Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 10, 2021
Via YouTube Live
Special Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines (remotely); E. Dill; T. Govert
Also Present: W. Brady; C. Brownell; R. Casner; G. Daigle; A. Lord; J. Ventres; G. Wilson; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public via virtual media

1. Selectman Dill called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

2. 2022-2023 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. Conservation Commission: Mr. Wilson, Chairman of the Conservation Commission reviewed the Commission's 2022-2023 budget proposal. He advised that, recognizing an anticipated increase in requests for trail maps from GetAway campers, he has requested an increase in the Printing budget; he also requested an increase to the Other Supplies budget, based on the previous year's budget experience, and a slight ($50) increase in the Conferences budget, for an overall 4% increase from the Commission's 2021-2022 Budget.

   In response to questions raised by Ms. Haines and Mr. Dill, Mr. Wilson advised that (a) the $5,000.00 requested under Additional Budget Information for Purchased Property Services was to purchase gravel to create/maintain Open Space parking areas as well as for surveying work, and (b) he would research the purpose of the Transfer to Special Revenue Fund. Ms. Zemienieski stated she would also ask Ms. Varricchio to provide an explanation of Special Revenue Funds.

   B. Economic Development Commission: Mr. Casner, Chairman of the Economic Development Commission stated that the only change to the Commission's 2022-2023 budget proposal was a request for $12,000.00 for Purchased Professional Service. He provided an overview of EDC's collaboration with the CT Landmarks Society and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program to develop a bicycle/walking path in the area of the 4-Corners. He advised that there are grant opportunities available for shovel-ready projects of this kind and the budget for Purchased Professional Services will be used to purchase surveying and engineering services for proposed sidewalks at the head of the trail.

   Ms. Govert and Ms. Haines noted several other potential state and federal grant sources for mobility projects. Mr. Casner responded to several questions from the Selectman. Ms. Zemienieski advised that the membership fee for the CT Main Street Program was included in the Municipal Offices/Central Services General Government budget, and Mr. Casner agreed to clarify whether or not it had also been included in EDC's budget to avoid any duplication.

   C. Land Use Office Operating/Capital (PZC, IWWC, WPCA): Land Use Administrator Ventres reviewed the Land Use Office Operating budget proposal and noted that, other than a slight increase in the advertising budget, the only other increases were Purchased Professional (Engineering) Services for the Planning & Zoning and Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commissions. He advised that he had increased the P&Z budget by $2500.00 and the IWWC budget by $1,000.00; effectively a 100% increase for each over the FY 2021-2022 budget.

Mr. Ventres stated that he had also submitted a capital request for $30,000.00 for PZC to develop a master plan for the Moodus business district. There was a general discussion regarding this capital request item.

- Planning & Zoning Commission: Mr. Brownell, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission, requested the PZC operating budget discussion be rescheduled. He stated that he had just recently received the budget proposal and has not yet had a chance to review it. The Selectmen agreed to reschedule the discussion of the PZC's budget proposal for their February 17th Workshop.

- Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commission: Mr. Brownell advised that Mr. Dill, Chairman of the Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commissions, had also not yet had time to review that Commission's budget proposal and also requested the discussion of same be rescheduled. The Selectmen agreed to reschedule the discussion of the IWWC's budget proposal for their February 17th Workshop.

- Water Pollution Control Authority: Mr. Ventres provided some background on the WPCA and noted that the Town provides $25,000.00 to supplement the cost of operating the sewage treatment plant. There was a general discussion about whether or not the Town could qualify for any clean water infrastructure grants; however, Mr. Ventres expressed his opinion that the grants would be awarded to municipalities who are in need of remediation to their water-treatment infrastructure. There was a brief discussion concerning the feasibility of extending the sewer line. Mr. Lord, Chairman of the WPCA, provided additional comments.

D. Zoning Board of Appeals: Mr. Daigle, Chairman of the Zoning Board of Appeals, advised that there were no changes to the ZBA's proposed 2022-2023 operating budget from their approved 2021-2022 budget.

E. Historic District Commission: Mr. Brady, Chairman of the Historic District Commission, advised that there were no changes to the HDC's proposed 2022-2023 operating budget from their approved 2021-2022 budget. He a stated that the Commission has discussed changes to its fee structure due to the significant variance in the value of the projects it reviews. He agreed to look into how other comparable towns structure their fee schedules.

F. Open Space Committee: Mr. Brady, Chairman of the Open Space Committee, advised that there were no changes to the OSC's proposed 2022-2023 operating budget from their approved 2021-2022 budget.

G. Other Budget Items: There were no other budget items discussed at the meeting.

3. Public Comment: Mr. Dill read the following email into the minutes:

"Dear BOS – Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion. I noticed you are meeting tonight with regard to town budgeting, so am forwarding FYI a message that I recently sent to the BOF expressing my stance on this year's finances.

"Sincerely,
"Chet Slabinski
"East Haddam resident and tax payer"

"Thank you BOF for the clear and open documentation of your policies and other information that is easily found on the town website. The year-end financial report is an outstanding view of our town!

"With the current uncertain state of the economy and looming inflation, my opinion for the coming budget year is that it we should pull back and focus primarily on town and school essentials: take care of good town employees and teachers, maintain our existing infrastructure, and responsibly complete any environmental remediations. This is not the year to ask for more dollars to be spent to increase our assets and enlarge empires.

"I strongly support the approach of responsible budgeting that includes justifying the need. This can be a year that we scrutinize what we had been doing and scrub any legacy items that have not produced desired results.
What's the old saying? "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all. "

"Further, I urge resisting the temptation to use "new and free (ha!)" Fed money to enact more programs without our own justification of need and an exit strategy.

"As an example of these points, I noticed that one preliminary education budget item was the hiring of more staff to expand the pre-K program. The old Head-Start program failed, and now a recent study of pre-K results showed that pre-K had little and sometimes even a negative impact on those young children in this social experiment. So instead of expanding it, perhaps we should be phasing it out?

"Thank you for this mechanism to allow comment.

"Sincerely,
"Chet Slabinski
"East Haddam resident and taxpayer"

4. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Govert, to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m. Unanimous aye.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary