TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Meeting Minutes
March 27, 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
- Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director

Mr. DiCristofaro thanked everyone for tuning in. He noted the ways that the public could have input.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. **Regular Meeting, February 8, 2021:**

Motion was made by Mr. Gelston to approve the minutes of the February 8, 2021 regular meeting as presented. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

b. **Regular Meeting, March 8, 2021:**

Motion was made by Mrs. Gionta motioned to approve the minutes of March 8, 2021 regular meeting as presented. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

c. **Special Meeting, March 13, 2021:**

Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to approve the minutes of March 13, 2021special meeting as presented. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Correspondence

Nothing noted.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. **Tax Collector's December, January and February Reports:**

It was noted that the December, January and February Tax Collector reports were presented. Mrs. Dill has indicated that collections are down 1.75% this February in comparison to last year. There were no questions.

b. **Communications Subcommittee:**

The Communications Subcommittee has produced an article regarding refunding. No questions regarding the article were noted. Mr. DiCristofaro directed publication in accordance with normal protocol.

OLD BUSINESS

a. **Annual Report:**

The 2020 annual report is slated to go to print on Tuesday. Any last-minute edits were requested as soon as possible.

NEW BUSINESS

a. **Comprehensive Energy Efficient Facility Upgrade (Co. #1, Co. #2, GH)—Multi-year Contracts:**

Mr. Smith noted that there are energy efficiencies regarding lighting to be found at Fire House Companies #1 and #2, and at the Grange Hall. He stated that these buildings are using old technology regarding lighting. Eversource sponsors a program that can upgrade all of the lighting to L.E.D. There will be no change in cost to the town, as savings generated will pay for the costs of the upgrade over time. Once paid for there is future cost savings in being energy efficient. No questions were brought forward.

Motion by was made by Mr. Dutch to authorize the First Selectmen to enter into 36-month agreement on behalf of the Town with Energy Resources for a comprehensive energy efficient facility upgrade at the East Haddam Fire Co. #1 and the East Haddam Fire Company #2. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and response, the Governor's order 7JJ, section 4 permits the Board of Selectmen to enter into or amend existing contracts or agreements deemed essential or time sensitive during the period of the declared public health and civil preparedness emergency. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Mr. Corbett to authorize the First Selectmen to enter into a 48-month agreement on behalf of the Town with Energy Resources for a comprehensive energy efficient facility upgrade at the East Haddam Grange Hall. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and response, the Governor's order 7JJ, Section 4 permits the Board of Selectmen to enter into or amend existing contracts or agreements deemed essential or time sensitive during the period of the declared public health and civil preparedness

emergency. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Mr. Thomas stated that that lighting upgrades were slated at the Public Works Garage also. He was advised that it was not an oversight; and would be included as part of an overall larger project.

b. **Gift Acceptance—Millington School House:**

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to accept with gratitude a gift in memory of Ruth May Hotyckey Ciucias for the Town of East Haddam in the amount of $1,500 for Millington School House repair projects. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and response, the Governor's Executive Order 7CC issued April 21, 2020 permits the municipality's legislative body (Board of Selectmen) and budget-making authority (Board of Finance) to authorize certain actions by a majority vote of each such body to include (1) the application for accept of grants, funding or gifts. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

c. **Grant Application Authorization—FY2022 Community Project Funding—Congressman Courtney:**

Mr. DiCristofaro advised that Congressman Courtney has advised of grant opportunities available through his office for shovel ready projects known as FY2022 Community Project Funding. Details are still forth coming, but it is believed that three projects will meet the grant specifications. It was noted that if the grant should be awarded, it would need to come back to the Board of Finance for approval, the action requested is to authorize the application.

i. **Motion was made by Mr. Gelston to authorize the application of the FY2022 of FY2022 Community Project Funding Grant in the amount of $300,000 for the additional costs of the Town-Wide Radio Project. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

ii. **Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to authorize the application of the FY2022 Community Project Funding Grant in the amount of $500,000 for the Public Works Storage Building with the acknowledgement that there are $150,000 in Palmer Funds available for the match. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

iii. **Motion was made by Mrs. Gionta to authorize the application of the FY2022 Community Project Funding Grant in the amount of $1,800,000 for the Nathan Hale-Ray High School Athletics Complex with the acknowledgement that there are $500,000 in Purple Funds available for the match. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

2021-2022 BUDGET

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that budget questions should be directed to:.
Budget.qustions@easthaddam.org
No questions or comments were received at this time.

a. **General Budget Review and Discussion:**

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that good news is that we have learned that we will receive COVID funding totaling $888,000 plus additional Federal funds based on population. Half of those funds will be received this June and the other half next year to expend on items meeting specific criteria. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that staff is looking at what expenditures can be met with this grant. One such project is likely the HVAC system at the schools which is in the capital budget. It was noted that the Board of Education will be receiving COVID funding also, somewhere between $200,000 and $400,000. Details are still emerging as to how it must be applied.

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that these are one-time only funds, but it is a significant offset to projects without having to tax for it. Mr. DiCristofaro restated that his goal is a zero-mill rate increase, which means a million dollars needs to be trimmed.

At the request of Mr. DiCristofaro, Mrs. Varricchio reviewed additional staffing over the current budget year.

The $100,000 place holder for evaluation funding for East Haddam Village Revitalization project was discussed. Mr. DiCristofaro queried if this expenditure could be cut and contingency utilized if it is needed. Following considerable discussion, the place holder was reduced to $50,000. Mr. Dutch stated that he is not on board with the project as it is looking for $6,500,000 in infrastructure improvements. Mr. Smith advised that a virtual presentation will be released to the public on April 8. Mr. Gelston stated that releasing the project with so many questions still unanswered at this time is foolish.

Mr. Thomas stated that it makes a difference whether the presentation being put forward is done by the town or Centerbrook. He further cautioned against positioning this as something the town is recommending. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that presenting something prematurely could set the project up for failure.

Mr. Smith noted that contract negotiations are or will be occurring with the Police, Transfer Station, Public Works and the Clerical Union. Accordingly, there is an increase in legal fees.

Mr. DiCristofaro noted that he would like to add the additional hours for the Assistant Town Clerk temporarily. He stated that the additional workload being experienced may only be a one or two-year thing. Mrs. Varricchio was asked to notate it for revisitation next year.

A $20,000 place holder was notated for cyber security insurance. Quotes and other coverages are still being solicited. The newness of this makes it hard to pinpoint the expenses. The Board will revisit this item later in the budget process to see where we stand.

Additional staff was requested for Shared Services at the cost of $45,000 in the Technology Department. The standard is for 150 to 200 units per technician. Ours handle 600 machines each plus networking, telephones, etc. It was noted that this area has been understaffed for a long time. The position will be funded temporarily through grant funding and revisited before moving to an operating expense.

Considerable questioning was generated regarding Shared Services technology. More detail was requested.

The Board recessed at 10:35 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:40 a.m.

Responsive to earlier questions elaboration of the shifts in Public Works was detailed. No additional personnel were included. By moving the Road Superintendent to higher duties, was there a cost savings to the town, what was the benefit of that decision. Improves efficiencies with crew leader, looking at what we were spending and what we are now the same or more or less. It was noted that the Public works Director and Superintendent setup costs $1.200 more than the Superintendent and Crew Leader. Mr. Smith explained that the Superintendent operates equipment, the Director does not. Mr. Thomas noted that the town is getting a bigger bang for its buck with the way Public Works is presently working. Kudos to Mr. Hedler.

It was noted that there is also a FEMA grant temporary person although it is anticipated that it will be long term temporary due to COVID grants.

Discussion for improvements at the Public Works buildings was held along with increases noted for refuse removal.

Lengthy discussion was held relative to tree removal. This line item is proposed with an increase of $50,000. Risk management is in place; and trees have been removed in the priority areas. It was noted, however, that newly deceased trees are discovered frequently. $150,000 is already dedicated to this.

Mr. DiCristofaro reiterated the need to cut the budget as bringing forward a mill rate increase with all of this additional State and Federal revenue coming in would be irresponsible. Mr. Thomas suggested cutting this item with the understanding that if savings are realized in plowing, etc. that they can be allocated to trees next Spring. Mrs. Varricchio suggested that $50,000 could be expended on tree removal in FY 2020-2021 with savings from snow removal that presently exists. Mr. Gelston noted that these dead and dying trees represent safety issues and needs to be a high priority.

It was the consensus of the Board to authorize Public Works to overspend $50,000 in this budget year on trees with the recognition they have underspent on snow.

Questions and comments were again solicited.

Health and Welfare

Mr. Smith identified the rationale which brings forward a request for the town to fund the Food Bank position through the Senior Center. The history was discussed, along with the need for cross training and back up. Mr. DiCristofaro recalled the prior discussion where the Board of Finance provided funding from Contingency. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that he was fine with providing the resources, but not with making it a town position. All concurred with the funding the position, but there was not consensus on where the person should report. For now, the funding will stay with Youth and Family Services with further dialog to occur.

Discussion was held regarding the transfer of Cemetery maintenance to contracted services. Mr. Smith reviewed the rationale for these increases. Further questions arose, however, they needed Mr. Angersola to answer those specific questions. This item will be revisited.

Culture and Recreation

The Library requested additional funding for maintenance. Recognition that an overall long-range plan is needed. Recreation Commission is looking for funding to replace stairs at Nichols Field and doors at the town beach, no concerns on these items were noted. The Lakes Association requested an increase to $31,283 up from $22,500. It was unknown what the increase represented. Accordingly, funding will remain flat, pending additional information to the contrary.

Mr. DiCristofaro noted that completes the operating costs on the town side of the budget and resulted in cost cutting of $309,000.

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that it seemed premature to review the Capital budget without knowing what funding we can use from grants. Mrs. Varricchio identified $325,000 that could be funded by grant funding. More time is necessary to determine what other items could be funded through these newly available grants.

Mr. DiCristofaro solicited comments or questions to Budget.questions@easthaddam.org

Marilyn Gleeson indicated that Eversource has not removed all of the trees needed at this time. It was reiterated that they will be working in town for quite a while and that town crews are following those hired by Eversource to complete quadrants.

Mrs. Gionta suggested starting the April 12 meeting at 6:00 so if more time is needed it is not such a late night. Mr. Thomas requested a one-page summary of what we started with, what we have cut, grant funds, and what the target is.

Mrs. Varricchio noted the need to issue a notification to the public because of the delay in moving the budget forward. She noted that a new referendum date will be necessary. She will confer with the Registrars.

Mr. Smith advised that he will be opening the Municipal Office Complex for meetings again.

Mr. DiCristofaro reiterated that the next meeting will be held on April 12 at 6 pm.

Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 12:20 pm. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Deb Denette