TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 27, 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
Michael Callahan – Citizen
Dr. Teresa DeBrito, Superintendent of Schools
James Francese - Citizen
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
Cindy Hughson, Business Manager
Patricia Stricker, BOE Chairwoman
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.

2024-2025 BUDGET

a. Capital Projects Requests – BOE and Town – Mr. Corbett recapped the BOF's discussions regarding the FY2025 budget at their last meeting. He advised that the consensus of the Board was to ask the BOE to reduce its proposed Operating Budget by 1% and use their capital reserves to fund their list of FY2025 capital projects.

Superintendent DeBrito advised that the BOE has re-prioritized its capital requests and she reviewed the updated list. Ms. Stricker provided additional information and expressed concerns about the long-term risks of not approving a number of the capital requests. Dr. DeBrito, Ms. Stricker, and Ms. Hughson responded to questions from the Board. Mr. Kolasinski suggested the BOE talk with local scout troops about taking on the High School Field House roof replacement task as an Eagle Scout project.

There was a general discussion concerning the impact of the state's unfunded mandates and Ms. Stricker reported that BOE members had raised that issue to legislators at a recent meeting of the CT Association of BOEs. She noted that she had set up meetings with several state legislators and stated she would invite Mr. Corbett and Mr. Gelston to those meetings. Ms. Whatley emphasized the need for the PTO to be informed about and involved in these discussions.

There was a general discussion about how best to address the budget issues and several potential approaches were considered. Ms. Hughson advised that $229k of the BOE's capital budget fell into the category of "health & safety" and agreed to provide reports breaking out building repairs and building maintenance with totals. Ms. Haines reviewed a list of capital projects on the Town's side that she believed should also be prioritized as "health & safety".

Mr. Corbett suggested that the Board consider bonding for some of the capital requests, including road/culvert/bridge repairs and replacements. Ms. Belles stated that the LRCIC would be an appropriate group to consider that option. She noted that she had spoken with Mr. Lindsey about that option and described the process that the Town would have to follow to approve the borrowing. There was a general discussion regarding the role of the LRCIC and Ms. Belles and Ms. Stricker agreed their meetings should be held 3-4 times per year.

It was the consensus of the BOF to reduce the Towns FY2025 Capital budget by $300k and the BOE's FY2025 Capital budget by $100k. Ms. Belles reviewed how the mil rate would be impacted.

Mr. Corbett solicited input from the Board and they were in agreement that a greater than 1 mil rate increase would not pass referendum. Additional modifications were made to the budget resulting in a 1.01 increase to the mil rate. The Board agreed that they could stand behind the revised budget and defend it to the public.

b. Other Budget Items (as time permits) – There were no additional budget items discussed at the meeting.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

The following comments were raised at the meeting:

- James Francese – noted his strong support for education and stated that the BOF has to balance its desire to protect the Town's taxpayers with the need to maintain the Town's assets. He encouraged the Board to advocate for the Town as a whole and educate the taxpayers that if they don't do what is necessary today, they will pay more to resolve the consequences later on.

- Patty Stricker – stated she appreciated all the work the BOS, BOF, and BOE did on the proposed FY2025 budget. She recommended the Tri-Board meet earlier in the budget season next year and suggested the Boards work together on budget-related issues throughout the year.

- Mike Callahan – suggested that future Tri-Board meetings should look up to 5-years in the future in their budget discussions and communicate those issues to the public. He expressed concern about the impact of unfunded mandates on the Town's budget and strongly encouraged the BOE to have the PTO lodge protests with their state legislators. He said that he worries about budget creep from needs to wants and stated he is in support of a 5-year plan that balances the wants with the needs.

POTENTIAL 2024-2025 BUDGET RESOLUTION

Ms. Belles provided corrected updates to the mil rate increase.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to utilize $1,145,000.00 of the Unassigned Fund Balance to offset the FY 2024-2025 budget, $545,000 of which has been designated as a projected amount of overcollection of taxes from FY 2023-2024. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to present to a Public Hearing on April 16, 2024, at the Nathan Hale High School, a total budget of $40,672,915.00 based on the October 1st, 2023, Grand List of $1,199,335,720. This budget represents a 1.01 mill rate increase and a 7.28 % increase from the FY 2023-2024 budget. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Todd Gelston
Secretary