**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM**
**Board of Finance**
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 12, 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: Don Angersola, Facilities Director
Valerie Belles, Finance Director
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
Cindy Hughston, BOE Business Manager
And other members of the public

## CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Corbett called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

## APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Regular Meeting, January 8, 2024 – Mr. Corbett called the Board's attention to the minutes of their January 8, 2024 meeting.

**Motion made by Mr. Gelston to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 8, 2024 as written. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

b. Special Meeting – Tri-Board, January 29, 2024 – Mr. Corbett called the Board's attention to the minutes of their January 29, 2024 special meeting.

**Motion made by Mr. Gelston to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of January 29, 2024 as written. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

## GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

There were no guests or audience comments discussed at the meeting.

## CORRESPONDENCE

a. Email – Mr. Corbett stated that an email had been received from Robert Simmons regarding the January 29th Tri-Board meeting and 2024-2025 budget. Mr. Corbett read the email to the Board. He thanked Mr. Simmons for his comments and confirmed that the Board of Finance is sympathetic to the tax burden on the community. He encouraged citizens to reach out to the BOF regarding their thoughts and concerns about the 2024-2025 Town budget.

Mr. Corbett stated he would like to move Mr. Lindsey's presentation up on the agenda.

**Motion made by Mr. Thomas to amend the agenda to move item 6a. Presentation and Discussion Regarding Future Debt Strategy and Capital Funding – Bill Lindsey from Munistat up for discussion next. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. Presentation and Discussion Regarding Future Debt Strategy and Capital Funding – Bill Lindsey from Munistat – Mr. Corbett introduced Mr. Lindsey who distributed handouts of his presentation to the Board. Mr. Lindsey reviewed how the Capital Projects Savings process works and the Town's existing debt profile. He also reviewed the Town's five new capital projects and stated that, net of grants, total borrowing for those projects equals $5.319M, noting that an additional $226k would have to be transferred into Capital Projects Savings for four years to cover that debt.

   Mr. Lindsey discussed the potential impact of another $5M bond authorization for Open Space purchases. He advised that, assuming $1M/year of the authorization is borrowed over a 5 year period, an additional $86k would have to be transferred into Capital Projects Savings annually for a four year period.

   Mr. Lindsey responded to questions from the Board and confirmed that he could assist the Town in prioritizing its future capital project requests. Mr. Corbett thanked Mr. Lindsey for his presentation.

b. Board of Finance Liaison Assignments – There were no liaison updates given at the meeting.

c. Board Subcommittee Appointments & Report

   i. Communications – Mr. Gelston reported that the Communications Subcommittee had updated the Citizen's Guide to the Budget. He stated that they are also working on an article about how and why we have audits

   ii. Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee – First Selectwoman Haines stated she will schedule the next Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee meeting after the BOF vacancy is filled.

iii. Financial Policies – Mr. Thomas stated he would like to have Ms. Varricchio, the Town's former Finance Director, participate in the Financial Policies Sub-Committee's next meeting. He said Ms. Varricchio will be available after budget season, in mid-April.

d. Liaison Reports

i. Redevelopment Agency – Mr. Thomas reported that the Agency last met on February 8th. He advised that the Agency's RFPs for an environmental assessment of the 1 and 7 Main Street property is moving forward.

Mr. Thomas also reported that the financial firm that will advise the Redevelopment Agency on tax incentive financing met with Town officials, and talked with business owners and residents of the Village; he expects they will provide the Redevelopment Agency with their feedback soon. Mr. Thomas suggested inviting the group to one of the upcoming BOF meetings.

## FIRST SELECTMEN'S REPORT

First Selectwoman Haines reported the following:

- Responses to the Town's RFP for bids to develop a master plan for Moodus will close this week.
- A crack in the Swingbridge's grid system was discovered; however, the project is still on schedule. The contractor has been flexible and cooperative about adjusting the bridge closing schedule to accommodate Town events. However, there continues to be challenges with tractor trailers fitting across the bridge when one-way traffic is in effect. Ms. Haines and the DOT discussed more regular enforcement of weight limits for the area to help deter tractor trailers from using the Swingbridge while the rehabilitation project is in process.
- The engineers have completed their inspection of the drainage pipe under Bebee Road and concluded that it is in good order. They have approved moving forward with the road work and Ms. Haines hopes to have Beebe Road open soon.
- The Secretary of State provided the Town with $10,500 to offset the expense of early voting; however, the Registrars of Voters estimate the funds will fall short of covering the cost of the anticipated primaries this spring and summer. Ms. Haines stated that members of the River COG have written to the Secretary of State expressing their concern and are hopeful that additional funding will be forthcoming. In the meantime, she advised that funds will have to be included in the 2024-2025 budget to cover the cost of early voting.

In response to questions raised by Mr. Gelston, Ms. Haines reviewed the Town's program for the removal of dead/diseased trees and stated that they are working with the state to improve drainage on the state roads in the Town. She reported that they are also looking into culvert/infrastructure grants and, further, the Town has submitted a FEMA application for reimbursement for the cost to repair damage caused by the recent heavy rainfalls.

## FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

a. December 2023 Year-to-Date Budget Report – Ms. Belles called the Board's attention to the December 2023 YTD budget report in their meeting packets. She noted that January had been an unusually busy month and the Finance Department is now in the process of catching up on its regular reports.

b. Audit Update – Ms. Belles reported that the auditors have advised the field audit will occur in late February. Consequently, she expects to file another extension with the state beyond the existing February 29th extension. She stated that she will be meeting with the auditors on February 15th.

## OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Corbett reported that, after submitting letters to the two party chairs in Town, the BOF received applications from two qualified candidates to fill its vacant position. He noted, however, that the press release regarding the vacancy did not get sent to the newspaper in time to get published and he presented several options to the Board on how they could move forward. The consensus was to forego publishing the press release, push out the scheduled interview date to February 28th, and post notices soliciting candidates for the position on the Town's website and in social media.

## NEW BUSINESS

a. Board of Education Funding Requests

i. ADA Platform – High School – Mr. Angersola, Facilities Director, provided information on the background for this request. He noted that the state had moved up the deadline for its requirement that the BOE complete construction of an ADA compliant viewing platform at the High School's softball field to August 2024. He advised that the BOE went out to bid twice on the project and have accepted a bid of $130k for the project.

Ms. Hughston advised that the BOE can fund the project from its reserves account and Mr. Angersola responded to several questions from the Board.

**Motion made by Mr. Gelston to authorize the Board of Education to utilize $130,777.11 from Education Capital Reserves account 33250-46101-25790 into Capital account 33250013-58926 Project C0256, for the purpose of installing an ADA compliant viewing platform at the Nathan Hale – Ray High School. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

ii. Generator – Middle School – Mr. Angersola provided background information on this request. He advised that the liquid ejector pump at the Middle School is not connected to the main generator. He stated that the most cost-effective solution is to install a separate 14kw propane generator. Ms. Hughston advised that the BOE can also fund this project from its reserves account. Mr. Angersola responded to questions from the Board.

**Motion made by Mr. Gelston to authorize the Board of Education to utilize up to $25k from the Education Capital Reserves account 33250-46101-25790 into Capital account 33250013-58926 Project C0296, for the purpose of adding the Middle School septic system to a back-up generator. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

iii. Air Conditioning Units – Middle and High School – Discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

b. Grant Authorization – AFG FY23 Request for PPE – Finance Director Belles advised that she has been working with Mr. Dorfman on a FEMA grant application to assist with the cost of purchasing PPE (i.e. turnout gear) for the firefighters. She stated that the grant request is for $160k and requires a 5% ($8,200.00) Town match which can be taken from the Fire Department's operating budget. She noted that the application deadline is March 8, 2024.

Ms. Belles responded to several questions from the Board. Mr. Kolasinski recommended the Fire Department get a minimum of three quotes for the PPE and also develop a solid replacement plan for current and future turn-out gear.

**Motion made by Mr. Thomas to authorize the Fire Department to apply for the Assistance to Firefighters Mico Grant in the amount of $160,000.00, with a 5% Town match of $8,200.00, for the purpose of acquiring personal protective gear. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

c. Electricity Contract – Ms. Haines provided the background on this request. She advised that the proposed contract offers a better rate than the previous one-year contract for the Town's electricity usage. She stated she would like to lock in the new rate for three-years. Ms. Haines responded to several questions from the Board.

**Motion made by Mr. Gelston to approve a three-year contract with First Point for an approximate rate of $0.1083 per kw hour for a three-year period from January 2025 through January 2028 and request the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

d. Discuss 24-25 Budget Development Calendar Dates – Finance Director Belles called the Board's attention to a document in their meeting packets that outlined potential dates for the BOF's FY2024-2025 budget workshops. Ms. Belles noted that the proposed dates were developed based on historical information and room availability. There was a general discussion regarding the proposed dates and Ms. Belles responded to several questions from the Board.

Ms. Belles stated that the Boards of Selectmen and Finance will be prepared to present their proposed budgets to the BOF on March 11th and the following tentative BOF schedule was agreed upon:

- March 11th – 4:30 pm to 7:00 pm Budget Workshop with BOS and BOE
- March 11th – 7:00 pm BOF regular meeting
- March 16th – 9:00 am to 4:00 pm BOF Budget Workshop
- March 20th – 4:30 pm to 7:00 pm BOF Budget Workshop
- March 23rd – 9:00 am to 4:00 pm BOF Budget Workshop
- March 27th – If necessary - BOF Budget Workshop

## GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

There were no guests/audience comments discussed at the meeting.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to adjourn the meeting at 9:23 p.m. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Todd Gelston
Secretary