Board of Selectmen
Nathan Hale-Ray High School
Auditorium
May 2, 2023
Special Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; E. Dill; T. Govert
Also Present: A. Chaplinsky; L. D'Aquila; D. DiStefano; E. Fiechler; C. Mansfield; M. Roberts; D. Scranton; C. Shaddox; M. Theide; E. Waters; L. Woodward; L. Zemienieski; and approximately 50 other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Agenda

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

3. Approval of Minutes: Regular Meeting of April 19, 2023

   Motion made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 19, 2023, as written. Unanimous aye.

4. Correspondence

   Ms. Haines stated that she had received a letter from Amalia Shaltiel regarding the East Haddam Ambulance Association which she would read during the Public Comment period of the meeting.

5. First Selectman's Report

   Ms. Haines reported that the Swingbridge will be able to be opened for marine traffic once the contractor receives and installs a new controlling mechanism, which is on order. She stated that they will also be installing navigation lights at the bridge and that she is continuing discussions with American Bridge Repair and the CT DOT regarding the possibility of opening the bridge to marine traffic for an extended period of time to allow boat owners the ability to move their vessels to boatyards south of the bridge, hopefully by Memorial Day.

6. Public Comment

   The following public comment was discussed:

   - Lynn Woodward stated that she is on the board of the East Haddam Ambulance Association (EHAA) and commented on First Selectman Haines statement in a recent edition of the East Haddam News that the EHAA is not financially viable. She noted that all ambulance organizations are experiencing financial challenges. Ms. Woodward reviewed the budgetary history of the EHAA and asked how the Town will pay to replace all of the services provided by the Ambulance Association.

Ms. Haines read a prepared statement regarding the Town's relationship with the EHAA and a timeline of the efforts made by herself, and the previous two administrations, to reach out to the Ambulance Association to discuss adjustments to their Agreement and work through issues and concerns. She explained why she did not feel confident contributing to the Association's budget at this time and reviewed the Town's plan for moving forward. She stated that while she did not have any confidence in the existing EHAA Board, she was very appreciative of the efforts of the volunteer and per diem staff and hoped they would consider continuing their volunteer service in the Town's proposed new hybrid ambulance model.

- Laurie D'Aquila stated that she is the President of the East Haddam Ambulance Association Board. She advised that contrary to Ms. Haines information, she has not received written notification from Vintech informing her that they are discontinuing their contract with the EHAA. She rebutted a number of Ms. Haines' statements and reiterated her past comments regarding the impact of the pandemic and poor Medicare/Medicaid reimbursement rates on the Association's financials.

  In response to a question raised by Ms. D'Aquila, Ms. Haines stated that the Town is working toward having the new hybrid ambulance model in effect by June 21st. Ms. Haines reviewed a letter that Vintech sent to the EHAA regarding past due bills and putting the EHAA on notice that they would not be providing staffing beyond April 15th.

- Colleen Shaddox raised several questions to which Ms. Haines responded as follows: she confirmed that there had been no Board of Selectmen or Town vote on the EHAA's request for a contribution of $100k to their budget; and that she, as First Selectman, had the authority to issue an RFP on behalf of the Town for proposals to supply part-time staffing for the Town's planned new ambulance service, and she reviewed the process the Town had followed to apply to replace the EHAA as its Primary Service Area Responder. Ms. Haines stated that the Boards of Selectmen and Finance had agreed not to use any ARPA funds for operating expenses and, consequently, the EHAA's request for a contribution to their operating budget had not been considered when they selected capital projects to be funded through that source.

- Mark Theide expressed his discomfort with the Town's plans to replace the EHAA with a medical division within the Fire Department. He categorized the plan as a government takeover because the Ambulance Association is a "profit center".

- Margy Roberts asked about the cost to run the new operation and expressed her concern about transferring a losing operation to the Town's budget. She encouraged the Town to put more effort into making the relationship with the Ambulance Association work.

- Elizabeth Fiechler stated that her family operates an ambulance business and noted that every service operates differently. In response to her question about the cost to operate the EHAA and whether or not there are enough volunteers to staff it, Ms. Haines briefly reviewed several of the quotes the Town received in response to the RFP for staffing services. She also provided an overview of the EMS/EMT staff at the Fire Department and the EHAA volunteer staff.

- Donald Scranton introduced himself as the Chief of the East Hampton volunteer ambulance group. He expressed concern about the lack of communication from the Town and the EHAA and stated he was worried about the potential for a significant increase in the need for mutual aid from East Hampton. He further expressed his apprehension about a conflict of interest arising when the East Haddam firefighters have to respond to both a fire call and an EMT call.

- Craig Mansfield noted he is an East Haddam Fire Commissioner and stated he took exception to Chief Scranton's comments. He noted that the EHAA financial model is unsustainable and that an all-volunteer model no longer works. He encouraged the Town and the EHAA to come together to solve the problem and stated that the Fire Department has supported the Town's Ambulance Association for a number of years.

Ms. Haines refuted Chief Scranton's statement that there has been a lack of communication from the Town.

The Board of Selectmen's meeting recessed for a Town Meeting at 8:05 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 9:24 p.m.

- Denise DiStefano presented several questions to Ms. Haines who provided information regarding the Town's current financial and in-kind support provided to the EHAA and stated that, if the new model goes forward, the revenues from the service and expense of part-time staffing would be carried on the Town's budget. Ms. DiStefano expressed her concern about replacing the EHAA and moving forward with the new model without knowing the cost.

Ms. Haines read a letter she had received from Amalia Shaltiel expressing Ms. Shaltiel's concern about the situation with the EHAA and her support for the Ambulance Association. Ms. Shaltiel's letter also encouraged the First Selectman to create a better relationship between the EHAA and the Fire Department rather than "*choosing one side over another".*

- Erica Waters asked why the schedule for several recent Board of Selectmen's meetings had changed. Ms. Haines explained that the four BOS meetings had been rescheduled because she had been taking an EMR class which conflicted with the times of those meetings. She noted that she had had the support of the other Board to reschedule those meetings.

- Anthony Chaplinsky asked whether or not there is any recourse to the current stalemate. Ms. Haines stated that she has made a persistent effort to work through the situation with the EHAA for 18-months and that she had the support of the Chairman of the Board of Finance and the EMS Director in those efforts. She emphasized that she has no concerns about the EHAA volunteers; however, it is the operations and management side of the organization that she feels is not fulfilling its charge.

- Laurie D'Aquila rebutted several of Ms. Haines representations of the EHAA Board's efforts to solve its problems. She explained some of the situations they were faced with and requested mediation to resolve this conflict.

- Colleen Shaddox emphasized the negative impact the pandemic had on the emergency medical services industry and encouraged the Town to look for alternative options to resolve the conflict with the EHAA.

- Elizabeth Fiechler noted that there are different perceptions of the situation, asked if there are opportunities for fund-raising to help support the Town's ambulance services, and "what happens now"? Ms. Haines stated that fund-raising can be done, however, she is obligated to follow through with the RFP process. Regarding Ms. Fiechler's inquiry about what will happen next, she provided information about where citizens can get details about the Town's future discussions and decisions on this topic.

7. Unfinished Business

   A. Cemetery Committee Letter & By-Laws: Ms. Haines reported that, at its last meeting, the Cemetery Committee had adopted its Rules and Regulations and By-Laws. She stated that this agenda item will, therefore, be removed from future Board of Selectmen meeting agendas.

8. New Business

   A. Gift Acceptance – Senior Center Shed: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to an email from Senior Center Director, Brad Parker, noting a donation to the Senior Center of a used storage shed, valued at approximately $1,200.00, from Liberty Bank.

      Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Govert, to accept a gift of a used storage shed for the Senior Center valued at approximately $1,200.00 from Liberty Bank and send acceptance of said donation to the Board of Finance and Town Meeting for approval. Unanimous aye.

   B. Board/Commission/Committee Changes (CEM, SUSCT)

      Cemetery Committee
      Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to a memorandum from Deborah Denette, Secretary of the Cemetery Committee relating to membership reappointments.

      Motion made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill, to reappoint Alison Guinness and Richard Pettinelli as regular members for two-year terms to expire June 30, 2025 on the Cemetery Committee. Unanimous aye.

      Sustainability Team
      Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to an email from Theresa Govert, Chairman of the Sustainability Team relating to membership changes.

      Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Govert, to accept, with deep regret, the resignations of Edwina Trentham and Greg Coleman from the Sustainability Team. Unanimous aye.

      Motion made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill to appoint Tanya Bourgoin as a member of the East Haddam Sustainability Team to serve until the desired certification level has been achieved. Unanimous aye.

   C. Tax Refunds

      There were no tax refunds considered at the meeting.

9. Public Comment

   Anthony Chapiski commented that he believes the business plan of the EHAA is unsustainable and stated that "*sometimes you have to move on*".

10. Selectmen's Discussion

    A. Liaison Reports

Mr. Dill reported that he will be meeting with Public Works Director Velez to discuss the Transfer Station. He stated that he also has a meeting scheduled with Crary Brownell, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission, to discuss repairs to Beebe Road.

B. Other: There was no other business discussed at the meeting.

11. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Govert, seconded by Mr. Dill, to adjourn the meeting at 9:57 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary