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

Participating:

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

Absent: Eric Kolasinski

Others: Valerie Belles, Finance Director
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Gelston called the meeting to order at 8:43 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Budget Transfer Request – $5,000 from BOF Contingency 10541020-58339 to Capital Project account number 33250013-58926 Project number C0249 Broadband Implementation Committee

Ms. Haines provided information about this agenda item. She advised that the Broadband Implementation Committee would like to do another mass-mailing and additional community outreach, as well as retain the services of the consultant, Entry Point, assist in completing two state grant applications.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to approve a transfer in the amount of $5,000.00 from the BOF Contingency 10541020-58339 to Capital Account 33250013-58926 Project C0249 Broad Band Feasibility Study and request that the Board of Selectman schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles advised that the transfer would be made into a capital account, whereby the funds could carry over to the next fiscal year.

b. Grant authorization – To authorize the Broadband Committee to Apply for Grants under State of CT Grant Programs (BEAD Program and CONNECTED Communities)

Ms. Haines stated that the state had only provided a short window to submit the grant requests and that the application deadline is the end of April, consequently, she stated that the Broadband Committee would like to retain the services of its consultant, Entry Point, to help with the grant writing.

Motion was made by Mr. Gelston to authorize the application for the Broadband Implementation Committee to apply for State of Connecticut grants through the BEAD and CONNECTED Program to help fund the construction and deployment of broadband services to underserved locations. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

2024-2025 BUDGET

a. Discussion and Potential Adjustments Following the Public Hearing

Mr. Corbett asked if the Board had any take-aways from the earlier Public Hearing. The following comments were made by Board members:

- Mr. Gelston – said that he would have liked more participants at the hearing to provide a more statistically significant representation of the taxpayers. He noted that there was strong support for the BOE budget from the participants and he mentioned the option of increasing the BOE budget $100k; however, he expressed concern about how the majority of taxpayers would respond to the increase.

- Ms. Whatley – recommended putting forward the FY2024-2025 budget as proposed. She agreed that the education community supported increasing the BOE budget; however, she did not feel the rest of the taxpayers will support it.

- Ms. Goff – stated she agreed with Ms. Whatley's comments and commented that she is concerned about risking multiple budget referendums. She encouraged the Boards of Finance, Selectmen and Education to follow through on the concept they discussed at a previous meeting of grouping a number of capital projects into a loan package.

- Mr. Thomas – advised that he was not prepared to make any changes to the proposed FY2024-2025 budget. He stated that the BOF achieved a 1.1 mil increase because they were able to use $545k of taxes collected last year as well as $600k of Fund Balance and noted that they would not have the additional tax revenue to reduce the budget's bottom line next year and the amount from Fund Balance that was applied this year is higher than what the Board has previously used. He commented that, going forward, they may have to reconcile themselves to either higher increases or foregoing some budget requests. He agreed that the Boards need to work together to create a long-term capital plan for the Town.

- Mr. Gelston – agreed that the BOF should not make any adjustments to the proposed FY2024-2025 budget. He emphasized, however, that the BOF should commit to undertaking incremental improvements to its deteriorating infrastructure. He noted that the cost of deferred maintenance is larger expenses down the road and stated that he would like to see a bonded capital plan put to a referendum by Thanksgiving of next year.

Mr. Corbett thanked the Board for their feedback and noted that the consensus was not to make any adjustments to the proposed budget. He stated he would include a New Business item to their May meeting agenda to establish an ad hoc committee, composed of BOF, BOS, and BOE members, to develop a bonded capital plan for FY2025-2026. He noted that he agrees with the timeframe Mr. Gelston proposed and that it will show the citizens that the Town government is committed to improving its infrastructure in a thoughtful and fiscally sound and responsible way.

In response to a request from Mr. Corbett, Ms. Belles reviewed the following results of the straw poll taken at the earlier Public Hearing:

1. Do you want to see the proposed budget adjusted? – 8 votes

2. Is the Town's budget too high to provide appropriate services to taxpayers in our community? – 1 vote

3. Is the Town's budget too low to provide appropriate services to taxpayers in our community? – 6 votes

4. Is the Board of Education's budget too high to provide appropriate services to taxpayers in our community? – 2 votes (via email)

5. Is the Board of Education's budget too low to provide appropriate services to taxpayers in our community? – 23 votes

b. Guest and Audience Comments

There were no public comments submitted or raised at the meeting.

c. Vote to Send Budget to Town Meeting

Motion was made by Mr. Thomas to present to the Annual Budget Meeting scheduled to be called by the Board of Selectmen for April 30th 2024 at 8:00 p.m. at the Nathan Hale-Ray High School Auditorium a total budget of $40,672,915.00 based on the Grand List as of October 1, 2023 of $1,119,335,720.00. The budget would require an increase over the 2023-2024 budget of 7.28% in expenditures, a mill rate increase of 1.01 mils, and a 4.17% increase in tax revenues. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Corbett thanked the Board members for their efforts this budget season.

Motion made by Mr. Gelston to adjourn the meeting at 9:12 p.m. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Todd Gelston
Secretary