TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 13, 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:

Michael Callahan
Rob Funk – Finance Director
Irene Haines – First Selectwoman
Cynthia Hughston – Business Manager, BOE
Brian Kaplita – IT Manager
Brian Reas - Superintendent
Amalia Shaetiel -Sustainability Committee
Jesse Scott – Sustainability Committee
Patricia Stricker – Board of Education
Michelle Velez – Public Works Director
Linda Zemienieski – Executive Manager
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Gionta called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to discuss the items on the agenda under New Business next. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

a. **Grant Authorization — Sustainability Team Request for authorization to apply for Energize Connecticut grant –** Ms. Gionta provided information on this request and recognized Jesse Scott. Mr. Scott advised that he is a member of the Sustainability Committee and provided an overview of the purpose of the grant. He noted that the Committee will focus their efforts on a program to encourage the public to make building envelope improvements and to educate them on the benefits of heat pump technology.

Motion was made by Mr. Corbet to authorize the application for a grant from Eversource and EnergizeCT requesting the amount of not more than $50,000 to increase awareness of residents to energy efficiency programs such as no-cost home energy efficiency audits, with no requirement for matching Town funds. Todd Gelston seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Motion carried.

b. Grant Authorization – Recreation Department request for authorization to apply for Community Foundation grant – Ms. Gionta provided information about this grant authorization request.

Motion was made by Harvey Thomas to authorize the application for a grant from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County (CFMC) requesting the amount of $3,000 to help fund enrichment programs at our summer day camp, with no requirement for matching Town funds. Bruce Dutch seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Motion carried.

2023-2024 Budget

a. Public Works

i. General Highways – Public Works Director Velez reviewed this budget and advised that the Supervisor position had been eliminated and replaced by the Road Foreman position and noted that the Grant Administrator hours had been reduced. She responded to questions from the Board and advised that the shift from Supervisor to Road Foreman had reduced the Salaries and Wages budget by approximately $20k. There was a general discussion about the increase in the In Service (Training) budget line and Ms. Velez clarified what is included in the Purchased Professional Service budget line.

In response to a question from Mr. Thomas, Director Velez provided information about the increase in the Catch Basin Cleaning budget line.

ii. Snow & Ice Removal – Mr. Funk reviewed expenditures in this budget to date. There were no questions concerning the Snow & Ice Removal budget.

iii. Tree Care & Removal – Ms. Velez provided an overview of the program to remove damaged/dead trees. She responded to questions from the Board and confirmed that it is still her intention to shift any surplus funds from the Snow and Ice Removal budget to the Tree Care & Removal budget after the winter season is over.

iv. Transfer Station – Director Velez reviewed the Transfer Station budget. In response to a comment from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Velez stated that she will schedule the hopper building to be power-washed within the FY23 budget season. Mr. Gelston encouraged Ms. Velez to put together a plan on how to reduce operating expenses at the Transfer Station.

Ms. Gionta noted that covers for the dumpsters up the hill at the Transfer Station have been in the past several budgets and there was a general discussion about the need for the covering the dumpsters. Ms. Velez responded to several questions regarding the composting program.

v. Transfer Station Revenues – The Board reviewed the proposed FY24 Transfer Station Revenues budget. Ms. Velez stated that, effective July 1, 2023 there will be a charge for disposing of tires, mattresses, and freon.

b. Public Works Capital

Director Velez reviewed the Public Works proposed capital requests and responded to questions from the Board. There was a general discussion regarding potential grant opportunities. In response to a question about priorities, Ms. Velez stated that replacement of the 20 year old loader is her number one priority and there was a general discussion about using ARPA funds to purchase a new loader.

In response to a question from Mr. Thomas about the condition of the Public Works building, Mr. Angersola advised that it has some deterioration similar to the Fire Company No. 2 building; however, not as extensive. He noted that there are no structural issues at this time and he will submit an estimate for repairs next fiscal year

There was a general discussion regarding the mis-numbering of trucks on the Public Works capital plan.

The meeting recessed at 7:25 p.m. and reconvened at 7:29 p.m.

c. **Board of Education**

i. Board Education Operating Budget – Superintendent Reas distributed and reviewed informational materials providing examples of Purchased Professional Services. Ms. Hughston provided information about two significant changes in that budget line: Tuitions ($107k) had been moved to the Purchased Professional Services budget line, and the athletic trainer expense had increased $38k. Mr. Reas responded to several questions from the Board.

ii. Board of Education Capital

Mr. Reas reviewed a presentation of capital projects that had been completed. He reviewed the list of capital project requests for FY24 and responded to questions from the Board. Mr. Gelston encouraged Mr. Reas and the BOE to think creatively for ways to economize their capital requests.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Thomas, Mr. Reas discussed the potential to receive a state grant for the proposed HVAC project and also how ARPA funds may be used to support the project.

In response to a request from Ms. Gionta, Ms. Stricker agreed to provide the BOF with a prioritized list of FY24 capital projects no later than March 21st.

Mr. Gelston asked Mr. Reas about the management of the BOE's HR responsibilities. Mr. Reas responded the school district is working under a Business Manager model which addresses its HR needs. Business Manager Hughston stated that, other than grievances which the Superintendent handles, she handles all of the schools' HR work. In response to an inquiry from Mr. Thomas, Mr. Reas confirmed that the BOE does not expect to utilize the Town's part-time HR professional.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Gionta, IT Manager Kaplita clarified why there are discrepancies between the internet costs between several Town buildings. He noted that there are government rates available and agreed that it would be a good idea to get competitive bids on a bundled package of Town's internet services.

Mr. Kaplita reviewed the Technology Department's staffing and confirmed that the Desktop Support position is currently vacant and that he is working to fill the position.

Mr. Gelston expressed concern about the Town's and BOE's large software budget and Mr. Kaplita and Mr. Funk reviewed several departmental software needs. Mr. Funk noted that there are alternative sources for some of the Town's software packages; however, he cautioned that the cost to migrate to new packages can be significant. He also stated that some of software fees, such as the ones for the Assessor and the Tax Collector, are not simply for the programs provided but also include charges for services such as mail handling (i.e., postage, envelopes, sorting, etc.). Mr. Kaplita and Mr. Funk agreed to look into ways to economize the purchase of software for the Town and BOE.

d. Fringe Benefits

Mr. Funk noted that the largest increase to Fringe Benefits is in the Health Insurance budget line. He stated that a placeholder of an 8.4% increase was used for healthcare benefits; however, it may come in lower. He advised that another impact to that budget line was the fact that more employees are opting into the insurance coverage rather than taking the stipend.

Mr. Funk advised that the Fringe Benefits FY24 budget was also impacted by adjusting the Employer Share of Social Security line to reflect the federally mandated 7.65% and by including the cost for employees in the Shared Services department that are paid through the BOE payroll.

Mr. Funk responded to several questions from the Board.

GUEST AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

There were no guest and/or audience comments discussed at the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 9:06 p.m. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Bruce Dutch
Secretary