TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2024
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

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

Others: Don Angersola, Facilities Director
Valerie Belles, Finance Director
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
L. Zemienieski, Executive Manager
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Corbett called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

2024-2025 BUDGET

a. Selectmen/Capital – First Selectwoman Haines provided an overview of this budget and Finance Director Belles explained the difference between category headings on the Operating budget and sub-lines. Ms. Belles agreed to add explanatory comments regarding the distinction in the ClearGov introductory notes.

   In response to an inquiry from Ms. Whatley, Ms. Haines described the policy for the Ambulance Association's reimbursement to the Town for firefighters going out on EMS calls. Ms. Haines and Ms. Belles responded to several questions regarding revenue. Mr. Gelston suggested including more detail about the Goodspeed Theatre's contributions to the Town, beyond their PILOT payment, in the narrative portion of ClearGov.

   The Board agreed to table discussions regarding FY2025 capital requests until after they had completed their review of the Operating budgets.

b. Board of Finance – Ms. Belles provided an overview of this budget and there was a general discussion about the police accreditation program and staffing levels. The Board agreed to add $100k to the FY2025 Contingency line in the BOF's FY2025 Operating budget for emergency

medical services, with the understanding that it could be eliminated before the budget is finalized.

c. Finance Office – Ms. Belles stated that, other than the standard 2.5% increase in the Salaries & Wages line, the primary increase to this budget is for Supplies ($500) to comply with new IRS requirements. She responded to several questions from the Board.

d. Assessor/Capital – Ms. Haines provided an overview of this budget. She noted that the increase in Purchased Professional Services ($754) is in support of the Assessor's request to conduct a personal property audit of Town businesses. She responded to questions from the Board. Ms. Belles responded to questions regarding the Veteran's Exemptions line in the Assessor's FY2025 Revenue budget.

e. Board of Assessment Appeals – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024.

f. Collector of Revenue – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted that the primary increase is under the Other Purchased Services line ($1346) due to an increase in the billing company's fee.

g. Legal Services – Ms. Haines provided an overview of this budget and advised that four collective bargaining contracts will be negotiated in FY2025. In response to a question from a Board member, Ms. Zemienieski clarified the difference between general counsel and legal counsel. Ms. Belles agreed to provide additional descriptive clarification in the "Legal Services" categories.

h. Town Clerk – Ms. Belles reviewed this budget. She noted that the primary increase was in the Salaries & Wages line and the Purchased Other Services (Telephone/Cell Phone ($510) and Advertising ($350) categories.

i. Zoning Board of Appeals – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. Ms. Zemienieski stated the Legal Service expense ($1k) will be moved to the Legal Services budget.

j. Town Office Building – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted it was flat from FY2024. There was a brief discussion regarding the title of the budget and Ms. Zemienieski suggested renaming it "Former Town Office Building". In response to a concern raised by Ms. Goff, Facilities Director Angersola confirmed that the building is checked twice monthly and there has been no adverse effect from not heating it.

k. Elections/Registrar of Voters – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that although the state has provided funding for early voting, it was not adequate to cover the Town's anticipated expense to comply with early voting requirements in FY2025. Consequently, there was a significant increase is the Salaries & Wages budget line ($21,084) for FY2025. Ms. Haines confirmed that the state will pay for new voting machines; however, the Town must absorb the cost of setting them up. Ms. Goff notes several typographical errors in the narrative for this budget.

l. Insurance (Risk Management) – Ms. Zemienieski reviewed this budget and responded to questions from the Board.

m. Regional Probate Court – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that it was a pass-through expense. She advised that the Town's contribution to the Probate Court is based on the value of the Grand List.

n. Land Use/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. There was a brief discussion regarding the $25k increase in the Special Programs budget line. Ms. Haines explained that the public sewer in the Village district is an aging system and has been in need of regular repairs. She noted that the WPCA has requested $50k for its upkeep for the past several years and it has regularly been cut back to $25k. There was a general discussion regarding the need for the increase in this budget line.

o. Historic District Commission - Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024. The Board provided several editorial comments to the narrative for this budget.

p. Conservation Commission - Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024.

q. Town Meeting Hall – Facilities Director Angersola reviewed this budget and noted a slight increase ($30) in the building maintenance contract.

r. Shared Services – Ms. Haines provided an overview of Shared Services. She reviewed the department's FY2025 budget and responded to questions from the Board. She confirmed that the HR position had been eliminated and that some HR issues are being referred to legal counsel. Mr. Gelston expressed his disappointment that the HR position was eliminated and stated he feels it would be more cost effective to have a professional HR person on staff rather than referring issues to legal counsel.

s. River House/Annex - Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024.

t. Municipal Office Complex/Central Services – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. There was a general discussion regarding moving the cleaning services in-house. Mr. Angersola confirmed that the decision has been a cost-savings one for the Town budget.

u. Millington School House - Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024.

v. Open Space Committee - Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024.

w. Grange Hall – Mr. Angersola reviewed this budget. He responded to questions from the Board and confirmed that deposits from rentals of the Grange Hall offset the cleaning expense for this facility.

x. Agriculture Commission - Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted the FY2025 Operating budget is flat from FY2024.

y. Economic Development Commission – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and stated that the Economic Development Coordinator organizes numerous events in Town. There was a brief discussion regarding the Airport Festival and Ms. Haines advised that, due to the Swingbridge repairs, the festival would not be held this year.

z. Redevelopment Agency/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and responded to questions from the Board. Ms. Haines and Mr. Thomas provided a high-level overview of tax-incentive financing. There was a brief discussion regarding this Agency's anticipated legal expenses.

aa. Police Officers/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted that the 30% increase in Salaries & Wages ($112,005) would be partially offset by the Resident State Trooper Wages & Salaries because the new Trooper is at a lower pay grade that the Town's previous Resident State Trooper. She responded to questions from the Board and there was a general discussion regarding the Water Safety budget line.

bb. Resident Trooper – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that it is a pass-through expense.

cc. Fire Department – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and responded to questions from the Board.

dd. Emergency Management/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and responded to questions from the Board.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to recess for lunch. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion passed.

The meeting recessed at 12:10 p.m. and reconvened at 12:50 p.m.

ee. Paramedic Services – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that it is a negotiated contracted and the fee is calculated on a per capita basis.

ff. Building Department – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted that the only increase in the Building Department's FY2025 Operating budget in 2.5% in Salaries & Wages. She also stated that FY2025 Revenue has been increased to more closely reflect the anticipated actual revenue.

gg. Regional Animal Control – Ms. Haines provided an overview on upgrades that were done to the dog pound as a result of state requirements. She explained the cost sharing agreement the Town has with East Hampton and stated she would like to increase the Town's contribution $7k to match East Hampton's. There was a general discussion regarding the proposed increase. In response to an inquiry from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles provided clarification for the department's Revenue budget.

hh. Fire Marshal – Fire Marshal Angersola reviewed this budget and noted that the only increases were to Salaries & Wages and Books & Periodicals, which is for Code books.

ii. Youth and Family Services – Ms. Haines stated that Youth and Family Services' FY2025 requested Town contribution includes funds to offset their rental expense. She provided the background on this request and stated she is not in favor of approving it. There was a general discussion about the agency's request and the Board agreed to ask for additional clarification regarding the rental expense from Director McCabe.

jj. Youth and Family Early Childhood Council – Ms. Zemienieski provided a brief explanation regarding this program and stated the Board of Education could provide more information. The Board agreed to table their consideration of this budget until their discussions with the BOE.

kk. Chatham Health District – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that the fee is calculated based on a per-capita basis.

ll. Senior Services/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted that the department offsets its budgets with numerous donations from the public. She responded to questions from the Board and stated she will follow-up with Director Parker concerning the $1,700.00 (30.9%) increase in the Electricity expense.

mm. Human Service – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. Ms. Zemienieski responded to questions from the Board.

nn. Cemeteries/Capital – Mr. Angersola reviewed this budget; he noted there is an overall $3k (-29.1%) decrease in the FY2025 Operating budget.

oo. East Haddam Public Library/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and provided an overview of several increases in staff salaries. She noted that the Library Director is considering replacing the LION Consortium for a less expensive contract in FY2026. She further advised that, due to the potential that a new library is being considered, the $85k Capital project to replace the windows in the Rathbun Library has been tabled. Ms. Haines responded to questions from the Board and there was a general discussion regarding staffing.

pp. Recreation Commission/Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She noted that the 7.4% increase in Salaries & Wages is primarily due to increases in the hourly rate for lifeguards and seasonal staff and an increase in the Assistant Director's salary to keep pace with the increase to the state's minimum wage requirements. In response to an inquiry, Ms. Belles provided clarification about the department's Special Revenue fund.

qq. Town Greens, Grounds and Fields/Capital – Mr. Angersola reviewed this budget. He stated that the over increase of $25,163.00 (20.3%) in the FY2025 Operating budget is due to a request to increase the part-time grounds maintainer to a full-time position. In response to a question from the Board, he advised that the grounds maintenance team has taken over many of the projects that had, in the past, been contracted out. Ms. Zemienieski added that the increase ($4.1k) in the Other Supplies line is due to a plan to lease, rather than purchase, a new riding mower; she confirmed that the mower has been taken off the Capital requests list.

rr. Lakes Association – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and responded to questions from the Board. Mr. Thomas noted that the Lakes Association budget is a "matching" budget whereby the Town only adds funds to it that are being matched by the individual lake requesting a contribution.

In response to a request from Mr. Corbett, Finance Director Belles provided an overview of the upcoming BOF Budget Workshop schedule.

ss. ARPA Capital Funding and Possible Action on Projects – Ms. Belles reviewed the guidelines for using ARPA funds and noted that the cut-off date for obligating the funds is December 31, 2024. She reviewed Capital requests for a Grounds maintenance tractor, to replace a tractor that is not working, and the Transfer Station network project which will allow the staff to accept electronic payments. Ms. Haines responded to questions from the Board.

tt. Other Budget Items as Time Permits – No additional budget items were discussed at the meeting.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

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

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to adjourn the meeting at 2:34 p.m. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Todd Gelston
Secretary