Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 16, 2022
Via YouTube Live
Regular Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; E. Dill; T. Govert
Also Present: D. Cox; D. Dill; T. McCabe; J. Moreau; T. Sevigny; A. Shaltiel; L. Zemienieski; D. Zuckerman, and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Agenda

   Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Govert, to approve the agenda as written. Unanimous aye.

3. Approval of Minutes: Special Meeting of February 2, 2022

   Motion made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of February 2, 2022, as written. Unanimous aye.

4. Correspondence: Ms. Haines advised that the following correspondence had been received in regards to the Building Department:

   "Hi -
   "Just wanted to let you know what wonderful service I received from Ruth Ziobron and Bill Thody at the Building Department. They were so accommodating and helped me through the process of getting a building permit. Made me feel very comfortable.

   "I have dealt with other towns and this service was great!!

   "Kathy Bengtson"

5. First Selectmen's Report

   A. Broadband – EntryPoint Presentation: Ms. Haines introduced Devin Cox of EntryPoint and Ms. Govert provided additional information regarding the Town's Broadband Committee's work.

   Mr. Cox provided an overview of EntryPoint's approach to broadband systems. He reviewed the benefits of broadband over alternative options, as well as the concept of open access versus a closed network. In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Mr. Cox advised that the Town would not have any difficulty attracting multiple ISPs because there is no need for them to have a physical presence in or even nearby the Town.

   Ms. Haines noted the rural nature of East Haddam as well as its topography challenges and Mr. Cox shared information on comparable communities EntryPoint has worked with in MA. There was a general discussion regarding the expense of installing and maintaining a municipal broadband network and Mr. Cox advised that the work can be outsourced.

Ms. Haines thanked Mr. Cox for his presentation and advised that the Board of Selectmen will discuss next steps and will be in touch with EntryPoint.

B. Horizontal Curve Signs on State Roads – State Road Project No. 0172-0477: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets regarding this agenda item. She advised that a public meeting is scheduled in April when the CT DOT will provide information regarding their plans to install horizontal curve signs on state roads. She noted that, since Project No. 0172-0477 relates to state roads, the citizens of East Haddam will not have much control over whether or not it moves forward.

Ms. Haines also reported the following:

- She has extended the time period for accepting applications for the Library Study Committee to, hopefully, gather a sufficient number of applications to create as bi-partisan a committee as possible.

- The draft ordinance for a Town Redevelopment Agency is being reviewed by the Town's attorney and its bond counsel. She stated that the draft ordinance closely mirrors the state statue for Redevelopment Agencies.

- The Brownell property was sold to a bank group and, on February 17th, she is meeting with that group and representatives from a manufacturing company and the East Haddam Historical Society to discuss uses for the buildings. She stated that the Historical Society is interested in turning the old mill building into a subject-specific museum.

- She is meeting with the CT DOT Deputy Commissioner and the project manager for the Swingbridge construction project on the afternoon of February 17th to discuss the possibility of installing a movable bridge south of the Swingbridge during the repair work to avoid a 35-mile detour and the consequent financial impact to the Town.

- Next week she will be meeting with Commissioner Mark Boughton of CT Department of Revenue Services who is in charge of all of the federal infrastructure money that is coming into the state. She stated that other participants include Sam Gold, Executive Director of the River COG, and representatives from Haddam, Deep River, Chester, and the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce. The agenda for the meeting is to discuss the Swingbridge construction project, including the rotaries, as well as the East Haddam Village Revitalization project and their impact on the represented communities and how to best approach them in a holistic/comprehensive fashion.

- Lauren Pszczolkowski has been hired as the Town's Economic Development Administrator and she is doing an excellent job.

- The Town has retained the services of a part-time human resources director for 15 hours per week. She advised that, although the Superintendent and Board of Education had initiated the idea of a shared Human Resources position, provided a job description, and participated in the interviews, they have elected not to participate in a shared Human Resources role.

6. Public Comment

Ms. Haines advised that the following comment, from Ruth Masci, was submitted electronically:

"Good evening,

"Thank you all for your service to our community. I appreciate the opportunity to clear up some confusion, for the public record, this evening.

"In the spirit of transparency, I am requesting clarification from the Board of Selectmen regarding the following:

"What is the rationale for the newly created Human Resources position hired last week? It is my understanding that this employee was hired for fifteen hours a week, working from home, for a yearly salary of $78,000 per year; is this accurate? Who is supervising this employee, and how will he be evaluated? Why is an hourly rate of about $100 an hour necessary, when this work has been absorbed by other employees in the past?

"If this information is inaccurate, please clarify the salary and hours for this position.

"Since this person holds a full time job for the state of Connecticut, how can he be available during regular business hours, should his duties require him to do so?

"Where was the surplus in our current budget that allowed for the creation of a new position at such an incredibly high salary, for so few hours?

"It is unfortunate that this board chose to create another administrative position, rather than directly impacting the citizens of our community. It seems that our seniors, emergency services, or schools could have benefited from a budget increase, rather than another addition to town hall.

"Thank you for your responses.
"Respectfully submitted,
"Ruth Masci"

Ms. Haines confirmed that the Human Resources position is for 15 hours per week and the salary is $78k per year. She stated that, since the BOE has withdrawn from sharing the service, the expense will be carried in the Selectmen's Operating Budget and she is not aware of any surplus in that budget; however, she expects to see some cost savings in other areas as a result of the new hire. She advised that the Human Resources position will report to her and the individual will be evaluated on a regular basis; in fact, one of the responsibilities of the new hire will be to establish a regular employee review program.

In response to questions raised by Ms. Shaltiel, Ms. Haines reported that full-time Human Resource directors earn between $150-$180k per year and the number of members that will be on the Sustainability Committee is not known at this time.

Ms. Shaltiel thanked Ms. Haines for being pro-active on the Swingbridge construction concerns.

Ms. Haines advised that the following comments were sent in in regards to the February 2 Public Hearing regarding Banning Cannabis Establishments in East Haddam but were received after the hearing closed:

- From Ilene Coman:

"Please read this letter during the meeting. Thank you,
"Ilene Coman

"It is important that my point of view is registered since recent local articles and comments from certain officials made it sound like residents were wholly against East Haddam allowing even 1 shop selling state-regulated recreational cannabis in East Haddam.

"I heard so many inaccuracies and old-school claims about marijuana and even more concerning were the false claims about legal state-regulated medicinal and recreational cannabis.

"I am a senior citizen who grew up in the 1970's when marijuana was everywhere. Though I almost never used it (nor alcohol), most of my friends and acquaintances did and it was a normal thing among my peers in my teens, and especially in my 20's and 30's, years when I was socially active. The claims that it was a gateway drug didn't ring true then, nor does it now.

"What is true in recent years is that street sellers are lacing cannabis with Fentanyl or with extremely high levels of THC. This gives adults more reason than ever to buy legal cannabis at state-regulated shops.

"Thankfully our state legislature and Governor Lamont have passed the legalization of selling recreational cannabis, along with farming and manufacturing it. By the end of the year, all adults will be able to go to shops, choose regulated cannabis in different forms, and in specific amounts.
Unlike alcohol, cannabis has a long list of benefits. It has made a huge difference in the quality of life for many middle age adults and senior citizens I know.

"The thing that stuck out at the last BOS meeting is that our town officials and townspeople need to hear from experts and researchers into cannabis and what legal establishments provide to adult customers at legal state-sanctioned medicinal and recreational cannabis. We need to hear facts instead of the kinds of inaccurate claims made during the last BOS meeting.

"I think our town should not ban a cannabis shop from opening here. A tasteful shop would be as appropriate, if not more so, than the multiple liquor stores we have. Cannabis appears to be more regulated than alcohol and there have been years for states to get things right, both with medicinal and recreational cannabis. People should look into what shops that are in rural areas like ours look like instead of shops in inner cities."

- From Lori and Tony Shetensky:

"We are not sure how to address this or to whom, but we did want to let you know that we are opposed to the establishment of any sort of cannabis establishment, retail shop or otherwise here in East Haddam or Moodus.

"Published reports written by university researchers have concluded that today's cannabis has been cultivated to be highly addictive and much more potent than cannabis of the past. It is a dangerous drug and the use of it should be discouraged. East Haddam can help to discourage it's use by passing an ordinance prohibiting the production or sale of cannabis in town.

"Based on articles we have read regarding the actual experiences of other state and local governments that have legalized the use and sale of cannabis, all have concluded that the additional cost of law enforcement, property damage and medical treatment has far outweighed any monetary benefit derived from tax revenues or job creation. A small town like East Haddam cannot afford to take on the financial risks associated with the local sale of this product. In short, we see no positive reasons to bring the sale or production of this product to our town.

"We agree with those who believe that the presence of a retail cannabis shop will have a negative impact on both our town and our residents, both adults and our youth. Regardless of age limits on who can purchase the cannabis, underage individuals will have easier access to it through the adults in their lives, just as they do to alcohol and other dangerous drugs.

"Rather than spending more money on treatment and additional policing, we believe that money would be better directed toward education and activities promoting mental health for all residents.

"We are in favor of a referendum on this issue, one that would be held at a time and place where all eligible residents can vote, including those who work "odd" hours.

"Sincerely,
"Lori and Tony Shetensky"

7. Unfinished Business

A. Retail Cannabis Discussion: Ms. Haines reviewed the background on this agenda item. Ms. Govert stated that she did not feel she is ready to make a decision on the date of referendum on this topic; however, she supported the idea of holding a referendum and suggested combining it with the upcoming Budget or BOE referendums would be the best approach.

Mr. Dill agreed that the Town should hold a referendum on the topic but suggested work needs to be done on drafting a useful referendum question(s). He stated he also agreed it would be best to combine the referendum on this issue with one of the other upcoming referendums.

Ms. Zemienieski provided information on the procedure for holding a referendum.

B. Property Tax Exemption Request: Ms. Haines recapped the background on this agenda item. She advised that, due to the timing of the request, the Town has the option of either creating an ordinance to address it, or putting off a tax exemption until the following tax year. Tax Collector Dill advised that the Town has previously never received a similar mid-year request.

Ms. Govert advised that there have been a number of significant conversations around the state about tax exemption for group homes and suggested CCM or COST may have some information the Board could use to resolve this issue. The Selectmen agreed to continue discussion of this agenda item.

C. Tax Relief for Elderly & Disabled Ordinance Discussion: Ms. Haines called the Selectmen's attention to the Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled ordinance information in their meeting packets. She noted that, by statute, it is the Board of Finance that sets the terms of the tax relief ordinance and, at their meeting of 2/7/2022, the Board of Finance made the following recommendation:

"Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to a report in their meeting packets created by the interim tax assessor regarding the Town's Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled program. She advised that, based on Social Security's COLA increases over the past 8-years she had recommended increases to the 3-tier income level qualifications as well as the related amounts of tax relief.

"Motion made by Mr. Thomas, to amend the ordinance entitled Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled to adjust the eligibility thresholds and relief amounts as follows:

- From $500 relief for incomes from $0 to $24,999 to $600 relief for incomes from $0 to $29,999;
- From $400 relief for incomes from $25,000 to $34,999.00 to $500 relief for incomes from $30,000 to $39,999;
- From $300 relief for incomes from $35,000 to $50,000 to $400 relief for incomes from $40,000 to $55,000;

"for the Grant Lists 2021 through 2026 and request the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried."

It was noted that the Board of Selectmen need to move this item to Town Meeting.

Motion made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill, to adopt and send to Town Meeting for approval, the recommendation of the Board of Finance that the ordinance entitled "Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled in the Town of East Haddam", adopted February 3, 2009, amended August 2, 2011 and October 17, 2017, be further amended to be effective for the Grand List years of 2021 through 2026 and to adjust the eligibility thresholds and relief amounts in section 290-33 as follows:

- From $500 relief for incomes from $0 to $24,999 to $600 relief for incomes from $0 to $29,999
- From $400 relief for incomes from $25,000 to $34,999.00 to $500 relief for incomes from $30,000 to $39,999;
- From $300 relief for incomes from $35,000 to $50,000 to $400 relief for incomes from $40,000 to $55,000;

Copies of said ordinance are on file in the Town Clerk's Office during regular business hours. Unanimous aye.

8. New Business

A. Grant Acceptance – Community Foundation of Middlesex County for Summer Day Camp and Enrichment Programs: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets regarding notification of a grant to the Recreation Department.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Govert, to accept a grant in the amount of $1,500.00 from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County for the purpose of funding recreational enrichment programs and activities for the summer day camp program, and send acceptance of said grant to the Board of Finance and then to Town Meeting for approval. Unanimous aye.

B. Call for Town Meeting: Ms. Haines stated the Board needs to call a Town Meeting to consider several items.

Motion made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the following call for Town Meeting:

The Electors and citizens of the Town of East Haddam, Connecticut qualified to vote in Town Meeting are hereby warned and notified that a Special Town Meeting will be held in the Municipal Office Complex, Meeting Room 1 & 2 located on 1 Plains Road in Moodus, Connecticut on Wednesday, March 2, 2022 at 8:00pm., for the following purposes, to wit:

Item 1: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance to accept a grant in the amount of $19,739.61 from the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation, entitled "FY 2022 Comprehensive DUI Enforcement Program for Resident Trooper Towns".

Item 2: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance to adopt the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that a grant in the amount of $5,500 is hereby accepted from the State of Connecticut, State Library, for the purpose of historic document preservation and appropriated to the Historic Document Preservation Fund (account 26041-43000); and that Irene M. Haines, First Selectman, is empowered to execute and deliver in the name and on behalf of this municipality, a contract with the Connecticut State Library for an Historic Document Preservation Grant.

Item 3: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance to accept a grant in the amount of $1,500.00 from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County for the purpose of funding recreational enrichment programs and activities for the summer day camp program (28045-44709).

Item 4: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance to accept a donation in the amount of $5,000.00 from Connecticare Inc. & Associates through the 2021 Connecticut Neighborhood Assistance Act, and to appropriate said funds to Open Space Reserve Fund (33250-43000-25022).

Item 5: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen that the ordinance entitled "Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled in the Town of East Haddam", adopted February 3, 2009, amended August 2, 2011 and October 17, 2017, is hereby further amended to be effective for the Grand List years of 2021 through 2026 and to adjust the eligibility thresholds and relief amounts in section 290-33 as follows:

- From $500 relief for incomes from $0 to $24,999.00 to $600 relief for incomes from $0 to $29,999;
- From $400 relief for incomes from $25,000 to $34,999 to $500 relief for incomes from $30,000 to $39,999; and
- From $300 relief for incomes from $35,000 to $50,000 to $400 relief for incomes from $40,000 to $55,000,

Copies of said ordinance are on file in the Town Clerk's Office during regular business hours.

Unanimous aye.

C. Sustainable CT Discussion: Ms. Haines stated that, in an effort to gather a sufficient number of bi-partisan applications for this committee, she is extending the time period for submitting applications. Further discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

D. Board/Commission/Committee Changes (CC):

Conservation Commission

Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to correspondence relating to changes on the Conservation Commission.

Motion made by Ms. Haines, seconded by Ms. Govert, to accept, with regret, the resignation of Tyler Meeks as an alternate member of the Conservation Commission. Unanimous aye.

E. Tax Refunds: There were no tax refunds presented at the meeting.

9. Public Comment

Mr. Moreau provided the following comments and questions:

- He is opposed to the sale of cannabis in Town and suggested that people have been able to acquire the product without a having a local store so the need is not there.

- He watched the February 9th Fire Commissioners meeting on YouTube and was disturbed by a few comments made at the meeting, in particular, the one made by the Fire Commissioner regarding new structural work needed on Fire House No. 2. Mr. Moreau expressed his opinion that the Commissioner's statement implied that he was more concerned about his reputation than what is best for the citizens of East Haddam.

  Mr. Moreau suggested that the Fire Department is "over apparatused" and recommended it is time to consolidate the fleet. He noted that the new Quint will replace at least one engine and possibly more. He presented a proposal for what apparatuses the Town needs to provide the service required for a community of this size. He suggested that, based on the previous Building's Committee poor results, any new Building Committee formed to address the structural issues at Fire House No. 2 should have strict oversight.

- He asked if the Board of Selectmen read the investigative report done on two Fire Department employees and, if so, how can they justify that the individual that was terminated is now acting as the Town's Deputy Fire Marshal?

- He noted that many Board/Commission/Committee members sit on more than one board and asked how the Town addresses conflicts of interest?

Ms. Haines stated that this administration had inherited existing issues with Town-owned property; however, she agrees that the Board of Selectmen needs a clear understanding of the Town's long-term fire safety needs before it moves forward with any work on Fire House No. 2. As such, she has retained the services of a consultant to do a 20-year study of the Town's fire safety staffing, equipment, and building needs.

In response to a question from Mr. Dill, Mr. Moreau stated his fleet consolidation recommendation would benefit both fleet and building requirements. He agreed to send his recommendation to the Selectmen for their review. Mr. Dill and Ms. Govert both expressed their support for a long-term study of the Town's fire safety needs.

10. Selectmen's Discussion

A. Liaison Reports: Ms. Haines reported that the Selectmen have all been working with their liaison assignments to produce the proposed FY2022-2023 Operating and Capital budgets. She reiterated that now is the time for the public to submit their comments/questions/concerns about the proposed budget, while it is being developed.

B. Other: Ms. Govert expressed her concern that Ms. Haines had moved forward with hiring a part-time Human Resource professional after the BOE withdrew from their agreement to share the service. She stated she wished Ms. Haines had discussed the hiring with the Board of Selectmen before moving forward and expressed some concern about the availability of the new hire given his other responsibilities.

   Ms. Haines confirmed that the new Human Resource professional is a local resident who is working remotely and has committed to being available for on-site meetings with employees when necessary. She reiterated that the BOE had initiated the idea of a shared Human Resource professional, had provided a job description, and had participated in the applicant interviews before pulling their support at the last minute. She advised that the BOE has also expressed a desire to not participate in a shared Finance Director position going forward. She stated that she hopes to determine the cause of their concern for continuing in participating in the Shared Services concept.

11. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss the meeting at adjourned 9:20 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary