 12-hour shift from home. He is requesting a \$50,000 budget to pay per shift. BHC will continue to pay their daytime staff from insurance billings, and they



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hope to continue to contribute annually from the EMS account to general fund revenue to offset EMS costs and to the vehicle replacement fund for ambulance purchases is the contractor with the payors. W. Giglio asked how did the call volume increase from 300 to 800 calls? J. Roderigo noted there was a population increase and a change in why people call for services; increases to Route 8 calls, mental health calls, sicker people with less primary care and two 55+ communities came into town. BHS does a fair amount of mutual aid which is reciprocal. K. Lembo asked if the presence of a Town Nurse offsets some of the calls. J. Roderigo noted that the town nurse is an asset that a lot of towns do not have the luxury of having and she checks on people. There are times when she arrives to a home and calls EMS. She checks on people, assists with elderly services and makes sure people do not fall through the cracks. Discussion continued about what a paid ambulance service would cost the town and the price would be upwards of \$750,000 annually for one ambulance.

G. Smith asked what keeping the third ambulance will cost the town. J. Roderigo noted that there will be costs for consumable supplies. Fuel and supplies will increase, but not dramatically. The primary reason for keeping the third vehicle is for the new high school EMT program, so the ambulance will be going back and forth to WRHS to train future EMTs. The EMT program is funded by Region 16 and a grant but BHC is administering that program and expects 16-18 students to take the EMT program. The second part of the Operating Budget proposal is a **\$6,000** Stipend for the EMS Director, who oversees the service and the volunteers.

N. Nau asked BHC to reevaluate next year's requests for EMS training, Ambulance supplies and Fuel to make sure costs will be covered.

Turning back to the operating budget lines other than EMS, K. Brennan asked about Vehicle Equipment Testing – The TNT Rescue Tools will have annual maintenance and we have an additional fire truck and ambulance which will require annual testing and maintenance. B. DeGeorge also noted the addition of \$7500 for state mandated structural gear decontamination, requiring professional cleaning twice a year. They will have a mobile company come out to complete that work. OSHA is updating their standards and that will require more testing.

Hose and Airpack replacement lines reflect cost increases to those items, plus capital projects associated with these items. Fire Training is increasing by \$5,000 with new OSHA standards that result in mandatory training and a hired instructor. N. Nau asked for an inventory of cylinders and hose line, so that asset tracking software will allow us to track replacements and integrate with Slate pages.

Capital Projects:

- Replacement of Chiefs Vehicle – The Chief's vehicle is a 2018 Tahoe coming up on the replacement reschedule. It currently has 45,000 miles and the intention is to hand it down to the Assistant Chief. Could this vehicle be repurposed to Fire Marshal Vehicle? B. DeGeorge noted that they would prefer a vehicle where they can have the gear separate. The Asst. Chief currently does not have a vehicle and in the distant past, the Asst Chief had an old police car.
- 3 Airpack's XP Pros: These are mandatory replacements of Airpack's which were all bought at once 2011 and their useful life 10-15 years. Three air packs went out of service this year to keep them on track to maintain within operating line. The new air packs and cylinders will all be compatible. There are (8) X3Pros, (20-24) 2011s; All receive annual flow testing and bottles are tested regularly.
- Battery Operated Fans: To move away from onboard generators; the request is for (2) fans for Engine 1 and Engine 3
- Electrical refit and insulation of BHC: This is a repeat project for some electrical upgrades and replacement of ceiling insulation.



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- **Mask Fit Test Machine:** This machine will annually test members for mask fit. This service is usually subbed out. This item is no longer a priority for the AFG grant, so now it is extended into capital projects. Right now, Wolcott Fire School charges \$30-\$35 per firefighter per year. The machine would have a 5-year service plan and would require maintenance and calibration.
- **Large Diameter Hose Replacement:** C. Brennan explained that each year the hose is taken out of service and this year they lost five lengths of 5-inch hose, due to age and use. Hose prior to 1987 needs to be replaced. The capital project is to keep up hoses with large hoses replacements and costs for 5-inch hose is \$1000/section. N. Nau asked is BHC is transitioning to tanker use, for non-hydranted areas. Much of the town has hydrants.
- **RIT Pack:** This is the AFG grant which has been applied for, and this amount changed from total cost perspective. \$17,300 AFG grant and we will match at 5%. The RIT pack is for assisted breathing for a firefighter in trouble.
- **SBCA Masks** – This capital project is to keep up with mask replacement of twenty-five masks.

Discussion continued about upcoming needs of BHC:

- **Storage of Equipment** – Which vehicles are stored at Station 2? Brush truck, third ambulance stored at Station 2.
- **Building modification at Station 1** – B DeGeorge noted that space is at a premium, but he is not proposing building changes at this time. A new rescue pumper would combine two vehicles and reduce the fleet by one vehicle. He envisions a compact fleet that would work well for the town.
- N. Nau asked about wildland needs for the DEEP VFA grant for this year and BHC will review options. She noted that another AFG priority for future consideration is a vehicle mounted exhaust system for cancer protection.
- **Dive Team** currently does not have their own line item in the budget. There are ten members who are part of Region 5 team. There are four divers, and BHS does not have our own dive equipment.
- **Lucas Device** – J. Rodorigo noted that they will be asking for a new Lucas device for the third ambulance in the future.

5. **Open Budget Discussion:** Revenue, Expenditures, Non-Recurring Capital Projects

- **Staffing** – At this time, the boards will table staffing proposals, as they best belong in executive session.
- **Capital Projects** – K. Brennan noted that we have discussed many of the capital projects with the Fire Department. He would like to address revenue streams for capital and unspent capital projects from prior years, at the next workshop.
- The Board agreed to add an **April 2nd Joint Budget Workshop at 7:00 PM at the Senior Center** (if available). At that workshop, the boards will have the First Selectman's budget proposals to review. They will enter an Executive session for staffing proposals and review all the capital projects.
- N. Nau will push posting the first public draft of the budget back until after the next workshop discussion.
- April 9th is currently listed as a Regular Board of Finance meeting and Budget Workshop. Mr. Yamin will attend this meeting to present the Regino 16 budget.



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6. **Adjournment:** S. Leeper made a motion to adjourn the BOF Workshop at 9:04 PM. K. Lembo seconded the motion. All ayes. M. Krenesky made a motion to adjourn the BOS portion of the Workshop at 9:04 PM. P. Betkoski seconded the motion. All ayes.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin A. Schwarz