Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 24, 2024
Special Meeting Minutes
.

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; T. Bourgoin; E. Dill
Also Present: D. Angersola; V. Belles; E. Blaschik; M. Callahan; T. Dumaine; J. Flynn; C. Mansfield; B. O'Mara; R. Shea; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Long Range Capital Improvements Committee Appointments: Ms. Haines read the charge of the committee prior to the Selectmen appointing members.

   RESOLVED: That a Long Range Capital Improvement Committee (formerly Financial Needs Roundtable Committee) of seven (7) members be appointed for the purpose of identifying, researching, analyzing and evaluating the Town's long and short-term capital needs. Capital by definition includes major maintenance, repairs and replacements, as well as refurbishments of major equipment, acquisitions and improvements of buildings, land, roads and equipment. The Committee shall carry out its duties in accordance with the Board of Finance Capital Improvement Program Policy.

   The Committee shall be composed of the First Selectman; the Chairman of the Board of Finance (or designee) and one other member of the Board of Finance not of the same political party; the Chairman of the Board of Education (or designee) and two other members of the Board of Education from a different political party and the Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission (or designee). This shall be a standing committee, and members shall be appointed by the Board of Selectmen every two years coinciding with the Municipal election cycle. Members shall serve with no compensation. The First Selectman (or designee) shall Chair the Committee. The Committee shall meet quarterly or as needed and their meetings shall be open to the public.

   The Committee shall invite advisory participants to their meetings as needed to include the Land Use Administrator, Director of Operations, Finance Director, Public Works Director, Economic Development Administrator, the Superintendent of Schools and any others as needed.

   Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to appoint Irene Haines, Joseph Corbett, Harvey Thomas, Patricia Stricker, Jacqui Endorf, Keira Thompson and Crary Brownell to the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee with terms to expire with the 2025 municipal election. Unanimous aye.

3. 2024-2025 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. <u>Emergency Management Operating/Capital</u>

      Director Mansfield provided background on the origins and role of the Emergency Management Department. He reviewed the operating budget and noted a $4,539.00 (3.9%) increase in the

Valley Shore contract but a slight overall decrease in the proposed FY2024-2025 Operating budget of $461.00 (-0.2%).

Mr. Mansfield reviewed the Department's Capital budget and stated that the Town could defer the scheduled $10k contribution for Replacement of Radios Equipment (Mobiles and Portables) this year. He responded to several questions from the Board.

B. Town Office Building

Ms. Haines advised that the budget for the old Town Office Building at 7 Main Street had been cut to "bare bones" during previous fiscal cycles and noted that the proposed FY2024-2025 had remained flat. There was a general discussion regarding closing the parking lot at 7 Main Street; however, it was decided not to pursue the suggestion.

C. Town Meeting Hall

Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted there was a small ($30) increase in the proposed FY2024-2025 budget. There was a brief discussion regarding ARPA funds that had been set aside for new windows for the building and it was noted that $45k of the allocation had been used to repair the Fire House roof.

D. River House/Annex

Ms. Haines reiterated that the River House/Annex budget had been significantly reduced during previous budget cycles and the proposed FY2024-2025 Operating budget remained flat.

E. Grange Hall

Ms. Haines advised that the FY2024-2025 budget is down $3,520 (-21.1%) due to reductions in Building Maintenance and Electricity. Ms. Zemienieski advised that the reduction in the Electricity line is a result of having paid off the energy efficiency loan.

Mr. Angersola advised that they have started replacing windows at the Grange Hall. Ms. Belles noted that the Town had earmarked ARPA funds for this project and those funds will have to be allocated by December 31, 2024 and there was a general discussion about ensuring that that happens.

F. Millington School House

Mr. Angersola advised that the necessary upgrades to the Millington School House had been completed and, consequently, the Building Maintenance line for the FY2024-2025 budget had been reduced; overall the budget was decreased $1,500.00 (-55.1%).

G. Municipal Office Complex/Central Services

Ms. Haines stated that the proposed Municipal Office Complex/Central Services FY2024/2025 Operating budget had been increased by $619.00 (0.2%). Ms. Zemienieski provided additional detail about this budget.

Ms. Haines reviewed the three projects in the FY2024-2025 Capital budget: $15k for phone system upgrades, $80k for video conferencing system/speakers in the gymnasium, and $15k for future replacements and upgrades to the video conferencing systems. Ms. Zemienieski noted that the video conferencing system and speakers for the gym could be pushed off this year. There was a general discussion about new technology available.

H. Regional Probate Court

Ms. Haines noted that the FY2024-2025 Regional Probate Court Operating budget had increased $5,459.00 (37.5%) over last year's budget. She noted that the total expense for operating the Probate court is shared by several towns in the region and is based on each town's Grand List.

I. Selectmen

Ms. Haines stated that the proposed FY2024-2025 Selectmen's Operating budget showed an increase of $4,420.00 (2.4%) driven by the annual Salaries & Wages increase. There were no other changes in this budget

Ms. Haines complimented the work ethic of Town employees and stated she wished she could compensate them appropriately. She noted that the less than competitive salaries the Town pays makes it hard to recruit and keep staff. There was a brief discussion regarding the cost of employee turnover.

J. Legal Services

Ms. Haines stated that there will be several union negotiations this fiscal year and stated that the proposed FY2024-2025 Legal Services Operating budget showed an increase of $1,500.00 (1.9%) due to the fact that the Planning & Zoning Commission is encouraging the Land Use Department to more actively enforce the regulations on blighted properties.

K. Insurance (Risk Management)

Ms. Haines stated that the FY2024-2025 Insurance budget reflects a $4k (1.6%) increase due to anticipated higher liability coverage premiums. There was a general discussion regarding the Town's insurance coverages.

L. Fire Marshal

Mr. Angersola stated that the proposed FY2024-2025 Fire Marshal Operating budget reflected a $2,033.00 (8.1%) increase due to increases in the Salaries & Wages (2.5%), Gasoline (900%), and Books & Periodicals (7.7%) line items. He responded to questions from the Board and advised that he had included the gasoline expense for his dual roles (Fire Marshal and Facilities Maintenance Director) in the Fire Marshal's Operating budget.

M. Paramedic Services

Ms. Haines stated that the Paramedic Services budget was flat for FY2024-2025. She advised that the Town contracts with Middlesex Hospital for its paramedic services and is based on a $1/per capita fee which Middlesex has not increased for several years.

N. Resident State Trooper

Ms. Haines stated that the FY2024-2025 Resident State Trooper budget reflects a decrease of $35k (-20.6%) because the Town's new State Trooper is at a lower pay grade than the previous Resident State Trooper.

O. Cemeteries

Facilities Director Angersola advised that the Town had received a grant for the cemeteries this year and, consequently, he had reduced the FY2024-2025 budget by $5k (-48.5%).

P. Chatham Health District

Ms. Haines advised that Chatham Health is a contractual service and the annual fee for FY2024-2025 had gone up slightly by $628.00 (0.5%). In response to a question raised by Mr. Dill, Ms. Zemienieski advised that, by arrangement, the towns serviced by the Chatham Health District provide the staff with office space at no charge.

Q. Human Services

Ms. Haines stated that the proposed FY2024-2025 Human Services budget was flat.

R. Town Greens, Grounds and Fields

Facilities Director Angersola stated that the proposed FY2024-2025 Town Greens, Grounds and Fields Operating budget reflects an increase of $21,063.00 (17%). He advised that part of the increase is due to his request to increase the part-time grounds keeper's hours from 30 hours per week to 40 hours; additionally, the Department has consistently gone over budget in the Repairs & Maintenance line and, therefore, he had included an increase of $1,500.00 (21.4%) in that line item. He responded to questions from the Board and confirmed that there is sufficient work, year round, to justify the additional hours for the assistant grounds keeper.

Mr. Angersola reviewed the Department's three Capital requests for FY2024-2025: $63k for a cab utility tractor, $18k for a zero-turn riding mower, and $20k for an additional installment for a Ventrac tractor. He noted that there is $14k in reserves for the Ventrac tractor that could be used for the utility tractor. There was a general discussion regarding lease options for the utility tractor and riding mower and Mr. Angersola agreed to do additional research on leasing that equipment.

S. Debt Service

Finance Director Belles reviewed the FY2024-2025 Debt Service budget and noted that it is down $185,775.00 (-6.6%) but it only represents currently bonded projects and does not include the newly authorized Capital projects. She stated the new projects will show up in the Interfund

Transfers budget. Ms. Belles also emphasized that the Town's audit would have to be completed before it goes to bond for the newly authorized capital projects.

Ms. Haines noted that the BOS has not been successful in its efforts to encourage taxpayers to attend the budget workshops and suggested disseminating information to the public on the many adjustments that were made to the FY2024-2025 budget before it goes to referendum. She hoped that such communications could help prevent a repeat of the negative pushback that has happened in the past when the proposed budget is released.

Mr. Michael Callahan noted the impact of the revaluation on last year's budget process. He further commented on the fact that the state is contributing less to rural communities than it has in the past and there was a general discussion about the number of unfunded state mandates imposed on municipalities.

There was a general discussion regarding possible options for increasing revenue and renegotiating some of the Town's PILOT agreements.

There was a brief discussion about coaching the Fire Department on how to manage their budget through more effective management of their volunteer recruitment efforts.

T. Board of Assessment Appeals

Mr. Blaschik advised that the Board of Assessment Appeals proposed FY2024-2025 Operating budget was flat. He responded to several questions from the Board.

The Board recessed for lunch at 11:47 a.m. Ms. Haines reconvened the meeting at 1:15 p.m.

U. Lakes Association

Brittany O'Mara stated she represented Moodus Reservoir and Mr. Flynn represented Lake Hayward; however, the representative from Bashan Lake was unable to attend the meeting. Ms. O'Mara stated that the proposed FY2024-2025 Lakes Association Operating budget was down $6,796.00 (-16.7%) from last year. In response to a question from Ms. Haines, she provided additional information about the $5,000.00 (-43.5%) reduction in the Moodus Reservoir budget line.

There was a general discussion regarding Capital budget for the Lake Hayward Dam Repair project. Ms. Haines recommended Mr. Flynn and the Lake Hayward Board speak to Representative Courtney regarding potential federal grants for dam repair projects.

Ms. Toni Dumaine, from the Moodus Lake Shore Property Owners' Association, asked whether the Town could offer any financial support for that community's infrastructure, specifically road drainage improvements. Ms. Haines stated that she had discussed the Lake Shore Association's concerns with the Town's Public Works Director. She explained the limitations on the Town's responsibility to provide support to private communities.

V. Other Operating/Capital Budget Discussion

The Board revisited the Libraries' proposed FY2024-2025 Operating budget. They discussed staffing requests and Salaries & Wages increases and the impact of them on the Town's Fringe Benefits expense. There was a general discussion regarding whether or not the Town's budget for its libraries is in line with that of comparable municipalities. Ms. Haines stated she would

meet with Interim Library Director Prichard and the new Director – Ms. Morgen, to discuss their staffing and salary increase requests.

Finance Director Belles stated that she had confirmed that the Technology Budget carries the expense for the Assessor's software and, consequently, she expects to eliminate the $23k increase to the Assessor's Other Professional Services budget line.

Ms. Haines stated that she would speak with the Police Department to determine whether the Capital requests for an Interceptor and Police Cruiser 60 were one and the same. She will also ask them to clarify the difference between the Capital request for bullet proof vests and body armor.

Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the agendas for the upcoming BOS Budget Workshops and confirmed she would reschedule Director Conroy's presentation of the Parks and Recreation FY2024-2025 Operating and Capital budgets.

4. Public Comment: There were no additional public comments discussed at the meeting.

5. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to adjourn the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary