TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes
August 12, 2024
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

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

Absent: Joseph Corbett

Others: Valerie Belles, Finance Director
Laurie D'Aquila, East Haddam Ambulance Association
Lynn Woodward, East Haddam Ambulance Association
Denise Di Stefano, citizen
Rob Johnson, citizen
Ruth Masci, citizen
Robert Smith, citizen
Lynn Woodward, citizen
Linda Zemienieski, Executive Manager
And other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Gelston called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

GUESTS & AUDIENCE COMMENTS

The following citizens spoke at the meeting:

- Robert Smith – expressed his concern about the Town's tree removal project and related expenditures, including legal fees**.** He reiterated the concerns he raised at the August 7th Board of Selectmen's meeting and recommended the Board of Finance evaluate the funds being expended on this project. There was a general discussion about Mr. Smith's concerns which included the suggestion to obtain an independent analysis of trees that should be removed and whether or not there would be a cost benefit to do so.

- Ruth Masci – voiced her concern about current layoffs at Public Works, noting the staff is now at 50% of its previous employees. She raised several questions about the department's

expenditures, particularly for capital equipment that she believes is not being utilized. There was a general discussion concerning the division of responsibilities between the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance. The Board members agreed to ask First Selectwomen Haines and Public Works Director Velez to attend their September meeting to speak about staffing issues and the tree removal project.

- Lynn Woodward – expressed her concern about the number of trees removed on Schulman-Veselak Road and also noted that the grass at the Firehouse and Grange have not been mowed in quite awhile.

- Laurie D'Aquila – stated that Public Works reduced staffing levels also concern her because, during inclement weather, they generally clear the roads ahead of the ambulance to ensure the ambulance can get through to respond to a medical emergency call. She noted that she feels that layoffs this early in the budget year could be a sign of poor financial management of the department.

- Rob Johnson – stated that he had viewed the YouTube recording of the August 7th Board of Selectmen meeting and he feels there was "poor feedback and little accountability" taken by the Selectmen regarding citizens' concerns raised at that meeting about Public Works. In response to a question raised by Mr. Johnson, Finance Director Belles advised that it is not usual for a Board of Finance to be informed, on a regular basis, of operational and/or employee issues. There was a general discussion about the defined roles of the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen; Mr. Thomas emphasized that it is not the Board of Finance's function to manage the Town's operations.

- Denise Di Stefano in response to a question raised by Ms. Di Stefano, Ms. Belles confirmed that the Town does contribute to unemployment benefits for its employees and noted that the contribution is based on a calculation made by the state.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence discussed at the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Regular Meeting – July 8, 2024 – Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to the minutes of their July 8, 2024 regular meeting.

Motion made by Ms. Whatley to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of July 8, 2024 as written. Ms. Goff seconded the motion, and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. Board Sub-Committee Reports

i. Communications – Mr. Gelston reported that the Communications Subcommittee is scheduled to meet on August 14th to discuss a list of articles to submit to the East Haddam News.

ii. Long-Range Capital Improvements –Mr. Thomas reported that the Long-Range Capital Improvements Subcommittee is scheduled to meet on August 22nd.

iii. Financial Policies – Mr. Thomas reported that the Financial Policies Subcommittee has finished drafting the General Fund Revenues policy and, following their final review of the document, it will be submitted to the full Board for their review and approval. He stated that he recommends the Subcommittee next work on improving and simplifying the process the Long-Range Capital Improvements Subcommittee uses to evaluate and rank proposed capital improvements.

b. Discussion on Bonding Plan – Mr. Gelston solicited input from the Board members regarding the banding/bonding options Mr. Lindsey proposed at their last meeting. The consensus of the Board was to pursue Option #2 and bond for approximately $5M this fall. The Board discussed a timeline for the related referendum and other prerequisites.

Ms. Belles provided additional information about proposed capital projects for a new firehouse, the HVAC systems for the schools, and the road reclamation analysis. Mr. Thomas suggested that, after the Town receives the engineer's analysis and cost projections for road improvements, the Board discuss a rolling 5-20 year bonding cycle for the road reclamation project.

c. Preferred email Addresses – Mr. Gelston and Ms. Belles encouraged the Board to use their EastHaddam.org email address whenever they are communicating about official Town business. Ms. Belles noted that, if personal email addresses are used for Town business related communications, the individual's personal email is subject to discovery in FOIA requests and other legal situations.

FIRST SELECTMEN'S REPORT

The First Selectwoman was not in attendance at the meeting and this agenda item was postponed. Ms. Whatley recommended that Mr. Gelston strongly encourage the First Selectwoman to attend the Board's September meeting to discuss citizens' concerns that were raised at this meeting.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

a. June 2024 Year-to-Date Budget Report – Ms. Belles called the Board's attention to the June 2024 YTD budget report in their meeting packets. She provided an overview of the report and noted that the Public Works' General Highways budget was $90k under budget for the fiscal year; its Snow Removal budget, after transferring funds to the Tree Removal budget, broke even; its Transfer Station budget was $23k over-budget, and its Tree Care budget was $96k over budget.

In response to a question from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles stated that, upon request, she could provide copies of the monthly reports she prepares for the Board to citizens.

b. Audit Update – Ms. Belles stated that the auditors are still working through the FY2023 budget. She noted that she has been communicating with the CT Office of Policy and Management and has fulfilled all of their requests to date. Ms. Belles confirmed that the auditors are still targeting the end of August to finalize their audit of the Town's FY2023 books. She further stated that the Finance Department has started its preparations for the FY2024 audit.

OLD BUSINESS

a. East Haddam Ambulance Association Financial Reivew – Ms. D'Aquila provided some background on this agenda item. She noted that the Town has received all of the Ambulance Association's financial documents back to FY2010, with the exception of FY2024. She stated they will provide their FY2024 financial documents as soon as their accountant signs off on them.

Ms. D'Aquilia stated that, since Covid, the regular attendance at EHAA Board Meetings by the First Selectman and and the Board of Finance's liaison has gotten off-track. She noted that monthly P&L statements, and other useful information, is provided at the Ambulance Association's monthly meetings and she encouraged the Town to re-establish its representative's attendance at the EHAA Board Meetings.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Grant Acceptance – Emergency Management Performance Grant Acceptance – Ms. Belles provided background information about this agenda item.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to recommend to the Board of Selectmen to accept a grant in the amount of $5,488.25 from the State of Connecticut, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, entitled "FY 2022 Emergency Management Performance Grant" (revenue budget 10542-43000 and expense budget 10542070-51590) and to ask the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

b. Grant Acceptance – M. Jones Family Fund – Ms. Belles advised that the M. Jones Family Fund and the Mary Janvrin and Natalie Janvrin Wiggins Fund for Birds, Other Animals and Nature at the Community Foundation of Middlesex County provided a grant to the Recreation Commission for the purpose of supporting summer camp programs**.**

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to recommend to the Board of Selectmen to accept a grant in the amount of $2,000.00 from the M. Jones Family Fund and the Mary Janvrin and Natalie Janvrin Wiggins Fund for Birds, Other Animals and Nature at the Community Foundation of Middlesex County for the purpose of supporting summer camp programs (revenue budget 28045-44709-R1099 and expense budget 28045033-56900-R1099) and to ask the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Goff seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

c. Grant Acceptance – FEMA Assistance to Firefighters – Ms. Belles advised that a grant authorization form from the Fire Department had been previously accepted and a grant award, in the amount of $54,857.14, was received. She noted that there is a required match of $2,742.86 which will be paid out of the Fire Department budget.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to recommend to the Board of Selectmen to accept a grant in the amount of $54,857.14 for the FY 2023 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program from the U.S Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, for the purpose of purchasing turnout gear (revenue budget 33050-43000-G2901 and expense budget 33055011-58820-G2901) and to ask the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Kolasinski, Ms. Belles confirmed that the turnout gear supported by this grant will go out to bid.

Ms. Whatley was absent for the vote and the motion was approved by a majority aye vote. The motion carried.

d. Donation Acceptance – Donation Plum St. Productions LLC – Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets regarding this agenda item. He advised that Plum St. Productions LLC had made a $500.00 donation to the Open Space Committee.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to recommend to the Board of Selectmen to accept a donation of $500.00 from Plum St. Productions LLC and to appropriate funds to Open Space Reserves (33250-43000-25022) and to ask the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

e. Donation Acceptance – Boy Scout Troop 22 – Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets regarding this agenda item. He advised that Boy Scout Troop 22 had donated the surplus funds raised for an Eagle Scout project at the Town Beach to the Recreation Commission.

Motion was made by Ms. Whatley to recommend to the Board of Selectmen to accept a donation of $734.47 from Boy Scout Troop 22 and to appropriate the funds to Parks and Recreation programs (revenue budget 28045-44709-R1099 and expense budget 28045033-56900-R1099) and to ask the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Goff seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

f. ARPA Project Transfer – Elementary School Fire Alarm – Ms. Belles provided background information on this agenda item. She stated that the transfer of unexpended funds from the completed Radio Tower project will complete the Elementary School Fire Alarm project.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to authorize $27,613.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to the Elementary School fire alarm project (15010500-58926 Project C0267) to finish the project. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was approved by unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

g. ARPA Project Transfer – Elementary School Parking Lot and Sidewalk – Ms. Belles advised that the Elementary School generator project came in under budget and the surplus funds are sufficient to cover the overage in the Elementary School parking lot and sidewalk project. Consequently, the Board of Education recommended transferring the unexpended funds from the generator project to the parking lot and sidewalk project.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to authorize transferring $7,399 from ARPA project Elementary School Generator (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0216) to fund APRA project Elementary School parking lot and sidewalk improvements (account 1510500-58926 Project C0268). Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

h. ARPA Project Transfer – Transfer Station Network Project – Ms. Belles reported that the MOC Wireless Network project came in under budget; therefore, the Town would like to transfer the unexpended funds to the network project at Transfer Station to get phone lines set up and help complete that project.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to authorize transferring $2,400.00 from MOC Wireless Network - ARPA Project C0194 to fund Transfer Station Network – ARPA Project C0298. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

i. ARPA Project Transfer – Electricity to Nichols Field – Ms. Belles advised that this agenda item is related to the completion of the Nichols Field project which includes includes new scoreboards, fencing, and the electrical work and materials to connect the scoreboards.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to authorize transferring up to $9,000.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to Electricity to Nicholas Field (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0286) to cover the expense of scoreboards and needed materials to complete project. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion.

In response to a question from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles provided clarification of the use of "up to" in the motion.

The motion was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

j. ARPA Project Transfer – Grounds Utility Tractor – Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets about this agenda item.

Motion made by Ms. Whatley to authorize transferring $1,321.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to Grounds Utility Tractor (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0299) to cover the expense of purchasing a York rake and tires. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion.

In response to a question from Mr. Kolasinski Ms. Belles advised that the funds would be used to cover the expense of purchasing a York rake and tires for the John Deere Tractor and she confirmed that the tractor is being used.

The motion was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

k. ARPA Project Approval - Transfer Station Generator – Ms. Belles provided background information on this agenda item and stated that the funds will be used to pay for hooking up the Transfer Station generator which will finalize the project.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to authorize transferring $11,400.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to Transfer Station generator (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0325) to cover expenses to complete the project. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

l. ARPA Project Approval – Trowbridge Road Paving – Ms. Belles stated that, due to cuts in the capital paving budget, Trowbridge Road paving was not able to be completed this fiscal year. She noted that this funding will allow Public Works to complete the intented project.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to authorize transferring $240,000.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to Trowbridge Road paving (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0326) for expenses to complete the project. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion. Mr. Kolasinski voted nay and the motion was approved by a majority aye vote. Motion carried

m. ARPA Project Approval – Municipal Office Complex Meeting Rooms 1&2 Sound System – Ms. Belles advised that the original A/V system was gifted to the Town in 2013 and there have been many complaints about poor sound quality, delays in presentations, and unreliability. She stated that this funding will allow the Town to replace the existing equipment to improve sound quality during the meetings and ensure more reliable recordings for recording secretaries.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to authorize transferring $90,646.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to MOC Meeting room 1&2 sound system (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0327) to cover expenses to complete the project. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was approved by unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

n. ARPA Project Approval – Voters' Box Camera – Ms. Belles stated that there is a mandate requiring municipalities to keep camera footage of the absentee ballots Voters' Box for longer periods of time than our other surveillance cameras record. She advised that this funding will ensure that we are in compliance with that mandate.

Motion made by Ms. Goff to authorize transferring $5,000.00 from unexpended ARPA funds for Voters' Box cameras, 15010500-58926 Project C0328, for expenses to complete the project. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

o. ARPA Project Approval – Old Town Hall Interior Painting – Ms. Belles stated that these funds will be used to repair, prime, and paint the interior of the Old Town Hall.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to authorize transferring $6,775.00 from unexpended ARPA funds to Old Town Hall Interior painting (account 15010500-58926 - Project C0329) for expenses to complete the project. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m. Ms. Whatley seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Rebecca Whatley
Secretary