TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes
June 12, 2023
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 and 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

Board of Finance Members:

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

Others:

Lori D'Aquila, East Haddam Ambulance Association
Rob Funk, Finance Director
Irene Haines, First Selectman
Jen Reynolds, Fire Department EMS Coordinator
James Ventres, Land Use Administrator
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 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board reviewed the following minutes:

a. Public Hearing, April 18, 2023

Motion was made by Mr. Gelston to approve the minutes of the Public Hearing of April 18, 2023 as written. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

b. Special Meeting, April 18, 2023

Motion made by Ms. Whatley to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of April 18, 2023 as written. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

c. Regular Meeting, May 8, 2023

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 8, 2023 as written. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

d. Special Meeting, May 16, 2023

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 16, 2023 as written. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

e. Special Meeting, May 24, 2023

Mr. Gelston noted a typographical error and requested the following change in the first bullet point under agenda item b. Survey Results Discussion on page 2: *"Mr. ~~Todd~~ Gelston stated…"*

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to approved the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 24, 2023 as amended. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

There were no guest/audience comments raised for discussion at this time in the meeting.

Ms. Gionta stated she would like to move Old Business agenda items a and b up for discussion at this time in the meeting

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to amend the agenda to move Old Business items a. Discussion regarding Open Space Reissuance of Bond Authorization relating to purchase of the Kronberg property, and b. Discussion regarding Open Space Future Bonding Authorization up following agenda item Guests and Audience Comments. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

a. Discussion regarding Open Space Future Bonding Authorization relating to purchase of the Kronberg property

Land Use Administrator Ventres advised that CT DEEP had approved the Town's application for a $243k grant to purchase the Kronberg property; he noted that the Town's share of the cost to purchase the property is $270,900.00

Mr. Ventres reviewed the qualities of the Kronberg property. He provided an overview of Town's previous bond authorization for open space purchases and reviewed the 20-year history of open space acquisitions.

Ms. Gionta stated that she supports the proposal to pursue another bond authorization for open space acquisitions and solicited the Board's input. Mr. Thomas recognized the success of the Town's open space program and complimented the Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, and Land Use Department for their work on the program. The other board members agreed with Mr. Thomas' comments and Mr. Gelston noted that the Town's open space attracts tourism and new business to Town.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Whatley, Mr. Ventres provided clarification regarding the split of the cost of the Kronberg property between the CT DEEP grant and the Town.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas that the Board of Finance approve the Open Space purchase of the Kronberg property for $479,000, of which the Town of East Haddam is responsible for $279,900.00. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Motion carried.

b. Discussion regarding Open Space Future Bonding Authorization

The Board discussed the proposal to pursue a new open space bond authorization under the previous agenda item.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston that the Board of Finance is in agreement with moving forward with a bond authorization for open space purchases and recommend to the Board of Selectman schedule a Town Meeting and referendum for the purpose of re-authorizing the commitment to bond up to $5M as open space opportunities become available. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to copies of several emails in their meeting packets regarding the use of Everbridge to notify citizens of Town Meetings, referendums, and voting days. There no discussion regarding the emails.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. Board of Assessment Appeals Spring Report

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to a copy of the Board of Assessment Appeals Spring Report in their meeting packets. She reviewed the report and noted that a total adjustment of $780,480.00 had been made to the Grand List based on the approved appeals. There were no questions from the Board.

b. Board Subcommittee Reports

i. **Communications –** Mr. Gelston advised that he had posted lawn signs announcing the recent Public Meeting on the Budget. In response to a question from Ms. Whatley, he confirmed that lawn signs with information about the date/time/place of the upcoming budget referendum will also be posted.

ii. **Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee** – Ms**.** Gionta noted that the Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee had discussed reconvening mid-year and she requested Ms. Haines schedule that meeting.

iii. **Financial Policies** – Mr. Thomas reported that the sub-committee had worked on the Board of Finance's process for the authorization of grant submissions and the Lakes Association capital reserves policy. He stated that the sub-committee has also scheduled a meeting to work on updates to the BOF's General Fund Revenues policy.

c. Liaison Reports

i. **Redevelopment Agency** – Mr. Thomas reported that the Centerbridge Group had presented a new proposal to the Redevelopment Agency. He noted that the Agency has moved the proposal forward to the Planning & Zoning Commission which will determine whether or not it complies with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. In response to a question raised by Ms. Gionta, Mr. Thomas stated that the Agency had not solicited the new plan from Centerbridge.

Mr. Thomas further reported that the Redevelopment Agency's Communications sub-committee is preparing a document that will provide the public with information about what the Agency has been working on and what to expect in the future.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Haines provided the following report:

- She provided an update on the Swingbridge renovations and stated that the Traffic Division of the CT DOT had provided the towns of East Haddam and Haddam with a limited number of tickets for the Hadlyme Ferry. She advised that the towns are distributing the tickets judiciously and soliciting feedback on how well the ferry is working as an alternative river crossing to the Swingbridge. She noted, however, that the ferry has limited capacity and hours.

- The New Library Building advisory group is researching the square foot cost of renovating the existing library buildings vs. building a new library vs. fitting out the basement of the Municipal Office Building as a library. Ms. Haines stated that once the group submits their findings, the Town will present them to the public for their input on which option to pursue.

- A land conveyance of a .94 acre parcel across from Ballek's Farm was granted to the Town. Ms. Haines advised that Mr. Curtin owns an adjoining piece of land and has expressed an interest in constructing a permanent building for a farmers' market on the property and donating it to the Town.

- CT DOT consultants had recently visited the Moodus business district to conduct a traffic/highway study. Ms. Haines stated that the Town plans to apply for a state connectivity grant to complete the sidewalks in Moodus and add benches, etc. to the area and the DOT's report will be useful for the grant application.

- She recently met with representative from the Hope Partnership to discuss affordable housing opportunities in Moodus. Ms. Haines advised that Hope Partnership | Affordable Housing is a non-profit organization dedicated to developing affordable workforce housing opportunities in Southern Middlesex County. She explained the difference between low-income and affordable housing.

Ms. Haines stated that, at the Board of Finance's request, she had asked Jen Reynolds, the Fire Department's EMS Coordinator, to attend tonight's meeting and speak with the Board about the budget for the proposal to have the Fire Department assume the Town's emergency medical response responsibilities. She distributed materials related to the budgetary aspects of the proposal to the Board.

Ms. Reynolds reviewed the budget projections and explained how the expenses were determined. She noted that the revenue number in her budget projections was taken from the East Haddam Ambulance Association's projected 2022 revenue figures. She responded to questions from the Board regarding payroll, staffing, revenue, the cost of reserving for replacement ambulances, the OEMS license, and how comparable communities provide emergency medical response.

In response to a recommendation made by Mr. Gelston, the BOF agreed to re-start setting aside reserves for replacement ambulances in the FY2024-2025 budget.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

a. April 2023 Year to Date Budget Report

Mr. Funk called the Board's attention to the April 2023 YTD Budget Report in their meeting packets. He noted that the Town's expenses are on-track to come in approximately $500k below what was budgeted and revenues are projected to come in approximately $300k above what was budgeted. He responded to several questions from the Board.

b. Audit Update

Mr. Funk reported that the "final draft" of the Town's audit was submitted to CLA's management for their internal review. He stated that the draft audit indicates the Town may have to use less than the $500k of Fund Balance that was earmarked for the FY2022-2023 budget. He responded to several questions from the Board.

c. Volunteer Firefighters Pension Contribution update. Discussion on potential of impact on FY24 budget.

Mr. Funk reviewed the findings of recent actuarial reports on the Volunteer Firefighters pension fund. He noted that the reports state that at the end of FY2022 the account was 103% funded. Consequently, he recommended not making the $64k contribution to the fund projected for FY2023-2024. The Board discussed options for using the $64k.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Discussion regarding Open Space Reissuance of Bond Authorization relating to purchase of the Kronberg property

This agenda item was discussed earlier in the meeting and is covered in the above minutes.

b. Discussion regarding Open Space Future Bonding Authorization

This agenda item was discussed earlier in the meeting and is covered in the above minutes.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Gionta stated she would like to add a discussion of the Board of Finance's calendar to the agenda under New Business.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to add the following item to the agenda under New Business: c. Discussion of the Board of Finance's 2023-2024 regular meeting calendar. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

a. Donation acceptance - Consumer Reports gift

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to a copy of a letter from Consumer Reports regarding their 2023 donation, in lieu of taxes, to the Town. She reviewed the letter and First Selectwoman Haines clarified that, due to the additional cost of the maintenance program for the donated LUCAS chest compression equipment, the entire donation will be utilized for the LUCAS equipment.

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to accept a gift from Consumer Reports in the amount of $25,000.00, to be used for the purchase of a LUCAS chest compression systems, going into revenue account 33050-43000-G2301 and to expense account 3305011-58820-G2301, and to recommend that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

b. Approval of Suspense list from Tax Collector

Ms. Gionta called the Board's attention to the Tax Collector's Suspense List in their meeting packets.

Mr. Gelston made a motion to accept the Tax Collector's Suspense List in the amount of $64,932.16. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

c. Discussion of the Board of Finance's 2023-2024 Regular Meeting Calendar

Ms. Gionta explained that the Board traditionally takes either the month of July or August off in the summer. After a discussion, the Board agreed to cancel their August meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to cancel the Board of Finance's regular scheduled meeting of August 14, 2023. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

GUEST AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Ms. D'Aquila introduced herself as a member of the East Haddam Ambulance Association's (EHAA) board. She stated that the EHAA has had an agreement, regarding reserving to purchase a new ambulance every five years, with the Town since 2010; however, the Town has not complied with that obligation for the last few fiscal years. She stated that the Association has provided the Town with all of its financials going back to 2010.

Ms. D'Aquila stated that the EHAA is seeing an increasing number of calls from Medicare clients and discussed the minimal level of Medicaid/Medicare reimbursement for ambulance transportation. She noted the Association's successful efforts to reduce expenses and asked how the Town would manage the legal costs if the Association resists its efforts to have its PSA transferred to the Town.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 8:46 p.m. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Bruce Dutch
Secretary