TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
July 13, 2021
Nathan Hale-Ray High School Auditorium

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. DiCristofaro, Chairman of the Board of Finance called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

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
- Approximately 10 members of the public

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

No guests/audience comments were discussed at the meeting.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT

Mr. Smith reported the following:
- Inclement weather has delayed paving projects in Town, including the area around the elementary school which had been scheduled to be completed by this time.
- A number of live trees were downed by the recent tropical storm/wind event; Public Works is continuing to remove dead and dying trees.
- A new truck was delivered to Public Works last week and has been put into service.
- Several painting projects are underway and the Grounds Maintenance crew is keeping up with mowing.
- CT DOT has initiated a project on Route 149 to remove a short section of ledge and the road will be closed in the area of Landing Hill to the Salmon River boat launch Mondays thru Fridays.

Mr. Smith called the Board's attention to the 2018 Compensation and Classification Study that was done by Randi Frank Consulting and stated that it has been posted on the website. He also called their attention to the list of Town employees' salaries in their meeting packets.

In response to a concern raised by Mr. DiCristofaro, Mr. Smith stated that he would reach out to the Connecticut Department of Transportation to ask them to be more strategic with the location of the Route 149 closure sign in the Moodus area.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mrs. Varricchio reported the following:

- The auditors will begin their work on the fiscal year 2020-2021 audit next week.
- The Town was awarded a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report Excellence Award. She and she thanked Mr. Gelston for encouraging her to pursue this designation.
- She is working to close year end and stated that preliminary 2020-2021 budget reports will be available for the August meeting. Mrs. Varricchio clarified that the truck Mr. Smith mentioned was purchased under last year's budget.

Mr. Smith and the Board members expressed appreciation for Mrs. Varricchio's work on achieving the CAFR award. At the request of Mr. Dutch, Mr. DiCristofaro read the citation of achievement.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Open Space—Mullazi et al Property—O'Connell Road Extension—the Hayward Lot

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that the Board had authorized the application for a state grant for the Mullazi (Hayward Lot) Property on O'Connell Road Extension. He noted that a Connecticut DEEP grant in the amount of $96,900 toward the purchase of the property has been awarded which was less than the amount applied for. Mr. Smith advised that the purchase price of $323,000 would be offset by the DEEP grant and a $10,000 Eight Mile River and Watershed Grant. He noted that there is the potential for an additional $5,000 grant which, if realized, would reduce the Town's cost to purchase the property to less than the $221,100.

Mr. Thomas called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets related to this agenda item. He advised that the parcel scored very highly on the Open Space Committee's set of criteria for such purchases and the acquisition is endorsed by the Eight Mile River Wild and Scenic Watershed management committee. He stated that the Town has expended most of its 2003 commitment of funding up to $5M for open space purchases and also noted that the funding to purchase previous parcels had been bonded.

Mr. DiCristofaro noted that the two questions before the Board are (1) whether or not to authorize the Town to pursue the purchase of the Mullazi property, and (2) if so, whether to fund the purchase of the parcel by bonding or from reserves. He solicited the feedback of the Board.

Mr. Thomas voiced his support of acquiring the property and stated that he would look to the recommendation of Mrs. Varricchio for the best funding option. Responsive to an inquiry from Mr. DiCristofaro, Mrs. Varricchio noted that the Town does not maintain a sinking or reserve account for open space purchases and provided some additional clarification regarding previous open space bonding.

Mr. Corbett stated that he needs to do more research on the topic of the Town's open space purchases, but his initial reaction is that this may not be a good time to endorse the purchase of more open space.

Mr. Gelston stated that he continues to believe that open space is an asset to the Town and that it is the responsibility of the Board of Finance to put together the best financial package for such purchases. He noted, however, that it is the people's decision, via referendum, to decide on whether the Town purchases the property or not.

In response to a question from Mr. DiCristofaro, Mr. Smith advised that the state has a target goal of 22% of state lands be designated as open space and he believes East Haddam has a similar goal.

Mr. Dutch stated that he is an advocate of open space when it makes sense and that this parcel seems to make sense. He stated that, ultimately, it is up to the voters to decide if they wish to purchase it.

In response to questions from Mrs. Gionta and Mr. DiCristofaro, Mr. Smith stated that he did not know what percentage of the Town is designated as open space but noted that at least 1,600 acres are protected as Town open space, 700 acres are protected by the Land Trust, the state has approximately 4,000 acres, and the Nature Conservancy has at least 2,000 acres.

Mrs. Gionta noted that it is up to the citizens to decide whether or not to purchase the parcel but concurred with Mr. Corbett's observations and stated that she is on the fence as to whether or not this should move forward.

In response to Mr. DiCristofaro's stated concern regarding the cost of financing, Ms. Varricchio agreed to provide an estimate of the bonding expenses for this purchase. Mr. DiCristofaro recommended that, in the future, the Board set aside reserves for funding open space purchases.

b. **East Haddam Swing Bridge—Approach Sidewalks Funding**

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that, as part of the Swing Bridge rehabilitation the state has asked the towns of East Haddam and Haddam to fund $150,000 each for the sidewalk approaches. Mr. Smith stated that, generally, town contributions to state projects are made at the completion of the project; however, in this case the state is requiring the contribution to be made in advance of the work.

Motion was made by Mrs. Gionta to appropriate $150,000 toward the municipal contribution (total cost $300,0000 shared equally by the Towns of East Haddam and Haddam) for the East Haddam Swing Bridge approach sidewalks as part of the rehabilitation of the East Haddam Swing Bridge and to request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion.

In response to a question raised by Mrs. Gionta, Mr. DiCristofaro advised that if the expense is approved at Town Meeting, the funds would be a special appropriation from the Unassigned Funds balance.

Mr. Smith responded to several questions from Mr. Dutch who noted that it does not appear that the Town has much of a choice in the matter. There was a general discussion regarding securing a contingency in the contract that this aspect of the project will still go forward, in its entirety, whether or not Haddam agrees to their share of contribution. Mr. Dutch noted that there will be some recurring cost associated with the maintenance of the sidewalk and lights.

Mr. Gelston summarized that 80% of the project is being paid by the federal government, 20% is being paid for by the State, and each town is being asked for $150,000 for the approaches. He noted that he would like to see accurate mapping as to how the approach sidewalk fits into the defined areas on each side of the bridge. In response to several concerns raised by Mr. Gelston, Mr. Smith clarified what the Town's obligations would be regarding the approach sidewalk and associated lighting.

Mr. Corbett received clarification that if the Board of Finance approved the expenditure, the voters would have the opportunity to vote on it at Town Meeting. He also raised several concerns related to technical issues.

Mr. Thomas reviewed the pros and cons of the state's plan for a walkway on the bridge and stated he supported recommending making the investment required by DOT. Mr. DiCristofaro suggested giving the Centerbridge Group the option to provide input regarding how the approach sidewalk fits into their Swing Bridge Landing proposal.

Mr. Smith stated that he would clarify the questions raised by the Board with representatives of the CT DOT and Haddam's First Selectman, as well as request better blueprints to review.

Motion carried with Mr. Gelston voting no.

c. **Grant Acceptance—American Recovery Fund for Library System**

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that at their June 8, 2021 meeting the Board authorized a grant application be submitted to the Connecticut State Library America Recovery Fund in the amount of $16,508 to support COVID reopening efforts with the money to be split between the Town's two libraries. He noted that no Town match was required for this grant and that the grant has been awarded.

Motion was made by Mr. Gelston to accept the Connecticut State Library Grant, as part of the American Rescue Plan Act Funding by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, in

the amount of $16,508.00 with no Town match and to be shared equally by both libraries for the purpose of creating outdoor wi-fi gardens for safer and healthier technology access, contingent upon acceptance by the Board of Selectmen and to request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE

In response to a question raised by Mr. Cross regarding the salary survey, Mr. DiCristofaro requested he bring his question up at the Town Meeting which will immediately follow this one.

OTHER

There was no other business discussed at the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 7:54 pm. Mrs. Gionta seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette
Recording Secretary