TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes
January 8, 2024
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

Board of Finance Members:
Eric Kolasinski
Joseph Corbett
Todd Gelston
Harvey Thomas
Rebecca Whatley

Others: Valerie Belles, Finance Director
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
Mrs. Maureen Goff
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Corbett called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Corbett stated that the election of officers had taken place at the Board of Finance's December 11, 2023 meeting and was inadvertently included on this agenda. No election of officers occurred at the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Regular Meeting, December 11, 2023 – Mr. Corbett called the Board's attention to the minutes of their December 11, 2023 meeting. Ms. Whatley noted a grammatical error on page 10 and Mr. Gelston noted the following revision on Page 7 – under Correspondence: *"Motion made by Mr. ~~Todd~~ Gelston to amend the agenda as stated by Mr. Corbett."*

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 11, 2023 as amended. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

b. Special Meeting, December 20, 2023 – Mr. Corbett called the Board's attention to the minutes of their December 20, 2023 special meeting.

Motion made by Ms. Whatley to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 20, 2023 as written. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Mr. Corbett reported that the email address to submit comments to this meeting was off-line temporarily. He stated that if the public wants to submit questions or comments to this meeting, they can do so through BOFChair@easthaddam.org.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence discussed at the meeting

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. Board of Finance Liaison Assignments - Mr. Corbett noted that he had distributed the list of liaison assignments but noted that changes could be made to the assignments when the Board's vacancy is filled. Ms. Haines noted several departmental contact updates.

b. Board Subcommittee Appointments & Reports

i. Communications – Mr. Gelston reported that the Communications Subcommittee will publish reprints of three articles related to the budget season in the East Haddam News and discussed a potential timeline. He noted that he is also working with Ms. Belles on updates to the Citizen's Guide to the Budget.

Ms. Whatley advised that she had drafted an article regarding the Board of Education's HVAC project with input from the BOE. She noted, however, that it had been brought to her attention that if either the BOF or BOE published the article, they could potentially be at risk for violating CT statutes related to the use of public funds and for "advocating to influence the voters". She discussed potential alternatives for getting the information out to the public.

ii. Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee – First Selectwoman Haines stated she expects to schedule the next Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee meeting for the end of January.

iii. Financial Policies – Mr. Corbett stated he will coordinate the next meeting of the Financial Policies Committee with Mr. Thomas, Finance Director Belles, and himself.

c. Liaison Reports

i. Redevelopment Agency – Mr. Thomas reported that the Agency's environmental grant application to the state is moving forward and the financial adviser firm is on-board with the Redevelopment Agency.

FIRST SELECTMEN'S REPORT

First Selectwoman Haines reported the following:

- On December 29th and 30th, there were several car break-ins in East Haddam and several surrounding towns. One of the vehicles broken into in East Haddam belonged to a CT State Trooper who resides here. The break-ins are being investigated by the CT State Police Eastern District Crimes Unit.

- The CT State Police have assigned Trooper Megan Jenny, as the new East Haddam Resident State Trooper.

- In the past 12 months, the Fire Department has added twenty-four new medical and fire-fighting volunteers to its staff and they are currently interviewing for two new full-time fire fighter positions.

- She is still waiting to get a decision from the CT Office of Emergency Medical Services regarding the Town's emergency medical response team.

- The Town and the Nature Conservancy are working with Resilient CT on a flood remediation plan for Succor Brook. She noted that the Succor Brook project is one of three projects that Resilient CT is participating in.

Mr. Gelston noted that automobile break-ins occur at convenience stores and gas stations as well as at residences. Ms. Haines responded to several questions from the Board.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

a. November 2023 Year-to-Date Budget Report – Ms. Belles called the Board's attention to the November 2023 YTD budget report in their meeting packets. She reviewed several statistics from the report and responded to questions from the Board.

b. Audit Update – Ms. Belles reported that she had filed with the state for another extension to February 29th. She stated that she and the auditors have set a target date for the field work to begin at the end of January and noted that she has been uploading documents into their portal.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business discussed at the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Grant Acceptance – To accept an ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) for Senior Center Funding – Ms. Haines provided background on this agenda item.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston, seconded by Ms. Whatley, to adopt the following resolution:

RESOLVED: That an American Rescue Plan Act Grant for Senior Centers in the amount of $24,150.00 is hereby accepted upon the terms and conditions set forth in a certain Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and Coronavirus Fiscal Local Recovery Fund ("CSLFRF") Beneficiary Agreement between the Town of East Haddam and the State of Connecticut, Department of Aging and Disability Services for the purpose of HVAC upgrades and replacement at the East Haddam Senior Center. Agreement by and between Coronavirus Fiscal Local Recovery Fund and the Town of East Haddam and to recommend that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval.

The motion was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

b. Filling BOF Vacancy – Mr. Corbett stated that he would like to fill the vacancy on the Board of Finance before moving into the budget season. He advised that, after reviewing related CT statutes, it was determined that the new Board member can be affiliated with either political party or a registered Independent. He stated that he would like to have an expansive search for a qualified individual and solicited input from the Board members.

There was a general discussion regarding the use of multiple communication vehicles, including print and social media, to solicit qualified applicants. Mr. Corbett recommended the following timeline: initiate solicitation for volunteers by the end of next week, accept letters of interest for the following 2-3 weeks, and schedule a special meeting for the week of February 19th to interview candidates. The Board supported the proposed timeline and agreed to schedule a special meeting for February 21st at 7:00 p.m. to talk with candidates.

Mr. Gelston stated that he and Ms. Whatley will coordinate publishing a public service announcement soliciting qualified candidates for the vacancy in the East Haddam News. He noted that publishing something in print media could potentially push out the proposed timeline.

c. Updating meeting minutes to summarize action taken at meetings – Mr. Corbett solicited the Board's input on how to create a document that summarizes the discussions and rationale behind the BOF's motions and decisions. There was a general discussion regarding the benefits of having such detail collated in an executive summary type document and Mr. Gelston volunteered to create such a draft document.

d. Improve Citizen participation in budget process – Mr. Corbett solicited input from the other Board members on this agenda item. There was a general discussion about using both print and social to encourage citizen participation in the budget meetings. The Board also discussed publishing a list of topics that will be discussed on which dates along with an outline of the proposed discussion schedule on each date. Ms. Haines emphasized the need to allow for flexibility in the discussion schedules and recommended including Ms. Zemienieski in any conversation related to publishing budget discussion schedules.

In response to a question from Mr. Corbett, Ms. Belles confirmed that the Tri-Board meeting has been scheduled for January 29th.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Ms. Maureen Goff -Daniel Peck Rd- stated that she supports the Board's efforts to encourage more public participation in the budget meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to adjourn at 8:20 p.m. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Todd Gelston
Secretary