

Stoneham Override Study Committee

Date:	July 29, 2025
Time:	7p
Location:	Stoneham Town Hall Hearing Room
Present:	Joe Joffe – Chair Stephen Ternullo – Vice Chair Nick Stavre, Jackie Mahoney, Heidi Bilbo, Brendan Dowdle, Eric Scruggs, Cory Mashburn
Absent:	
Guests:	Dennis Sheehan – Town Administrator, James O'Connor – Chief of Police, Brett Gonsalves – Director of Public Works

	<p><u>AGENDA</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approval of Minutes from previous meetings - Vote Required 2. Stoneham Police Department Presentation and discussion 3. Stoneham Department of Public Works Presentation and discussion 4. Pension System Overview – Dennis Sheehan to present 5. Structure of the Report 6. Upcoming meetings and future Public Comment 7. Feedback from Budget Information Session at Stoneham PD on 7/24/25 8. Other business – Non-Deliberative 9. Adjournment - Vote Required

1.	<p>Approval of Minutes from previous meeting - Vote Required</p> <p>A discussion was had about the keeping edit suggestions of meeting minutes to during committee meetings as part of open meeting best practices.</p> <p>The committee discussed and approved the 7/16 and 7/22 meeting minutes.</p>	<p>Mr. Stavre then introduced a motion to approve the meeting minutes for the 7/16 and 7/22 meetings; Mr. Mashburn seconded; all in favor.</p>
2.	<p>Stoneham Police Department Presentation and discussion</p>	<p>No votes needed</p>

Chief O'Connor presented information about departmental staffing, demand for services, and budgetary data.

Some highlights were:

- The Police Department has 40 officers (including 4 in training) with 4 unfilled positions (these are not being filled at this time due to hiring freeze). There are also six officers eligible to retire within the next five years which may have further impacts on departmental staffing and institutional knowledge.
- Covering staffing needs has become increasingly challenging due to injuries, FMLA, retirements, unfilled positions, vacations, and training needs. This leads to increased overtime required for Officers, which has additional financial costs for the town and places a burden on the officers who have to work to cover openings.
- Between 2001 and 2024 staffing has remained relatively flat while calls for service have risen by 42%.
- Based on the town's population, generally accepted staffing levels for SPD would be roughly 46 Officers and with expected population growth that number grows to 48 Officers in the short term.
- Based on some comparable nearby towns (based on population and 2023 calls) SPD has a smaller budget and fewer total staff (including Officers and Deputy Chiefs).
- Based on current staffing levels it is likely that FY 26 Overtime actual spending will be approximately the same as FY 25 (\$777k FY 25 spending vs. \$555k FY 26 budget).
- The last several years SPD has received a state grant to cover costs of mental health response calls including covering salary of a dedicated mental health clinician, officer training, and OT costs associated with proactive followups. Beginning in FY 26 the grant funds have been reduced to only cover the clinician's position and it is currently unclear if funding will be restored in the future. This may mean a reduction in services.
 - There was a discussion about applying for additional grant funding but additional funding was considered unlikely given the type and number of calls the department responds to.
- Training an officer takes approximately one year and the police academy is projected to cost \$27k per trainee. Annual training for Officers and the Department are expected to increase over time.
 - There were questions regarding potential grants to help cover new officer training costs. The town has applied in the past however we did not get awarded grant funds and it is seen as unlikely that we would get funds in the future.
- Chief O'Connor noted that we are in an accreditation/certification process with the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission to ensure SPD is following best practices which have additional training costs associated.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The midnight dispatch shift currently has one dispatcher working, which creates issues when the dispatcher needs breaks or is out for a shift. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dispatch has its own budget since they handle calls for more than just SPD however they are considered part of the overall police budget. ○ There was a discussion of potentially using a regional dispatch model as other nearby municipalities have done and questions as to what if any cost savings that might have. ● There was a conversation that consistent understaffing and current finding levels may cause Officer burnout, create recruitment and retention issues, drive additional overtime costs, and impact the services provided. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If understaffing continues or gets worse some services that could be potentially cut include school resource officers, reduced detective division, and other specialty positions. ● SPD has a relatively new training room that can be offered to host training for SPD and other police departments, the training company may then give SPD free or reduced seats in those trainings to help save SPD money. ● SPD is part of The Northeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council (NEMLEC) to provide shared resources to the town. 	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Stoneham Department of Public Works Presentation and discussion</p> <p>Brett Gonsalves, the Director of Public Works, gave a presentation on the DPW’s services provided, equipment and facilities challenges, staffing, and budget.</p> <p>Some highlights were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DPW is responsible for maintaining roadways, sidewalks, water service connections, sewer mains, pump stations, fire hydrants, catch basins, and drainage outfalls. ● Mr. Gonsalves discussed preventative maintenance projects completed regularly across the town, including pavement preservation projects and drainage inspections, along with infrastructure improvements, such as water main improvements and lead service line removals. ● Mr. Gonsalves provided examples of recent cost saving steps taken by the DPW including acquiring leak detection equipment to find leaks rapidly and MS4 drainage improvements at DPW that were able to be done by DPW employees that saved an estimated \$200-\$525k. ● The committee reviewed winter operations and equipment available. Based on the 2024-2025 winter season the town had access to 10- 15 less pieces of private equipment than what would be considered optimal, this is driven by less private service providers and increasing costs needed to attract them. This has led to delays in completing plowing on the roads, impacting driver safety and potentially timely emergency response. 	<p>No votes needed</p>

- The town has several pieces of aging equipment that are considered well past their end of service life (recommended at 10 years) which means increased maintenance costs and reduced availability of equipment during repairs. 20% of the DPW's pieces of equipment are 10+ years old and should be in queue for replacement.
- DPW's buildings are aging and during a recent inspection several areas of concern were noted.
- DPW has been able to perform some improvements to their facilities including roof replacement/repair, HVAC install (grant funded), and getting a new backup generator.
- Mr. Gonsalves summarized a 2018 report that stated there was a \$5.8M backlog of sidewalk repairs; that number is expected to be significantly higher now as more repairs are likely needed and the costs of known repairs has increased since the report was completed.
- There was a discussion of the priority of capital requests and Mr. Gonsalves noted that off the top of his head he would need \$1M to replace some key pieces of outdated equipment to improve DPW's responsiveness.
- The committee discussed upcoming personnel challenges, the DPW has 23 total employees presently (12 employees are in the field on any given day), other area towns with similar demands have double (or more) that number.
- The department's operating budget of \$2.15M is meaningfully less than comparable municipalities.
- The snow and ice budget is likely to have overage, last winter had a \$150k+ overage compared to budget and was considered a relatively light snow season.
- Mr. Gonsalves noted that DPW will continue to work to improve the town but with limited staff and resources they will have to be reactive rather than proactive with limited preventative maintenance.
- There was a discussion of using outside contracting services and why they might be used. Outside contractors are typically used because they have specialized equipment, because of the wear the service would place on town equipment, or because we do not have the staffing to complete the repair.
- Mr. Gonsalves noted that continued cuts to DPW would likely impact services including sidewalk repair and berm work.
- The committee requested some additional information on how many staff DPW would like to add, the budget increase requested for increased staffing, and an estimated savings from being able to use less outside contractors.
- There was a discussion of the water and sewer account and what those funds are used for.
- Mr. Gonsalves and the town planning board are discussing adding a fee to large developments in town to help cover the costs of infrastructure improvements that would be needed as a result of the project.

4.	<p>Pension System Overview – Dennis Sheehan to present</p> <p>Mr. Sheehan provided an overview of the most recent actuarial review of the town’s pension obligations.</p> <p>Some highlights were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Sheehan noted that the planned payments presented have already been approved by the regulator and are incorporated into current future FY budget projections. • It may be possible to reduce future payments since the town may have no unfunded pension liability from this projection but that would require actuary review and regulatory approval. 	No votes needed
5.	<p>Structure of the Report</p>	No votes needed
6.	<p>Upcoming meetings and future Public Comment</p> <p>The committee agreed to move the 8/19 meeting to 8/20 to accommodate the Superintendent and staff so that they could present on the School Department. The meeting will now be on 8/20 at 7pm in the Town Hall Meeting Room.</p> <p>The committee discussed possible public comment as a part of meetings in the future. For now it was agreed to allow for a public comment period at the committee’s next meeting on 8/5. After the 8/5 meeting the committee will plan to determine plans for future public comment periods.</p>	No votes needed
7.	<p>Feedback from Budget Information Session at Stoneham PD on 7/24/25</p>	No votes needed
8.	<p>Other business – Non-Deliberative</p> <p>None.</p>	No votes needed
9.	<p>Adjournment - Vote Required</p>	Mr. Mashburn then introduced a motion to adjourn; Mr. Stavre seconded; all in favor.