TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes
January 9, 2023
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 and 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Life

Participating:

Board of Finance Members:

Joseph Corbett
Bruce Dutch
Todd Gelston
Tracey Gionta
Harvey Thomas
Rebecca Whatley

Others:

Board of Selectmen Members:

Irene Haines – First Selectwoman
Eric Dill
Theresa Govert

Board of Education Members:

Brian Reas – Superintendent of Schools
James Francese
A. Terri Garrity
Keira Thompson
Patricia Stricker
Laurel White

Donald Angersola – Facilities Director
Rob Funk – Finance Director
Maureen Goff – Town Treasurer
Cindy Hughston – School Business Manager
Craig Mansfield – Board of Fire Commissioners
Michael Callahan
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Gionta called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance. The Board of Selectmen and Board of Education called their meetings to order concurrently.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to approve the agenda as written. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

TRI-BOARD MEETING, 2023-2024 PROPOSED BUDGET – BOARDS OF FINANCE, EDUCATION AND SELECTMEN

a. Review and Discussion

Ms. Gionta reviewed the annual budget process and encouraged the public to submit comments/ question/concerns early in the process.

Board of Selectmen

First Selectwoman Haines provided an overview of how the Town moves through the budget process. She also encouraged the public to provide their input before the Boards get too far into the budget development meetings.

Ms. Haines reviewed current events, the Town's cost drivers and areas of focus. She responded to questions from the Board and there was a brief discussion about current and upcoming union negotiations and work being done to get several Town projects shovel-ready for grant opportunities. In response to a question from Ms. Whatley, Ms. Haines advised that the Town has posted the Library Director position and, currently, the two libraries are being directed by their branch managers.

Board of Education

Mr. Reas reviewed the BOE's budget development process and stated that the project will begin on January 10th when he presents his proposed budget to the Board. He provided an overview of the public schools' accomplishments, priorities, anticipated capital projects, and budget drivers.

Mr. Reas responded to several questions from the Board and agreed to research how the East Haddam schools' statistics compare to the national averages and provide the BOF with his findings. The group discussed the certifications and scheduling of school resource officers.

b. Guests and Audience Discussion

Maureen Goff, Town Treasurer, expressed her concerns regarding the Board of Education's accounts payable check sign-off process and read a prepared statement. In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Ms. Goff stated that she had not requested to be removed from the BOE's Liberty Bank accounts.

The Boards of Selectmen and Education adjourned their meetings.

The Board of Finance took a brief recess at 6:02 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 6:11 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Regular Meeting - December 12, 2022

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to a copy of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 12, 2022 in their meeting packets.

Motion was made by Mr. Gelston to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 12, 2022 as written. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to an email in their meeting packets from Ms. D'Aquila of the East Haddam Ambulance Association. She asked the Board to review the email.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Gionta addressed the Ms. Goff's concerns and noted that she does not believe it is within the Board of Finance's purview to oversee the administrative procedures of the Town or the Board of Education. In response to a question raised by Mr. Thomas, Mr. Funk advised that the auditors had provided feedback about the issue in October.

a. Tax Collector's Report

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to a copy of the Tax Collector's Report in their meeting packets. The Board had no questions regarding the report.

b. Board Subcommittee Reports

i. Communications – Mr. Gelston advised that an article regarding the budget process was published in the January 5th edition of the East Haddam News. He stated that the Subcommittee is currently working on an article about the revaluation and how it impacts the mill rate and property taxes.

Ms. Whatley noted that the Subcommittee's next meeting is scheduled for January 10th.

ii. Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee – Ms. Gionta reported that the Subcommittee had met twice since the Board's last regular meeting. She stated that the next meeting is scheduled for February 9th at 5:00 p.m.

iii. Financial Policies – Mr. Thomas reported that the BOF policies section on General Fund Revenue has been drafted and is ready for review by the Board. He advised that he will also ask Ms. Varricchio to review the document.

Mr. Funk stated that the Cemetery Committee has requested the option to carry-over unexpended funds from year-to-year and the BOF will need to create a policy for that.

c. Liaisons' Reports

There were no liaisons' reports discussed at the meeting.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT

The First Selectwoman was no longer in attendance, consequently, discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

a. November 2022 YTD Budget Report – Mr. Funk called the Board's attention to the November 2022 YTD summary budget report in their meeting packets. He provided an overview of the report and stated that expenditures and collections are relatively equal. He noted that the opioid settlement funds are currently in Other Revenues but must be moved into its own fund.

Mr. Funk reviewed several budget lines and responded to questions from the Board. In response to a question from Ms. Gionta, Mr. Thomas agreed to discuss with the Open Space Committee, at their next meeting, how to develop better budget projections.

b. Draft 2023-2024 Budget Calendar Update

Mr. Funk and the Board discussed the schedule for their March budget meetings. They agreed to schedule the BOS and BOE presentations for March 6, and workshops on March 11, 13, 18 and 21.

c. Audit Schedule Update

Mr. Funk reported on the auditors' review and stated that they are making good progress. He noted that the current deadline of January 31st could be extended, if necessary; however, it would be preferable not to do that. Ms. Gionta commented that the BOF would like to have an final audited fund balance before they begin their budget workshops in March.

Mr. Funk stated that the auditors' response to his inquiry about the Treasurer's concern with the BOE's check signing process was that it is the Town's decision on how to handle the process; however, the policy should be codified.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Capital Items

i. Fire Company No. 2 Building Assessment Update and possible action – request for $175,000 capital appropriation – Ms. Gionta recognized Craig Mansfield and Don Angersola.

Mr. Mansfield reviewed the history of prior work done at Fire Company No. 2 and stated that an engineering study needs to be done on the firehouse. He advised that they had received three responses to the RFP for the study and the Fire Commissioners recommended accepting the bid from Silver Petrucelli & Associates Inc.

Mr. Mansfield stated that the Fire Commissioners would like the BOF to approve their request to allocate $175k to cover the expense of the engineering study ($122.8k), work to shore up the existing building until the actual rebuild or renovation work begins ($30k), with the balance to be used for reimbursable expenses. Ms. Gionta noted that the Town has been reserving funds in anticipation of this project and, consequently, the actual allocation could be reduced to $138k.

Mr. Mansfield and Mr. Angersola responded to several questions from the Board. They noted that they are projecting the cost to rebuild/renovate the Company No. 2 firehouse at approximately $3M. In response to a question raised by Ms. Whatley, Mr. Mansfield provided background on why Selectman Dill had voted nay on the Fire Commissioner's recommendation to award the bid to Silver & Petrucelli.

Motion was made by Todd Gelston to allocate the amount of $138,000 from the town ARPA Fund Grant – Fund 1500, Account 59020 to the FY 2022-2023 capital budget – (Project C0217) to fund the cost of a contract for Architectural Services in accordance with RFP Bid #2022-1: Renovation of Firehouse Company #2, and to request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for Approval. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Grant Acceptance—Historic Document Preservation Grant – Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets related to this agenda item.

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to accept a grant in the amount of $5,500.00 from the State of Connecticut Library for the purpose of historic document preservation (Account 26401-43000) and to recommend the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

b. Grant Authorization – 2023 Neglected Cemetery Account Grant – Ms. Gionta advised that the Town would like to apply for the 2023 Neglected Cemetery Grant and noted that it has been awarded the grant several times in the past.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to authorize the application for a Neglected Cemetery Preservation Grant in an amount up to $5,000.00 with a currently budgeted General Fund match of up to $5,000.00 for the restoration and improvement of neglected burial grounds and cemeteries in East Haddam. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

c. **Board of Finance proposed FY24 budget** – Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets related to the BOF's Operating Budget, including its contingency fund. She provided some background on the expenses in the budget.

Mr. Funk noted that he anticipates the funds for the Human Resources position will be moved out of the BOF's contingency budget and into the Shared Services budget next year and there was a general discussion regarding the Human Services budget expense. Mr. Funk responded to several questions from the Board members.

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to approve the Board of Finance budget request in the amount of $196,146.00 for fiscal year 2023-2024. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

GUEST AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

In response to questions raised by Michael Callahan:

- Ms. Gionta stated she would include an agenda item on the Board's February meeting agenda to discuss what the BOF's philosophy should be regarding setting a budget for FY2023-2024 given the current inflationary environment.

- Board members confirmed that the revaluation process is dictated by state statutes and that municipalities do not have any flexibility. The Board agreed with Mr. Callahan that there may be a number of properties that were over-valued based on the fact that property sales are readjusting to more normal activity following the earlier bump. It was noted that the Assessor will most likely get requests for reviews of numerous new assessments.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 9:29 p.m. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Bruce Dutch
Secretary