

**Town of Windsor  
Finance Committee Minutes  
Town Hall – Ludlow Room  
March 8, 2010**

**APPROVED MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Committee Chair Deputy Mayor Al Simon, Councilor Donald Jepsen

**ABSENT:** Councilor Randy McKenney

**STAFF:** Peter Souza, Town Manager; Bob Lewis, Fire Chief; Paul Goldberg, Fire Administrator

**GUESTS:** Mike Gergler, Wilcox & Reynolds; Randy Graff, Town Treasurer

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**3. DISCUSSION OF FIRE DEPARTMENT'S LENGTH OF SERVICE PROGRAM**

Town Manager Souza stated that this item has been reviewed by the Health & Safety Committee with their recommendation that the Town Council authorize the Town Manager to formalize a Length of Service Program for the Windsor Volunteer Fire Department and to negotiate and enter into an agreement with Wilcox and Reynolds Insurance Company, Inc to manage the Length of Service Program. Furthermore, it is understood the funding source for the first four years of the program is the SAFER federal grant program and funding for the out-years of the program would be subject to the annual budget appropriation process.

The Health & Safety Committee also asked that the Finance Committee review this item prior to Town Council consideration and action.

Chief Lewis provided an overview on the Length of Service program. The goal is to retain volunteer firefighters. As modern times have created a shortage of free time for many people, we have seen a diminished amount of new fire department applicants, as well as difficulty in retaining firefighters. The volunteer fire department has several membership retention programs in place. They include a tax incentive of up to \$1,000, an hourly stipend for reimbursement of expenses, purchases of uniforms and clothing, outside training and recognition events. To attempt to keep the existing firefighters as long as possible, we applied for and received a federal grant-SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) of \$291,115 to create a length of service awards program (LOSAP). The intent of this program is to offer a financial reward for maintaining an active membership with the fire department.

To be eligible for a year's contribution, a Fire Department volunteer must complete probation and have met the 25% attendance requirement. The contribution for a year is divided into four components and is valued at 25% of the year's contribution as follows:

- Membership
- 25% of emergency calls
- 24 hours of training
- Length of service

Councilor Jepsen asked where the money gets invested. Mr. Gergler, Wilcox & Reynolds, explained that the funds are invested via a New York based company called Hometown Firefighters, Inc. They invest in conservative income producing vehicles. Although structured similar to a defined benefit plan, the program is not an IRS qualified retirement plan.

Deputy Mayor Simon asked about the vesting period. Mr. Gergler responded that it is 10 years of qualified service. This would include five years of past service for eligible members.

Deputy Mayor Simon asked how many members would currently qualify. Staff stated that 78 firefighters were currently eligible. Deputy Mayor Simon asked if this number would grow over time. Chief Lewis stated this number would likely stay level or decrease slightly over time as the current membership changes meaning younger members may leave the service as they have life changes such as job and family responsibilities.

The committee asked how this program impacts recruitment activities. Chief Lewis stated this tool would probably have little impact as many of the new, younger members aren't focused on retirement needs.

Deputy Mayor Simon asked if other towns in the area have such length of service programs. Staff stated that well over a dozen other departments have plans such as Avon, Blue Hills Fire District in Bloomfield, Wethersfield, South Windsor, Simsbury and Mansfield.

Councilor Jepsen asked if we could opt out or suspend annual contributions. Mr. Gergler stated that although that is a possibility, there would be the consequence of needing to likely increase future year contributions to meet future obligations.

By unanimous consent, the committee members present agreed to forward to the Town Council with a positive recommendation the establishment of a volunteer fire department length of service program and to authorize the Town Manager to negotiate and enter into an agreement with Wilcox and Reynolds Insurance Company, Inc. to manage the Length of Service Program.

Deputy Mayor Simon asked when the program could be initiated. Town Manager Souza stated the federal funds can be accessed now, so it could likely start in FY 2011.

**4. STAFF REPORTS**

Town Manager Souza gave an overview of the preliminary budget stating that:

Non-tax revenues are projected to decrease by approximately \$550,000 due to lower interest earnings and less State Aid in casino money and school transportation categories. Overall expenditures are estimated to increase by approximately 1.25%. Mr. Souza stated the budgetary tax impact is estimated to be 2.6%.

Mr. Souza stated that he would like to meet with the Finance Committee on March 22<sup>nd</sup> to review the potential FY 11 budget prior to formally transmitting it to the Council by the end of the month. As in years past, staff will host an informal public workshop on the proposed budget on March 31<sup>st</sup>. The formal public hearing is scheduled for April 6<sup>th</sup>.

Town Manager Souza stated that he recently had a bond rating conference call with Standard & Poor. It appeared to go well. It is expected that we'll have the rating report by early next week. Pricing on the new money and refinancing is scheduled to take place on March 17, 2010.

Mr. Souza reported we have yet to receive FY 2010 Town Aid for Roads funding. We projected that we'd receive roughly \$200,000 in the FY 2010 budget. There is speculation that the State Bond Commission will meet next week and a bond authorization for Town Aid for Roads will be on the agenda.

**5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

By Unanimous Consent the committee approved the February 22, 2010 meeting minutes with one change to Page 6, paragraph 4 under Deputy Mayor Simon's comments: Delete Kostin & Ruffkess and insert Carlin, Charron & Rosen.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

By Unanimous Consent the meeting was adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Souza  
Town Manager  
Recording Secretary