

# Final Minutes Police Department Preliminary 2022 Budget

## January 28, 2021 Discussion with Chief Hicks

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM by Phil Rooney Chair of the subcommittee. Chief Hicks followed Chief Lentini's presentation.

Members present were David Coffey, Bill Grome, Julian Lafluer, and Chris Resmini. Absent was Jerry Pierce.

Chief Hicks had previously responded to questions submitted to him prior to the meeting and they are detailed below. At 7:50 Chief Hicks began his presentation by providing an overview to his responses.

### Response to FINCOM Questionnaire

1. Please briefly describe how the Covid pandemic has changed the way you have managed your workforce and changed your overhead spending during 2021

*COVID 19 Pandemic of 2020 presented several challenges in operations and policy development. For the Natick Police Department we had to determine how to balance our required response for service needs while maintaining a workforce that could be available to operate on a daily basis. In addition we had to add additional duties and requirements such as assisting with Public Health related responses and distribution of personal protective equipment. We had to limit access and contact between officers and the public as much as possible. For a short period of time we reduced the enforcement of minor civil violations (motor vehicle) and encouraged residents to report crimes that did not need an immediate response to our online platform. As stated we focused much of our time and effort to keep our workforce healthy. We restricted access to the police station for all but necessary matters and implemented strict sanitation procedures for all equipment that may be shared. From a budget perspective the purchase of equipment and cleaning supplies was a challenge due to availability so seeking out these products and paying top dollar was an impact.*

2. The Preliminary 2022 Budget submitted for our review - have you actively participated in the preparation of the salary and overhead spending information? Do you have concerns that the budget submitted does not reflect your needs for 2022? If yes, please detail those needs and why you are concerned.

*In preparing the Preliminary 2022 Budget I had two meetings with the Administrative Staff. During these meetings I expressed what I felt were the needs of the organization as well as the nuances to the budget based on collective bargaining agreements. The first of these meetings occurred shortly after FATM ended and the approved budget additions of that meeting was still being processed. The only additional item I advocated for was a Deputy Chief of Police which was included in the*

*first round of the administration's budget proposal. With the adjustments in expenditures I feel it reflects the needs of the department.*

3. In 2021 what has been the biggest challenge for your department with respect to staffing or spending? Please detail why.

*The biggest challenge to date has been hiring to both replace spots open positions due to retirements and resignations as well as the new approved slots from Town Meeting. Due to the COVID pandemic many of the training academies have been reduced, therefore making finding spaces even more of a challenge. Even for our non-sworn vacancies the application process has proven to be challenging due to lack of qualified candidates. We had to repost positions after exhausting an original pool of candidates. In many of the cases the candidate withdrew or was not comfortable taking a new position in this COVID environment. As a result, we have been operating at reduced capacity in all areas of the organization. We have recently seen some promising movement in our hiring in all areas and hope to be able to move towards full staffing by late spring although there are several potential retirements that may occur at that time which means we have to continue to stay ahead of these potential losses.*

4. In 2021 have you experienced staffing reductions due to retirement or resignations? Were you able to fill those vacancies? If no, are they provided for in the 2022 Budget? If no, why not?

*Please see above responses for impacts of retirements and staffing reductions and attempts to fill the vacancies created retirements and resignations. These positions are included in the 2022 budget for funding at this time.*

5. The 2022 Budget contains additions to staff. Please provide a brief summary of what has changed in daily operations that now requires these additions.

*The 2022 Budget includes the addition of a Deputy Chief to the staff. This is a position that I have been advocating for the past 8 years. Many of the members have heard my annual justification for such a position with the Natick Police Department. A police department the size of Natick is a complex operation with many levels of operational needs and oversight. As the Police Chief I can attest that I have many members that are performing multiple duties, including myself. In this environment items get placed on the back burner sometimes forgotten until the next crisis. In addition to the justifications from the past this position will assist us in redistributing priorities and responsibilities to ensure an efficient operation within the organization especially as we move to adjust to new police reforms and demands of the community.*

6. Please be prepared to provide context by category of overhead spending for 2022 and personnel dollar increases of more than 3% versus 2021.

*For the Police Department Salary the preliminary budget is projecting a 4.2% increase. As indicated the biggest driver of this increase is the proposed increase to add*

*the position of Deputy Chief. I also have to point out that the preliminary budget presented does not take into consideration the approved and voted increase at the FATM or Merit Increases approved for FY2021. If calculated the actual increase in FY2021 budget to Preliminary FY2022 budget will be slightly less. Proposed expenditures are indicating an 8% increase for 2022. Most members may remember that we have a line item that is adjusted every other year to account for a Promotional Process that includes several CBA expenditure requirements. This line item increases in the year when there is an examination and then decreases the following year. In FY2022 we are scheduled to conduct a promotional exam and this increase accounts for the cost to administer the process as well as other CBA requirements. As stated, in FY2023 these costs would be reduced from the budget line item.*

7 Chief Hicks, please be prepared to add some context around the increases in crime statistics (Robbery, Arson, Extortion, Weapons Violations, etc.).

*This question comes up frequently and I continue to caution about context in the effects of total crime in Natick. Natick rate of crime is extremely low and as such even a single incident can lead to a 100% increase. An example of this is Arson. We average one incident per year. This past year we had 2 (Was actually the same incident in 2 different areas of a vacant building) so it appears to be a 100% increase. Same can be said for many of the categories. Categories such as Fraud did see a dramatic increase and this was directly related to Unemployment Fraud related to COVID 19 Pandemic Program. I can elaborate on any other categories if the members have specific questions.*

Chief Hicks provided the following additional clarifications and information.

- Covid 19 required the department to adopt new processes and procedures for officers and staff. Some of these changes resulted in an online platform to report crime. Officers handling small non emergencies issues over the phone.
- Parking enforcement declined due to fewer shoppers, and decrease in commuters parking and taking the train to work.
- Interest in department open positions is not strong. Finding qualified candidates is difficult. The candidate pool is slim. The Police Academy Training Classes have been delayed due to Covid. The presence of Resource Officers in the High School is one way to create interest in the department. The chief feels the department could do a better effort in advertising the State Entrance Exam for police job eligibility.
- The Deputy Chief position will be a non-union position (same as the position of Chief). Filling this position will assist succession planning. The size of the Natick department compared to other similar towns and the command structures is notable due to the lack of a Deputy Chief. The existing Natick staff does well, but the Deputy Chief position

would relieve the demand of additional time to complete responsibilities and delays in responding to new police reforms/community needs.

- The chief stated the Fall Town Meeting approved additional staff positions that are accounted for in the FY2022 Budget but not in the FY2021 figures as presented to date.
- The 2022 Overtime Budget seems high compared to actuals in prior two-year average. This is because of Covid. Courts are closed as one example or when open backed up. Officers are spending more time processing and planning for court scheduling. The overtime may not be fully used because an officer may take paid time off instead for court time.
- The chief indicated the budget included the needs he identified for the department. He feels the community is safe with this budget. He likes the Police 2022 Capital Budget.

The chief completed his discussion at 8:22.