Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 21, 2024
Special Meeting Minutes
.

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; T. Bourgoin; E. Dill
Also Present: D. Angersola; B. Auld; V. Belles; J. Bielot; C. Brownell; M. Callahan; J. Cotter; D. Dill; R. Dill; M. Hansen; K. Klinck; C. Leidemer; A. Lord; I. Luciano; T. McCabe; M. McKim; E. Morgen; B. Parker; L Prichard; T. Reynolds; A. Shaltiel; J. Sina; R. Swol; W. Thody, M. Velez; J. Ventres; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines apologized for the delay in starting the meeting and noted that they had been experiencing technical problems. She called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 10:20 a.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. 2024-2025 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. Public Works

      1. General Highways – Public Works Director Velez advised that there was a 3.9% increase in the General Highways FY2024-2025 budget. She reported that the Project Grant Manager position had been eliminated and one of the uniform cleaning services contracts had terminated. She also stated that the 56% increase in the Uniform budget line was due to negotiations with the union to provide a boot allowance for union members. Director Velez reviewed other highlights of the budget and responded to questions from the Board.

      2. Snow Removal – Director Velez advised that there was an overall 2% decrease in this budget.

      3. Transfer Station – Director Velez stated that there was an overall 14.1% increase in the Transfer Station budget primarily due to the increase in the Uniforms budget line, for the anticipated boot allowance, and the Refuse Removal line item. There was a general discussion about how to control the Refuse Removal expense. Ms. Velez responded to several questions from the Board.

      4. Tree Care Removal – Director Velez stated that she is requesting a 42.9% increase in the Tree Care Removal budget. There was a general discussion about alternative options to remove the large number of diseased/dead trees in Town. She and the Board discussed alternative options to address the problem and Ms. Velez encouraged the Board to consider the rental of a Sennebogen system for tree removal. She acknowledged that it is expensive but stated that it would be much more efficient and cheaper in the long-run.

      5. Public Works/Transfer Station Capital – Director Velez reviewed the following Public Works Capital requests for FY2024-2025:

         - $80k for a Road Management Plan Consultant – Ms. Velez advised that the Town's roads management plan has not been updated since 2011. She stated that in order to be eligible for the state's Transportation Rural Improvement Program (TRIP) grants, an

updated plan would be required. Ms. Haines suggested using ARPA funds for this capital request.

- Funding for the AP Gates Road culvert replacement - Ms. Velez stated that the project qualifies for state and local bridge grant reimbursement programs. There was a general discussion about the prioritization of culvert replacement projects.

- $50k for gutter and front siding replacement for the Public Works garage - In response to a question raised by Ms. Haines, Mr. Angersola confirmed that the proposed repairs would be a worthwhile investment and also noted that a leak was recently discovered in the garage's roof.

- $100k for a temporary bridge replacement at Sheepskin Hollow South - Ms. Velez stated that they have reported this project to FEMA for a potential grant related to the January 4th weather event; however, she has not yet received their reply. She responded to questions from the Board.

- $5k for a Rammer Tamper Jumping Jack – Ms. Zemienieski noted that the cutoff for capital projects is $10k and Ms. Velez agreed to move this item to the Public Works Operating Budget.

- $12k for a Wain Roy Swinger Bucket – Ms. Velez advised that she is looking into purchasing a used swinger bucket for $9k; however, Mr. Dill cautioned her against purchasing a used item for this piece of equipment.

- $168k for Road Improvement Materials and $128k for Pavement Shim Overlay - The Board suggested combining these two capital requests. Ms. Velez advised that both requests would be eligible for the state's TRIP grant program if the Road Management Plan is updated.

- $550k for Annual Road Reclamation and Repaving - There was a general discussion regarding alternative approaches for these projects.

- $3,500 for Wi-Fi for the Transfer Station – Ms. Velez confirmed that she would move this item to the Public Works Operating Budget.

- $20k for an engineered design for the Transfer Station office/break room and hopper shed - There was a general discussion about the need for an engineered design for this project to determine the optimal approach.

B. Police Department Operating/Capital

Ms. Haines advised that Resident State Trooper Megan Jenney was not able to attend the meeting at this time. Ms. Haines provided a brief overview of the Police Department's proposed FY2024-2025 budget and noted that the 26.4% increase was driven by a negotiated increase in union wages. She responded to questions from the Board and confirmed that there is a vacancy of 1.5 police FTEs.

The Board reviewed the Police Department's FY2024-2025 Capital requests and Ms. Belles confirmed she would move the $6,500.00 request for replacement bullet proof vests to the

Department's Operating Budget since it falls below the Capital budget threshold of $10k. There was a general discussion regarding the police cruisers and whether or not the Town needs to purchase a new one for FY2024-2025.

Ms. Belles stated she would verify what the difference is between the Department's Capital requests for bullet proof vests and body armor.

C. Recreation Commission

Discussion of this budget was postponed.

D. Town Clerk

Town Clerk Klinck reviewed the Department's proposed FY2024-2025 Operating Budget and noted that there was an overall increase of .5%. There was a general discussion about potential legislation moving legal notices to the Town's website instead of newspapers and charging non-residents for notary services.

E. Assessor

Ms. Luciano reviewed the proposed FY2024-2025 Assessor's Operating Budget. She discussed the significant increase in Purchased Professional Services as a primary driver of the budget's 26.5% increase. Ms. Luciano responded to questions from the Board and Finance Director Belles confirmed that she would clarify whether the Assessor's technology expense is covered by the Town's Shared Services - Technology budget.

F. Collector of Revenue

Tax Collector Dill reviewed her department's proposed FY2024-2025 Operating Budget and noted that the 4.2% increase is primarily due to a 2.5% increase in salaries and an increase in the cost of printing/mailing tax bills.

Ms. Belles reiterated that she would clarify if the Collector of Revenue's technology expense is covered by the Town's Shared Services - Technology budget and there was a general discussion about how to be transparent and best represent the actual cost of the Town's departmental operations.

G. Election/Registrars

Registrar Hansen advised that the 44.8% increase in the Department's proposed FY2024-2025 Operating Budget was driven by an anticipated increase (43.5%) in the Salaries & Wages line due to early voting requirements. She noted that the state had provided funding to help offset the expense of early voting and there was a general discussion about the fact that the state's grant of $10.5k would be insufficient to cover the projected cost of early voting.

Ms. Hansen advised that the state has confirmed that it will be paying for new voting machines for its municipalities and, consequently, that item can removed from the Town's Capital budget. She responded to questions from the Board.

H. Building Department

Building Official Thody confirmed that the only increase in the Building Department's proposed FY2024-2025 budget was a 2.5% increase in Wages & Salaries. He responded to questions from the Board and there was a general discussion regarding the Department's projected FY2024-2025 revenue.

The Board agreed to take a short recess at 1:30 p.m. Ms. Haines reconvened the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

I. Youth & Family Services/Food Bank

Director McCabe stated that the overall projected FY2024-2025 budget for Youth & Family Services (Y&FS) was increased 2.6%. She provided highlights of the budget and noted that Salaries & Wages and FICA have decreased primarily because the agency is no longer providing counseling services in the school system. She stated that Y&FS is requesting the Town provide $1,000.00/mo. in rental assistance for its new office space. Ms. McCabe responded to questions from the Board.

Ms. Haines provided an overview of the new case manager position, which Ms. McCabe described as an assistance coordinator position. She stated that the goal is to close the needs gap for individuals/families within our community

J. East Haddam Public Library System

Ms. Haines introduced Laurie Prichard - Interim Library Director, John Bielot – Library Trustee, and Evelyn Morgen – the new Library Director.

Ms. Prichard stated that the overall increase to the proposed FY2024-2025 Public Library System budget is 5.5% which is mainly driven by staffing needs and salary increases. She provided the following details regarding the requested salary increases: the 16.7% increase to the Moodus Branch Manager's salary is a result of increased hours, the 109% increase proposed for the library technicians is driven by a desire to improve pay equity with surrounding towns, in particular for one of the techs who is a Hale-Ray alumna and the only tech with a Master's degree in Library Sciences.

There was a general discussion regarding the Library System's participation in the LION Consortium. Ms. Prichard stated that all of the three available consortiums are very good but the LION Consortium provides "white glove service". Ms. Haines stated that there is a potential to save money by switching to one of the other consortiums but LION requires a 12 month contract termination notice.

The Board and Mr. Bielot discussed the libraries' cell and phone service expense. Ms. Prichard noted that there were no new Capital requests.

K. Regional Animal Control

Ms. Haines explained that the Regional Animal Control Department had been operating with a significant surplus and, consequently, there was no need to fully fund the budget last year. As a result, the 400% increase proposed for FY2024-2025 represents a return to the normal budget funding.

Ms. Belles estimated that approximately $50k had been spent on upgrades to the dog pound last year as a consequence of unfunded state mandates and a failing well. There was a general discussion about asking East Hampton to share in the cost of the facility upgrades.

Ms. McKim responded to questions from the Board and confirmed staffing levels for Ms. Bourgoin. It was noted that the body cameras had been received and Ms. Belles stated she would remove them from the FY2024-2025 budget. Ms. McKim requested badges be procured for the Animal Control staff.

L. Senior Services

Senior Center Director Parker advised that, other than a 2.5% increase in Salaries & Wages, the proposed Senior Services FY2024-2025 budget had only increased by $800.00. Mr. Parker and the Board discussed the $13k Capital request for A/C replacements. Ms. Zemienieski confirmed that the $20,100.00 ARPA grant application for this Capital project had been approved and needs to go to Town Meeting for acceptance.

The Board recessed for a dinner break at 3:50 p.m. Ms. Haines reconvened the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

M. Fire Department Operating/Capital

Fire Chief Auld introduced Deputy Chief Swol, Captain Leidemer, and Chairman of the Board of Fire Commissioners Reynolds. Chief Auld reviewed the Department's accomplishments, staffing, and goals. He advised that they would like to hire one new full-time firefighter which would reduce their dependance on the per diem staff.

Chief Auld stated that the Department is requesting a total increase in the proposed FY2024-2025 budget of 7.3%. He reviewed several line-item increases, including Supplies (166.7% / $5k), Uniforms (25% / $3k), Other Supplies (40% / $2k), and Equipment (10% / $5k).

Deputy Chief Swol reviewed the Fire Department's Capital requests for FY2024-2025. He stated that, in addition to the annual replacement of fire hoses and air packs, in FY2024-2025 the Department would like to purchase an engine/rescue combination vehicle to replace Engine 215 and Rescue Vehicle 115. He stated that the estimated cost for a squad is $1.565M.

The Board asked for details regarding a number of the Operating Budget line increases. Ms. Haines questioned why the Department is asking for a $16k (80%) increase in its FY2023-2024 budget for In Service Training when, to date, it had only spent $2,900.00 of its FY2023-2024 budget. There was a general discussion regarding the requested increase to the Uniforms budget and Mr. Dill encouraged the Fire officials to reduce this line item; Ms. Haines noted that the Department proposed a 25% increase for Class A uniforms but only a 10% increase in the budget for turn-out gear.

In response to questions from Ms. Haines, Deputy Chief Swol provided additional information about the purpose of the engine/rescue combination vehicle vehicle and confirmed that Captain Mosig is working on getting quotes for a brush truck with a 550 chassis.

N. Land Use Office Operating/Capital

Land Use Administrator Ventres reviewed the proposed FY2024-2025 Land Use Operating budget. He advised that he is requesting an overall increase of $29,752.00 (16.1%) in the budget

and stated that the increase is primarily driven by a $2,500.00 (27.5%) increase in Purchased Professional Services line and a $25k (100%) increase in the Special Projects line. In response to a question from the Board, he advised that the Special Projects budget funds WPCA equipment repairs.

Mr. Ventres reviewed the Department's Capital budget and advised that the Town had issued a RFQ/RFP to create a master plan for Moodus Center. He stated that one quote, for $55k-$75k, was submitted which was within budget. He advised that he has requested $30k be reserved in the Capital budget for the next three years to fund Phase II of the project which is the engineering design work. He noted that he expects there will be grants available for Phase III – construction, if the project is shovel-ready.

Chairman Brownell stated that the Planning & Zoning Commission supports the Moodus Center project.

The Board discussed the FY2024-2025 Historic District, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Open Space Operating Budgets with Mr. Ventres who recommended keeping them flat. There was a brief discussion about increasing the Other Professional Services line in the Open Space budget by $3k; however, no changes were made at this time.

O. Redevelopment Agency

Chairman Lord discussed the Redevelopment Agency's Operating and Capital budgets with the Board. Finance Director Belles confirmed that the FY2024-2025 Capital budget includes $50k for grant writing services and $25k for an environmental study for the Redevelopment Agency.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to move agenda items 3 thru 9B up for discussion at this time in the meeting. Unanimous aye.

3. Approval of Minutes: Regular Meeting of February 7, 2024

Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to a copy of the minutes for their February 7th meeting in their packets.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of February 7, 2024 as written. Unanimous aye.

4. Correspondence: There was no correspondence for discussion at the meeting.

5. First Selectmen's Report: There was no First Selectmen's report presented at the meeting.

6. Unfinished Business: There was no unfinished business discussed at the meeting.

7. New Business

A. RFP/RFQ Moodus Master Plan Discussion: Ms. Haines advised that the Town posted the RFQ/RFP for general circulation and individually sent out nine RFQs to various firms. One response was received. She noted that the quote came in with a range of $55k-$75k. She advised that the Town has earmarked $55k in ARPA funds and $20K in capital funds for this project and she asked Ms. Zemienieski to schedule a shortlist interview with the responding firm.

B. Tax Refunds: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to one tax refund.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to award a tax refund in the amount presented.

- $248.05 to CCAP Auto Leasing LTD.

Unanimous aye.

8. Public Comment: There were no public comments or questions raised at the meeting.

9. Selectmen's Discussion

   A. Liaison Reports: Ms. Bourgoin reported that the Sustainability Team had met on February 19th. She stated the Team's main priority at this time is to set-up web and social media presence to kick-off an energy audit campaign funded by an Energize CT grant. There was a general discussion about the energy audit project.

   Ms. Bourgoin and the Board also discussed the Town's composting program and the Blue Earth contract. Ms. Zemienieski stated that the Blue Earth contract is past its termination date and a new contract will have to be submitted to the Town.

   Mr. Dill reported that he had attended the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses meeting on February 19th and spoke with Public Works Director Velez concerning storm damaged roads in Town.

   B. Other: There was no other Selectmen's discussion and the Board resumed budget reviews.

2. 2024-2025 General Budget Review Workshop

   P. Conservation Commission

   Chairman Sina advised the Board that he had not made any changes to the FY2024-2025 Conservation Committee budget from what was approved in FY2023-2024. There was a general discussion regarding scheduling more community events in FY2024-2025 and how to encourage the public to take advantage of the trails in Town.

   Q. Economic Development Commission

   EDC Chairman Casner and Economic Development Administrator Pszczolkowski were not in attendance at the meeting. The Board reviewed the proposed FY2024-2025 Economic Development Commission budget and, based on historical expenditures, agreed to reduce the Communications budget line to $500.00.

10. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary