Board of Selectmen
On-Line Via Zoom & YouTube Live
February 13, 2021
Special Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: T. Govert; C. Quinn; R. Smith
Also Present: D. Angersola; C. Varricchio; S. Wheeler; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public via virtual media

1. First Selectman Smith called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Mr. Smith provided information on how virtual attendees could submit their questions and/or comments.

2. Virtual Budget Process: Ms. Varricchio reviewed how the virtual budget review process would work. She advised that the proposed budget has not been modified in any way from the proposals submitted by the departments/commissions.

3. ClearGov Overview: Ms. Varricchio reviewed the ClearGov technology. She stated that she would provide the Board access to the website as soon as she has completed inputting the budget details. She noted that the public will also be able to access the website in the further to view the Town's budget information.

4. Governor's Proposed Budget: Ms. Varricchio reported that the primary impact of the Governor's budget is a decrease of $8,350.00 in the state's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) contribution to the Town. Mr. Smith stated he was pleased that the state's proposed budget will have no significant impact on the Town's budget.

5. 2021-2022 General Budget Review Workshop

    A. General Fund Revenue Detail: Ms. Varricchio advised that most of the revenue detail will be included in each department/commission's proposed budget.

    B. General Government Budgets

        1. Town Office Building: Mr. Angersola reviewed the details of this budget and noted that there was no increase from the 2020-2021 budget. Mr. Smith and Ms. Zemienieski provided additional information.

        2. Town Meeting Hall: Mr. Angersola reviewed the details of this budget. He advised that the windows will have to be replaced within the next several years and he will submit a capital project request after he receives estimates for the work. Mr. Smith noted that there was a nominal increase to this budget.

        3. River House/Annex: Mr. Smith advised that the Town provides a minimum of maintenance to these buildings and noted that no increases to the Operating Budget were requested for the 2021-2022 budget year. He noted that these buildings, along with the old Town Office Building, are part of the parcel that is proposed to be sold to the Centerbridge Group. He stated that if/when that transaction occurs, the buildings will no longer be the Town's responsibility.

Mr. Angersola advised that when the property changes hands, there will be an additional expense to clear out the buildings.

4. Grange Hall: Mr. Smith reviewed several improvements that were made to the Grange in 2020-2021, including installing a generator for the Food Bank. He reviewed the planned upgrades for 2021-2022 and Mr. Angersola stated that the proposed increase in the Maintenance line is due to the planned improvements.

   In response to a question raised by Ms. Govert, Ms. Zemienieski advised that the revenue generated from rentals of the Grange are very minimal. Ms. Varricchio stated that, due to the small amount of revenue that rentals represent, the income is included in the General Budget.

5. Millington School House: Mr. Smith reviewed the 2020-2021 improvements made to this building as well as upgrades planned for 2021-2022. Mr. Angersola noted that the $1,640.00 proposed increase in this budget is due to the planned repairs.

6. Municipal Office Complex: Mr. Smith reported that the Municipal Office Building Committee (MOBC) has been working to complete the final construction items. He advised that a number of safety updates had been installed during FY 2020-2021 as a result of the COVID pandemic and that a fence had been installed around the skate park.

   He reviewed several of the goals for FY 2021-2022, including renovation of the tennis courts, installation of audio-visual equipment in additional meeting rooms, improvements to the storage area in the basement, and electrical work to reconfigure which air-conditioner compressors run off of the generator.

   Mr. Smith stated that the Clerical Union's contract expires in June and a placeholder for a 2.75% increase in wages and salaries for building custodians and temporary help workers was included in the budget.

   He further noted that the cleaning, cleaning supplies, and printer/copier expenses for all of the Town's buildings/departments is included in the Municipal Office Complex budget.

   Mr. Angersola reviewed details of this budget and noted several increases, including $18,950.00 to the Building Maintenance budget line. He stated that total projected expenses for the building in FY 2021-2022 are $394,276.00 which represents an increase of $20,230.00 over the 2020-2021 budget.

   Ms. Varricchio reported that the Town had worked with a consultant to achieve a significant decrease in its electricity rate per kilowatt hour. She noted that the new rate for the Town and the Board of Education is a part of a two-year contract that will begin in January 2022. Mr. Smith stated that they are working on other cost-savings options, potentially including solar panels.

   In response to a question from Ms. Govert, Ms. Zemienieski advised that the increase in the Building Maintenance budget line does not include the proposed capital projects. Mr. Angersola stated that the increase is primarily related to reworking the parking lot drains, repairs to leaky downspouts, adding plexiglass to the cupola louvers to prevent water from coming into the building, and constructing shelves for storage in the basement. Ms. Zemienieski added that part of the increase is for generator contracts for the MOC generator and the light tower/portable generator.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Quinn, Mr. Angersola stated that most new construction warranties expire after 1-year. He further noted that he has not been successful in getting the building contractors to return his calls. There was a general discussion regarding whose responsibility it is to repair poorly designed work and Ms. Quinn stated that it is unacceptable that the contractor is not returning Mr. Angersola's phone calls. Mr. Smith recommended that Mr. Angersola discuss the problems with the Building Committee to see if there is any alternative to having the Town carry all of the cost of the repairs. Mr. Angersola agreed to do so.

7. Regional Probate Court: Mr. Smith reviewed the achievements, goals, and staffing for the Regional Probate Court. He stated that regional probate courts were mandated by the state several years ago and East Haddam's court supports four towns. He noted that the court provides excellent service to the Town and the expense is pro-rated between East Haddam, East Hampton, Portland and Marlborough.

   Ms. Zemienieski stated that this is a pass-through budget and the only increase in the budget relates to the rental of additional space.

8. Selectmen: Mr. Smith reviewed the accomplishments, goals, and staffing of the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Zemienieski stated that the only increase to this budget is a placeholder for a 2.75% increase to salaries. In response to an inquiry, she clarified what expenses are covered by "Other Supplies".

9. Insurance (Risk Management): Mr. Smith stated that the Town has done a good job of controlling this expense. He noted that the Town has maintained cost-effective coverage for all of its operations and he reviewed several achievements and goals. It was noted that CIRMA has only provided preliminary budget information for Workers Comp insurance, liability, auto and property coverage, therefore, the Town has included placeholders of no more than 3% (the Town's stabilization ceiling) for the premium increases.

   Mr. Smith reviewed expected changes to the Town's cyber security coverage and stated that a placeholder has been added to the budget until CIRMA can provide a quote. He noted that, since coverage will no longer be available via a pool, he anticipates the premium for an individual policy will represent a significant increase.

   Ms. Zemienieski provided additional information concerning the Risk Management expense and stated that she anticipates having firmer projections in 2-3 weeks.

10. Board of Finance: Mr. Smith provided an overview of the roles, responsibilities, achievements, goals and staffing for the Board of Finance. He noted that the Town has retained its AA+ rating and successfully refinanced its debt at significantly lower interest rates, resulting in over $2.6 million in combined cashflow savings.

    Mr. Smith advised that the BOF budget includes a placeholder of $100,00.00 for studies and legal costs related to analyzing the proposal submitted by the Centerbridge Group for the East Haddam Village.

    Ms. Varricchio reported that, other than the placeholder for the Village revitalization study and a 2% increase in the Audit Services expense, the budget has remained flat. She noted that the $7,800.00 contingency increase is to restore the budget line to the BOF's historical $90,000.00 level because that amount had been transferred out to other budgets.

11. Finance Office: Ms. Varricchio provided an overview of staff and department responsibilities and noted that the noted salary expense is part of the Shared Services budget. She reviewed the benefits of the ClearGov initiative and the department's work managing numerous grants. Ms. Varricchio stated that, other than the standard increase in the Salary line, the Finance Office budget has remained flat.

    The meeting participants agreed to take a 5-minute break.

C. Public Safety Budgets

1. Fire Marshal: Mr. Angersola reviewed the Fire Marshal's achievements, goals, and staffing. He stated that he has requested an iPad with cell service and inspection software for use at fire emergencies. He noted that there is a $209.00 overall increase requested in this budget. Ms. Varricchio noted that the iPad expense will be included in the Shared Services Technology budget.

2. Paramedic Services: Mr. Smith stated that Middlesex Hospital provides the Town's paramedic services and contract charges, per resident, have remained flat since 2017.

3. Resident State Trooper: Ms. Zemienieski reported that she has not yet received the state's salary/overhead projection for the 2021-2022 budget year for Resident State Trooper services to the Town. She stated that she has kept this budget flat but reserves the option to update it once she has received the state's salary/overhead projections.

D. Health & Social Services Budgets

1. Cemeteries: Mr. Smith reviewed the accomplishments and responsibilities involved in maintaining the Town's cemeteries. Mr. Angersola stated that he has requested an increase of $6,950.00 for contractor services to supplement the Town maintenance crew. He stated that the Town crew is responsible for maintaining 30 of the Town's 36 properties and sub-contracting the maintenance of four more cemeteries would allow them to more effectively manage their work load.

    In response to a question raised by Ms. Quinn, there was a general discussion regarding alternatives to sub-contractors.

2. Chatham Health District: Mr. Smith provided an overview of the responsibilities, accomplishments, goals, and staffing of the Chatham Health District and stated that the 2021-2022 budget reflects a $2,271.00 increase. He advised that the fee the Town pays for this service is based on a per-capita rate and noted that the Boards of Selectmen and Finance recently approved a one-time additional allocation to CHD for COVID related expenses.

    Mr. Smith stated that the Everbridge notification service will no longer be funded by a CT Department of Health grant so a cost-sharing plan that includes Chatham Health and the two towns that use Everbridge, one of which is East Haddam, has been implemented.

    In response to a question raised by Ms. Govert, Mr. Smith confirmed that the increase to Chatham Health District's 2021-2022 FY per capita rate from what was originally projected, was related to a slight error in the Health District's calculation and the impact on the Town's budget is nominal.

Mr. Smith complimented Director Melmed and the Chatham Health District's staff on their response to the COVID pandemic while maintaining their regular duties and responsibilities.

3. Human Services: Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the organizations the Town donates to. She noted that there were no increases in the budget for 2021-2022. Ms. Govert stated she would be interested to know how many Town residents are serviced by the listed organizations.

   There was a brief discussion regarding whether or not the Clothing Bank would be re-locating and Mr. Smith confirmed that it will remain in its current location for the present.

E. Culture & Recreation Budgets

1. Town Greens, Grounds & Fields: Mr. Smith reviewed the responsibilities, accomplishments, goals, and staffing of the crew that maintains the Town's greens, grounds and fields. He noted that the crew currently consists of two part-time regular employees and one part-time seasonal employee and stated that he has proposed to increase staffing to one full-time and one part-time regular employee and two part-time seasonal employees which represents a $40,449.00 increase to the Salary budget line

   Mr. Angersola discussed the challenges of scheduling coverage with two part-time employees. Mr. Smith stated that the lack of any employees for the afternoon shift has resulted in hiring private contractors. He noted that eliminating the cost of private contractors would cover most of the additional salary expense.

   Ms. Quinn expressed her concern about adding additional full-time employees and noted that, in addition to a Salary line increase, benefits would also go up. She suggested the possibility of adding another part-time worker to the crew. There was a general discussion regarding scheduling challenges and the availability of part-time vs. full-time applicants.

F. Debt Service: Ms. Varricchio noted that this agenda item was discussed earlier in the meeting and those discussions are recorded in the minutes above. She noted that debt will increase by $760,000.00 in FY 2021-2022; however, some of the cost will be offset by transfers from the Capital Projects Savings budget.

   She reviewed the ratings agency's financial scoring of the Town and noted that the Town's current and projected debt is considerably below legal and the Board of Finance imposed ceilings.

   Ms. Varricchio and Mr. Smith stated that a significant number of capital projects requests were submitted, some of which must be addressed this year.

G. Other Budgets: No other budgets were discussed. Ms. Zemienieski stated that she would like to schedule the attendance of department heads and Commission Chairman at the Budget Workshops. There was a general discussion regarding the schedules.

6. Public Comment: There were no public comments submitted to the meeting.

7. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made Ms. Govert by seconded by Ms. Quinn, to adjourn the meeting at 12:45 p.m. Unanimous aye.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Theresa Govert, Secretary