TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2021
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Mr. DiCristofaro called the Board of Finance meeting to order at 9:04 am. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members:
- William DiCristofaro, Chairman
- Bruce Dutch, Secretary
- Joseph Corbett
- Todd Gelston
- Tracey Gionta
- Harvey Thomas

Others:
- Robert Smith, First Selectman
- Theresa Govert, Selectman
- Carleen Quinn, Selectman
- Brian Reas, Superintendent of Schools
- Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director

Mr. DiCristofaro thanked everyone for tuning in, noting that he anticipated that this meeting will be one of the longer meetings. He noted the ways that the public could have input.

2021-2022 BUDGET

a. **Emergency Management:**

Mr. DiCristofaro invited Craig Mansfield, Emergency Management Director to review the Emergency Management Budget.

Mr. Mansfield noted the following:
- There is no change to operating budget other than to Valley Shore with an increase of 2.5%.
- Mr. Mansfield provided an update on the Radio Tower project. He noted that substantial progress has been made, however, COVID caused significant impact as the out of State vendors could not travel to Connecticut.
- All emergency responders have been issued portable radios, all emergency vehicles and town vehicles all have mobile radios installed.
- The budget includes a $287,500 request for new capital, there has been considerable testing done on the four current sites, which revealed the need for a fifth site. An upgrade to the Honey Hill site will address the dead spot within the Hadlyme area of town.
- Cost partners and service sharing are being pursued.

- The $287,500 will finish the build out of the fifth site and purchase pagers. The current technology will not be supported shortly. It will also improve some of the communications within the three schools. The annual recurring cost was noted to be insufficient at this time.

Mr. DiCristofaro inquired about revenue to offset these fees? Mr. Mansfield advised that we are a partner, but the towers are not owned by us and therefore, the revenue is not ours to gather. He added that we have been fortunate to be able to utilize the towers, free of charge. Responsive to inquiry from Mr. DiCristofaro, Mr. Mansfield noted that the project began in 2015, and since then costs have increased. Funding was spent on engineering at both the middle school and at Goodspeed sites; ultimately those partnerships fell through. Mr. Mansfield elaborated on the failed sites at the request of Mr. DiCristofaro and the areas where coverage is not ideal.

There was Board of Finance consensus to build reserves for these types of projects to assure level funding in the future. Mr. Mansfield noted that the partnership built with the State should help with the infrastructure long term.

Mr. Gelston inquired if the town should anticipate future charges for the towers we use. Mr. Mansfield noted the long-term agreements in place but stated that he could not guarantee that there would not be charges in the future.

Responsive to inquiry from Mr. Gelston, Mr. Mansfield stated that when the Radio Committee completes its charge, it will likely be its recommendation to the Board of Selectmen that it create a standing Committee and that the Committee will have oversight for all of the radio needs of the town.

Mrs. Gionta inquired if there was insurance available for individual radios, she was advised that the vendor does not insure them. Discussion was held on the replacement cycle of the radios. It was also noted that replacements would not be procured just because the funding is available, there would need to be justification. Mr. DiCristofaro noted that responsible budgeting will likely require between $100,000 and $200,000 for the next several years. Mr. DiCristofaro was thankful for the work of the Radio Committee. Mr. Mansfield noted the benefits of town-wide communication is already noteworthy.

b. **Fire Department**

Mr. DiCristofaro welcomed Fire Commissioner Jiffy Spencer to present the Fire Department budget.

Ms. Spencer reviewed the Fire Department's proposed operating budget. It was noted that the Selectmen have made reductions. The Fire Department is looking for increases for the staff, the justification was noted, the Selectmen halved it. Fire Ponds shows $4,500 but will likely return to $2500 next year as catch up occurs. Mrs. Spencer stated that she could live with the reductions made by the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Spencer reviewed the Fire Department's capital budget. Mr. DiCristofaro reviewed the decision matrix again, which is to either approve, delay or bond, change or eliminate by

funding it another way. Assuming that everything presented is needed but understanding that we cannot fund it all. Mrs. Varricchio noted that the $80,000 noted in vehicles, we already have in reserves. It was also noted that a grant ($15,000—dryer) is pending. COVID relief funding may ultimately be available to offset other costs.

Discussion on reserves was held. Mrs. Varricchio noted that she will prepare several reserve scenarios for the Board's consideration. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that he would like to see the Board settle on a fixed amount to keep the mill rate stable, allowing for larger expenditures when they are needed.

Ms. Spencer was asked to highlight any items that could be delayed or were critical at this time.

Ms. Spencer noted that every piece of equipment has been documented, she added that there currently are 19 apparatus, the goal is to have more multi-function apparatus and reduce this down to 11 or 12.

Ms. Spencer noted that new in this year's budget is a request to replace the garage door openers, which is a safety issue and a request to replace all of the keys with an FOB system for better monitoring and control. Also, a Vehicle Exhaust Fume Removal system is needed to accommodate the Quint.

Ms. Spencer noted that the metal sheathing needs replacement at Company #2. There is concern with what deterioration is underneath. Mr. DiCristofaro suggested delaying this item to see where it fits into the long-range plan. Mr. Smith noted that he did not feel that this is something that should be put off.

Mr. Gelston inquired what was the root cause requiring overtime on a consistent basis? Ms. Spencer advised that it is predominantly the timing of an emergency call that comes at end of shift and storm events. Mr. Smith noted that the Board of Selectmen reduced the overtime budget to $10,000. Ms. Spencer noted that $20,000 was asked for, she suggested that $15,000 would be a good compromise.

Mr. Thomas summarized discussion that a truck is reserved for and regular employee salary line needs to be bumped up to accurately reflect the way the department is being done now.

Mr. DiCristofaro noted concern that we are seeing a shift from volunteers to full time. He stated that he is very mindful of personnel being added. Mr. Smith responded that the coverage is being accomplished per diem part time. He further stated that it has been very successful.

Mrs. Gionta inquired about the substantial increase in training. Ms. Spencer noted that minimal training was held this year due to COVID. It was noted that grant funding may pay for the uniforms and gear of the six new volunteers. DiCristofaro thanked Ms. Spencer for her work that went into getting the budget presented.

Motion was made by Mr. DiCristofaro to recess at 10:45 am. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Mr. DiCristofaro reconvened the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

c. **Public Works**

Operating Budget:

Road Superintendent Steve Hedler reviewed the responsibilities of Public Works. Staffing changes were noted. The prior model had a Public Works Director and Public Works Superintendent. Currently there is a Public Works Superintendent and a request for a Crew Leader. There is also an administrative position working on closing out grants.

There has been a lot of transitioning in the Public Works Department. It was noted that last year the town benefited from attrition and retirements. Pursuant to the collective bargaining agreement, new staff is hired at 80% of the salary of tenured staff, after one year it is 90% of the salary of tenured staff and after two years it is at full salary.

Mr. Gelston inquired what the budget was for manpower three years ago. Mrs. Varricchio responded $737,060 representing an approximate 4% increase to date if the grant position is not factored in. The grant position is paying $38,000 annually for 16 hours a week with the current goals of managing the FEMA storm damage grant and the bridges grants to monitor compliance and assure full grant funding.

Responsive to inquiry from Ms. Gionta, Mrs. Varricchio advised that the salaries for staffing levels with both a Public Works Director and Superintendent and a Superintendent and Crew leader were about the same. The disadvantage is the lack of administrative support, the advantage is additional workforce.

Considerable discussion was held regarding the administrative grant person. Mrs. Gionta questioned if the person would be a contractor or an employee. It was noted that a W2 is being issued, however the hours are insufficient to allow benefits.

Further discussion was held of where, within the budget, this position should be placed. For the time being Public Works was deemed appropriate, however, should the position continue it was determined that it belonged under the Finance Department. It was also noted that this position is coordinating grant reimbursements, not writing them.

Capital

Mr. DiCristofaro explained the financial challenges facing the Board at this time and then invited Mr. Hedler to present the public works capital budget.

Mr. Hedler discussed the need for a Public Works storage building. Presently the garage at 7 Main Street serves as storage for supplies and equipment; it is anticipated that said building

will be sold. Mr. Cahill has indicated that the Palmer Fund could be utilized to offset costs by $150,000.

$20,000 was budgeted last year for HVAC improvements, this amount budget will be insufficient by approximately $5,000. Potential rebates to the $5,000 were noted.

The Pole Barn located at Hood Lane provides storage for paving materials, equipment etc. the equipment is rotated seasonally. The siding is beyond salvage, and failure is anticipated within six months to a year.

Discussion was held regarding the need to have a generator to keep the Transfer Station open regardless of power issues. Mr. Gelston noted that the risk is low, but the consequence is high and stated that he felt that it should be done. Other Board members echoed Mr. Gelston's comments.

Security systems are needed at both the Public Works garage and the Transfer Station. A system at the garage will allow the school busses to be monitored. Mr. Corbett inquired about the life cycle of the security system and was advised 12 years was anticipated. It was noted that if the Transfer Station receives a needed upgrade, the security system being procured will continue to be functionable. Mr. Thomas suggested that this technology should have been there all along.

Discussion was held on the use of cameras at the Transfer Station, the use of this as an enforcement tool was discussed. Mr. Gelston sought assurance that the cameras will have the technology to read the license plate.

Mr. Hedler stated that there has not been a plan in place for road reclamation and pavement shim and chip sealing since 2012. Of the 113 paved miles that are maintained, only three miles have been done in the past few years (Petticoat). It is the Selectmen's recommendation to budget a set amount and not to a target. Due to weather and other storm events, some years can be more productive than others, this allows for the funding to be available when needed. The proposal is for 13 miles of road to be redone annually going forward. Yet it is hoped to do 16 miles for the first few years to catch up. Mr. Hedler noted that road pavement management includes how heavily the road is utilized and what the drainage needs are, he further suggested that quadrants should be done. Mr. DiCristofaro inquired if the proposal could be stretched out to a 12-year plan rather than a 10-year plan to ease into it, from a tax perspective. He stated that he was in favor of the approach but had concern with it being such a large hit. Mrs. Varricchio noted that funding was not new, just the approach. The prior year funding was $350,000 versus the proposed $500,000.

Mr. Hedler explained the process of the rubberized chip seal, which lengthens the life of the road. It was noted that LOCIP and TAR are grants that contribute to offset road costs.

Mrs. Gionta noted that she concurred with stretching this out to a 12-year plan rather than 10 as it reflects savings of $140,000 annually. Mr. Hedler noted that the $140,000 will have impact on the end of the cycle as it will impact shim and chip seal being done, shortening the life overall.

Mr. Gelston noted that this is a hard lesson for the Town. He also noted that given the overall budget this year that he was in favor of a 12-year cycle. Mr. Thomas noted that road maintenance items have been kicked down the road, which costs more in the long run.

Guardrail replacement and several culvert replacements were noted as new requests, that were unanticipated but viewed as safety issues. It was noted that some projects can be done in house whereas others need to be contracted out. It was noted that grants cannot be applied for without a commitment to do the project. It is understood that this is not necessarily the final price tag, but a place holder.

Considerable detail regarding vehicles and equipment ensued. Mr. Hedler provided a thorough description of processes and protocols, and the need to catch up. He noted that there are no vehicles to pass down, which was part of the plan that has not been followed for the past ten years. Accordingly, there are not vehicles to pass down as intended. Mr. Hedler noted that reviews are now by engine hours rather than physical miles. The shuffling of back-hoes was detailed.

He reviewed where purchases have been delayed minimizing cost impacts. The Board was appreciative of the work done for the presentation and with the direction being taken.

Mr. Hedlund noted that the street sweeper and 544 replacement loader are due for replacement this season, however, they are being pushed back to minimize the financial impact in favor of the other priorities.

It was emphasized that the town needs to establish reserves for large equipment expenditures and vehicles in Public Works like we do in the Fire Department. Mrs. Varricchio noted that the Police vehicles are another area that reserves should be considered. The Board was appreciative of the comprehensive proposal.

Mrs. Gionta inquired whether we could borrow/share/rent a sweeper rather than own it. Mr. Hedler stated that it would cost $60,000 to $65,000 annually to contract it out and noted other cost benefits in ownership.

Mr. Dutch concurred that the purchase of vehicle warranties is sound and he expressed his appreciation to see it included with the cost of the vehicles.

At the request of Mr. DiCristofaro, Mr. Hedler discussed the dead and dying trees. It was noted that all of the trees died at approximately the same time due to the infestation of the Asian Ash Borer and accordingly are all decaying at the same time. He also noted that they are seeing significant losses with Oak and Sugar Maple trees. Mr. DiCristofaro requested a percentage of where we are with the work to be done, there was not a clear answer. It was noted that the strategy is to work behind Eversource, which is taking down a majority of the trees on our roads, however, they only work on the side of the road with the utility poles.

Mr. DiCristofaro sought and received confirmation that priority is being given to trees where the liability is the highest, parks, schools, bus stops, etc., with the caveat that if Eversource will

take the tree, the Town will encourage work in that area, but leave the tree for Eversource. An additional $50,000 is requested within this budget,

The town is averaging the removal of 5 ½ trees per day. That is more efficient than what Eversource is doing. Tree crew takes down the trees, the road crew picks up the side of road debris, which allows for efficiencies. Mr. DiCristofaro noted concern that with the expanded road reclamation would there be the manpower to do the work an additional $50,000 afforded. Mr. Smith noted the limitations of the past are no longer present.

Mr. Thomas stated that he felt this was under control, he felt the additional funding was reasonable to avoid falling behind in keeping up with the risks. Mrs. Gionta disagreed with Mr. Thomas. Mr. Gelston inquired when Eversource would be done with its work in town. Mr. Hedler noted commitments through December 31st and that there are ten crews are presently working for Eversource in town daily.

Mr. DiCristofaro inquired about continued budgetary impact, Mr. Smith opined tree removal would come in at $200,000 for the next two years, but then he would anticipate a drastic reduction. Mr. DiCristofaro commended Mr. Hedler for his comprehensive presentation, he inquired if there were any questions or comments from the virtual audience. None were noted.

Mr. DiCristofaro requested a motion to move all remaining agenda items to the next meeting.

Motion by Mr. Thomas to table the remaining items to the Saturday, March 27, 2021 Special Meeting. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 1:57 pm. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette