TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2024
Municipal Office Building – Room 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
Dr. Teresa DeBrito, Superintendent
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
Cindy Hughson, BOE Business Manager
Patricia Stricker, BOE
Michelle Velez, Public Works Director
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Corbett called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Special Meeting – March 11, 2024 – Mr. Corbett called the Board's attention to the draft minutes of their meeting of March 11, 2024.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of March 11, 2024 as written. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion. Mr. Gelston abstained from the vote and the motion was approved by a majority of ayes. Motion carried.

b. Special Meeting – March 16, 2024 – Mr. Corbett called the Board's attention to the draft minutes of their meeting of March 16, 2024. Ms. Goff noted a correction to the list of participants.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of March 16, 2024 as amended. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

2024-2025 BUDGET

a. ARPA Capital Funding and Possible Action on Projects – Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets regarding the Board of Selectmen's motions on ARPA funded capital projects. Mr. Angersola provided information regarding the Town Meeting Hall Windows and Town Meeting Hall Exterior capital projects.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to authorize transferring $13,125.00 from ARPA project Town Meeting Hall Windows account 15010500-58926, Project C027, to fund new APRA project Town Meeting Hall Exterior account 1510500-58926, Project C0297, for the purpose of refinishing the exterior of the Town Meeting Hall building. Ms. Goff seconded the motion. Ms. Whatley abstained from the vote and it was approved by a majority of ayes. Motion carried.

Mr. Thomas made a motion to authorize transferring $9,484.00 from ARPA project Municipal Office Complex Wireless Access Point account 15010500-58926, Project C0194, to fund new APRA project Transfer Station Network Project account 1510500-58926, Project C0298, for the purpose of providing the Transfer Station with internet access. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion. Ms. Velez provided clarification regarding this capital request. **The motion was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

Mr. Angersola provided background information on his request to use ARPA funds to purchase a Grounds maintenance tractor and responded to several questions from the Board.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to authorize $63,000.00 for purchasing a new Grounds Utility Tractor from ARPA account 15010500-58926, Project C0299. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to authorize $50,000.00 for purchasing a new generator for Firehouse #1 from ARPA account 15010500-58926, Project C0300, to provide a reliable power source at Firehouse #1. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion. Mr. Angersola and Ms. Belles responded to several questions from the Board concerning this capital request. **The motion was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

b. Public Works

i. General Highways – Public Works Director Velez reviewed lines items in this budget that increased over that previous fiscal year and responded to several questions from the Board. She provided additional information on several line items that had decreased in the FY2025 Operating budget.

ii. Snow & Ice Removal – Ms. Velez reviewed this budget and discussed her recommendation for purchasing sand for the FY2025 winter season. She confirmed that any surplus in this budget at the end of FY2025 will be moved to the Tree Care and Removal budget.

Mr. Thomas recommended using a rolling 5-year average for this budget and Mr. Gelston supported the recommendation. There was a general discussion regarding the storage of sand.

iii. Tree Care and Removal – Public Works Director Velez reviewed her discussions with Eversource regarding cost-sharing for using a Sennebogen for tree removal. She responded to questions from the Board and advised that her proposal is a 2-year plan budgeted at $250k each year.

There was a general discussion about how aggressive the tree removal program will be and Mr. Thomas suggested Ms. Velez communicate her plan with the public via an article in the East Haddam News. Ms. Whatley also suggested additional information concerning the proposed tree removal program be included in the budget's narrative on ClearGov.

iv. Transfer Station – Ms. Velez reviewed this budget and responded to questions from the Board. There was a general discussion regarding the significant increase ($96,610.00) in the Refuse Removal budget line and the cost to operate the Transfer Station.

c. Public Works Capital – Ms. Velez discussed the funding challenge concerning a plan to pave 10 miles of Town road per year and stated it would take $3.8M per year to accomplish that goal. There was a general discussion regarding the Capital request to hire a Road Plan Consultant and Ms. Velez stated that an updated road plan is required to be considered for state and federal grants. Director Velez agreed to provide the Board with a 5-10 year history of road work projects undertaken by the Public Works Department.

There was a general discussion regarding the AP Gates Culvert Replacement capital project and Ms. Velez responded to questions from the Board.

Ms. Velez and the Board also discussed the deterioration of the Public Works garage and Mr. Angersola provided additional clarification and historical information.

Mr. Angersola provided information on the Transfer Station FY2025 Capital requests.

d. Board of Education Operating Budget – In response to a question from Mr. Corbett, Superintendent DeBrito provided background information on the Youth & Family Services Early Childhood Council program. Ms. Hughson provided additional information.

Ms. Hughson reviewed the cost of employee benefits and there was a general discussion regarding the projected increase in the health insurance expense. Ms. Stricker noted that, exclusive of the insurance, Special Education, and transportation expenses, the increase in the BOE's FY2025 budget over last year is closer to 2%.

In response to an inquiry from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Stricker provided an overview of the BOE's FY2025 strategic plan and goals. She stated that the BOE's goals are student focused. Superintendent DeBrito advised that she has scheduled a number of sessions

when she will be out in the community and available to the citizens for questions and conversations. She noted that she also has open office hours for the public to come into speak with her.

Ms. Hughson responded to several questions from the Board. BOF members made several recommendations about how the BOE could provide additional explanatory information to the public about its FY2025 budget in ClearGov and the East Haddam News.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

The following public comments were discussed at the meeting:

- Raymond Swol – complimented the Board on their work on the Town's budget. He spoke highly of Valley Shore Emergency Communications and cautioned that if the Town decides to go out for competitive bids for this service, to make sure that they thoroughly review any bids that come in to be sure that there are no hidden expenses that could inflate the overall cost of the service.

Ms. Belles provided an overview of the Board's next budget workshop meeting. In response to a concern raised by Mr. Gelston, she provided an explanation of accounting guidelines for ARPA funds. She called the Board's attention to a mill rate sheet in the meeting packets and discussed interfund transfers and reliance on fund balance to moderate mill rate increases. Mr. Thomas noted that a $1.5M reduction in the FY2025 Operating budget would be required for a zero mill rate increase. He stated that he does not believe that is feasible; however, suggested a $1M decrease would be a good goal.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to adjourn the meeting at 7:23 p.m. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted, t
/s/
Todd Gelston
Secretary