Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 12, 2022
Via YouTube Live
Special Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; E. Dill; T. Govert
Also Present: D. Angersola; E. Bader; E. Blaschik; S. Deguzis; D. Dill; T. Gelston; T. Gionta; C. Halliday; T. McCabe; B. O'Mara; B. Parker; M. Shumbo; C. Varricchio; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public via virtual media

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

2. 2022-2023 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. Senior Services: Mr. Parker, Senior Center Director, provided information on the distribution of expenses noting that the Town pays for Building Maintenance and Salaries, but most of the supplies and operation of the Center is covered by donations and Senior Club volunteers. He reviewed the list of major service level accomplishments and noted that participation is returning to normal levels.

   Director Parker reviewed the Senior Center's Operating Budget noting significant increases in the Wages & Salaries and Building Maintenance lines. Ms. Varricchio explained that the 10.9% increase to Wages & Salaries is due to the final installment of salary adjustments to bring wages into a range comparable with surrounding municipalities. Mr. Parker advised that the Building Maintenance increase is a consequence of an overly aggressive decrease in that budget line implemented last fiscal year. Mr. Parker stated that the Supplies budget, which is primarily used for volunteer recognition, had also been increased by $200.00. The overall proposed increase to the Operating Budget is 11%. Mr. Parker responded to several questions from the Board.

   Mr. Parker reviewed the Senior Center's Capital Budget requests to replace the medical car in 2029 and noted that donations made for rides to medical appointments are reserved and will be used as matching grant funds to purchase the new vehicle and, consequently, it is expected there will be no cost to the Town. He noted that the Senior bus is scheduled to be replaced in 2031.

   B. Youth & Family Services / Food Bank: Director McCabe stated that the Youth & Family Service Operating Budget request represents a 5.9% increase over its FY 2020-2021 budget. She noted that the actual budget increases for the past 5-8 years have been $\leq$1%; however, the Service received its final installment of a 10-year Drug Free Communities grant last year. She reviewed several positions that were funded by the grant and provided an overview of the Youth & Family Services staff roles and responsibilities. Ms. McCabe stated that she has been unsuccessful at finding a grant to replace the Drug Free Communities grant for the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

   There was a general discussion about the need to move toward a more wholistic approach to the Town's social services. Ms. McCabe responded to several questions.

   There was a brief review of the Food Bank's Operating Budget. Ms. McCabe noted that Youth & Family Services will absorb the full cost of the part-time manager this fiscal year.

Ms. Varricchio provided a brief overview of Special Revenue Accounts as they relate to the transfer of funds from the Conservation Commission and Recreation Commission budgets. She also provided an explanation of the $25k transfer from the Land Use budget to the WPCA's Operating Budget as funds the Town provides for the maintenance and repair of aging equipment.

C. State Budget Review: Ms. Varricchio reviewed several potential state stipends that the Town may or may not receive. She also discussed the low interest rates currently earned on municipal investments.

   There was a brief discussion regarding funds the Ambulance Association owes the Town. Ms. Haines noted there are problems with staffing and, consequently, coverage is not as good as it should be and the Fire Department is picking up many of the emergency calls.

D. Town Office Building: First Selectman Haines reviewed the Town Office Building Operating Budget and advised that the phone lines have been disconnected, for an annual savings of $1440.00, and only basic services, such as fire alarms and electricity, are being provided for the building.

E. Town Meeting Hall: Mr. Angersola reported that the Town Meeting Hall Operating Budget is flat for FY 2022-2023.

F. River House/Annex: Ms. Zemienieski advised that the cost for heating fuel had increased significantly resulting in an overall 6.4% increase in the River House/Annex Operating Budget.

   Mr. Angersola responded to Ms. Haines' question about whether or not any additional maintenance is required for the buildings at the Old Town Office site and there was a brief discussion regarding the condition of the buildings. Ms. Varricchio noted that some of the buildings on the Old Town Office Site are designated as historic and, therefore, their continued maintenance falls under different set of criteria.

G. Grange Hall: Mr. Angersola advised that the overall Operating Budget for the Grange Hall had been reduced significantly (37.1%) because the window replacement project has been put on hold temporarily. He provided an overview of several maintenance/upgrade projects that need to be completed. Ms. Haines responded to questions from the Board members.

H. Millington School House: Mr. Angersola advised that the major maintenance projects at the Millington School House have been completed and, consequently, the Building Maintenance budget line was reduced accordingly resulting in an overall reduction in the School House's Operating Budget of 71.10%. There was a general discussion regarding the potential use of the School House and Mr. Angersola noted that there is no water/bathroom at the building, thereby limiting its use by the public.

I. Municipal Office Complex/Central Services: Ms. Zemienieski reviewed this Operating Budget and advised that the overall 5.9% increase is primarily related to the cost of propane (an increase of 65.4%) and consolidating Water Testing for all of the Town's buildings into this budget. She noted that the MOC water tests are being conducted on a school level, but she expects that could change going forward.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Gionta, Ms. Haines provided an overview of the services provided by the River COG that justified the expense of the Town's membership fee.

J. Regional Probate Court: Ms. Zemienieski stated that she has not yet received a budget for the Probate Court; however, she has received a communication informing her that the Town can expect level funding for FY 2022-2023. Ms. Zemienieski advised that the expenses of the regional Probate Court are shared by four towns and the allocations are based on the residential Grand List for each town. It was noted that the Probate Court's proposed budget for FY 2022-2023 has an overall increase of 3.4%

K. Selectmen: Ms. Varricchio advised that the only increases to the Board of Selectmen's Operating Budget was to Wages & Salaries as the final installment of a salary adjustment to bring wages into a range comparable with surrounding municipalities as a result of a 2020 Wage Study, and $240 to Telephone/Cell Phone to allow unlimited texting on the First Selectmen's phone. The overall proposed increase to the BOS Operating Budget is 3%.

L. Legal Services: Ms. Varricchio reviewed the Legal Services Operating Budget and noted that there is an overall 28.4% decrease to the budget because the Labor Counsel budget line has been reduced 50% since there will only be one union contract to negotiate in FY 2022-2023 vs. the three that had to be negotiated in FY 2021-2022.

Ms. Haines advised that the Town has issued an RFP for a general counsel; however, she does not expect to make any changes to the Town's labor counsel. There was a general discussion regarding the benefits of historical knowledge for the labor counsel and Ms. Haines responded to questions from the Board members.

M. Insurance (Risk Management): Ms. Varricchio called the Board's attention to the Insurance Operating Budget proposal and noted that it has been challenging to secure cyber insurance for the Town. She noted that the Town previously had the coverage through CIRMA; however, they are no longer providing pool coverage for it. Ms. Zemienieski provided additional information and advised that she has put a placeholder of $20k in the 2022-2023 Budget for cyber insurance.

N. Fringe Benefits: Ms. Varricchio reviewed the Fringe Benefits budget which has an overall increase of 2.1%. She provided an overview of the recently instituted Employee Assistance program which has been well received; she advised that the expense for the program, for both Town and BOE employees, is approximately $4,000.00 per year. Ms. Varricchio noted that the Town's health insurance expense decreased 2.8% this year. She responded to several questions from the Board.

O. Board of Finance: Ms. Gionta, Chairman of the Board of Finance, provided an overview of the BOF's Operating Budget, noting the overall 3.5% proposed increase is related to increases in the Auditor/GASB Compliance and Bond Disclosure Fees lines.

P. Finance Office: Ms. Varricchio reviewed the Finance Office's Operating Budget and advised that the only increase is 2.5% for Wages & Salaries. She noted that there are no contractual wages included in the budget at this time.

Q. Fire Marshal: Mr. Angersola advised that, other than a 2.5% increase in the Salaries & Wages line, the budget remained flat for FY 2022-2023. Ms. Varricchio provided some clarification regarding the department's staffing and its Revenue budget.

R. Paramedic Services: Ms. Varricchio provided some background regarding this budget and advised that Middlesex Hospital continues to bill the Town at a rate of $1 per capita. She responded to several questions from the Board members.

S. Resident State Trooper: Ms. Zemienieski advised that the Town is billed at 85% of the state's expense for the Resident State Trooper. She stated that she has received a projection from the State of Connecticut and they included a 2% salary increase for the position; however, they have not ratified a contract as of January 31, 2022 other changes that might occur with ratification are not reflected in the projection.

T. Cemeteries: Mr. Angersola reported that there is a 21.1% reduction in the Cemeteries proposed FY 2022-2023 budget because the Town was no longer contracting out the lawn care services. He noted that approximately 50% of the savings had been repurposed into Purchased Professional Services for the purpose of tree removal services. Ms. Zemienieski stated that a portion of the budget is also earmarked for the new Cemeteries Committee to meet its charge to find a suitable location for a new cemetery.

Ms. Varricchio reviewed the Cemeteries Revenue budget.

U. Chatham Health District: Ms. Zemienieski advised that this is presently a draft budget and provided some information regarding the Everbridge expense. Mr. Angersola stated that the Board of Education had elected to utilize the Everbridge system for school notifications because their previous system was not communicating notifications on a timely basis. There was a general discussion regarding and one-time allocation to CHD due to COVID related staffing and Ms. Haines responded to several questions from the Board members.

V. Human Services: Ms. Zemienieski provided an overview of this Operating Budget. She noted that the agencies receiving the allotted donations assist the Town's citizens that are in need of their services.

W. Town Greens, Grounds and Fields: Mr. Angersola reviewed this Operating Budget. He stated that the 15% overall increase in the budget is related to several line item increases. He reviewed the benefits of keeping the seasonal part-time employee on year-round basis, noted that there has been a significant increase in equipment maintenance costs, there is an added expense for a cell phone for the Grounds Keeper, and advised that the $6,100.00 increase in Other Supplies is because a new flagpole is needed at Millington Green and an OSHA review requires the Grounds Crew to have steel-toed boots and safety workpants. Ms. Zemienieski stated that the cost for the Town dock and portable restroom and for Memorial Day supplies (flags, wreaths & geraniums) are also included in the Other Supplies budget line.

Mr. Angersola responded to questions from the BOS and BOF members. There was a brief discussion regarding the parks that are covered by this budget.

X. Debt Service: Ms. Varricchio reviewed the BOF's policy for the Town's Debt Service. She provided an overview of the Debt Service budget and noted that, as a result of the December 2020 re-financing, the interest rate on the Town's blended debt is less than 1%. She stated that the Town's credit rating is AA+, the second highest rating available; she noted that, currently, the state's financial condition precludes the Town from achieving a AAA rating.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Dill, Ms. Varricchio advised that the state cannot take funds from a municipality's reserves; however, it could reduce state aid.

The board took a recess for lunch at 1:00pm.

The board reconvened at 1:45pm.

Y. Board of Assessment Appeals: Mr. Blaschik, Chairman of the Board of Assessment Appeals, advised that the FY 2022-2023 Budget for the Board of Assessment Appeals, is flat. He noted that the Board has expended approximately 38% of its FY 2021-2022 budget and that he feels it is on target for the year. There was a brief discussion regarding whether or not the Wages & Salaries line should be increased due to a potential increase in hearings as a consequence of the revaluation and Mr. Blaschik confirmed that he feels it is adequate.

Z. Lakes Association: Mr. Bader introduced the other members of the Lakes Association. He reviewed the Association's proposed FY 2022-2023 Operating Budget and provided an overview of the herbicide treatment cycles for the three lakes and stated that they are proposing the Town reimbursement them for 50% of that expense. He pointed out that the Lakes Association budget is equally divided among the three lakes and requested the Board of Finance either carry over any budget surplus at the end of the year in a savings/reserve account or reallocate the funds to the lake(s) that expended their full budget amount.

Mr. Bader reviewed the Lakes Association's 2022-2023 Major Service Level Goals and the representatives had a conversation with the board concerning a possible joint venture to pursue DEEP grants for the purpose of hiring boat launch monitors to inspect boats to mitigate invasive weed infestation in the lakes. There was a general discussion regarding the hydrilla problem in CT lakes and rivers.

Mr. Bader and the lakes' representatives provided the Board members with an overview of the Association's Capital Improvements needs.

AA. Other Operating/Capital Budget Discussion: Ms. Varricchio reviewed the following Capital Improvements items:

- Municipal Office Complex Wireless Network Access
- Municipal Office Complex Network Switches
- BOE Wireless Network Access
- Municipal Office Complex Video Conferencing System
- Grange Hall Window Replacement
- Municipal Office Complex Phone System Upgrade
- Funding for the proposed Redevelopment Agency

3. Public Comment: There were no public comments discussed at the meeting or submitted electronically.

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 2:39 p.m. Unanimous aye.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Dill, Secretary