Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 18, 2025
Special Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; T. Bourgoin; E. Dill

Also Present: D. Barlow; V. Belles; J. Bielot; E. Blaschik; L. Conroy; D. Dill; G. Fraites; R. French; M. Hansen; K. Klinck; I. Luciano; A. McCabe; E. Morgan; M. Olzacki; B. Parker; J. Rhoades; D. Southworth; M. Velez; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. 2025-2026 General Budget Review Workshop

Ms. Haines noted that 2.5% increase in the Salaries and Wages line for the Public Works budgets was contractual. It was noted that the narratives for the Public Works budgets would need to be updated.

A. Public Works

1. General Highways – This budget reflected an overall decrease of 0.5% ($7,124.00). Ms. Haines noted a $4,152.00 reduction in the Over Time budget; however, there was a 58.3% ($7,200.00) increase in the Purchased Professional Services line. Public Works Director Velez advised the increase was due to mandated testing and permits.

There was a general discussion about discrepancies in Actual and Projected budget number in the Supplies category and Ms. Haines suggested a potential for savings if the historical actuals were significantly lower than the projected budget amount.

Ms. Velez and Finance Director Belles discussed the appropriate journal entries for FEMA funds and expenses. Ms. Belles agreed to add descriptive language to some of the Other Supplies lines. She also advised that the proceeds from the sale of used equipment is recorded in the Town's Miscellaneous Revenue budget.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Dill, Ms. Velez stated that the increase in Purchased Professional Services was for surveying and bridge engineering. She also confirmed the Engineer line was zero for FY2025-2026.

2. Snow Removal – This budget reflected an overall decrease of 4% ($9,732.00); however, Ms. Belles stated that funding for the Regular Employees Salaries & Wages had not carried through to the FY2025-2026 column and would need to be added back into the budget.

Ms. Velez stated that she plans to switch to using all salt on the roads going forward which will result in an increase in the cost of materials but should show a savings in Salaries & Wages because the crew should not have to go out and repeated apply materials to the road. She noted that sand will be added to the mix for hilly roads for traction. Ms. Velez stated that she did not order sand this year and would list the majority of the balance of the Town's sand for sale on the GovDeals website.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Bourgoin, Ms. Velez confirmed that the Other Supplies line item had been zeroed out.

3. Transfer Station – This budget reflected an overall increase of 5.7% ($49,689.00). Ms. Velez confirmed that Salaries & Wages are contractual and, due to the timing of signing the current contract, some of the increase from the first year of the contract falls into the FY2025-2026 projected budget accounting for the 8.1% increase in that line item.

   Ms. Velez stated that the increase in the Refuse Removal line was contractual. She noted that the 7.2% increase in electricity is due to rate increases and Ms. Zemienieski confirmed that the Board will see similar increases in most of the Town's budgets.

   There was a general discussion regarding the Composting program and it was noted that the revenue from the program is not offsetting the Refuse Removal expense as much as was projected. Ms. Velez confirmed that the Town is on a month-to-month contract with Blue Earth. Ms. Haines stated that she is researching HazMat disposal programs and suggested discontinuing the Composting program in favor of participating in a regional program with RiverCOG towns.

   It was noted that revenues from the state's Nips program are allocated to this budget. Ms. Belles suggested increasing the revenues from the Nips program to $10k annually.

4. Tree Care Removal – This budget reflected an overall increase of 11.9% ($30,000.00). There was a general discussion about the need for a Deputy Tree Warden. Ms. Velez confirmed that the increase requested in this budget is due to the ongoing need to remove dead/diseased ash, beech, and oak trees.

5. Public Works/Transfer Station Capital – The following capital requests for FY2025-2026 were discussed:

   - Road Improvement Materials (FY2025-2026 request $168,000.00) – Ms. Velez confirmed that this capital request includes infrastructure such as catch basins, pipes, and drainage materials.

   - Pavement/Shim Overlay (FY2025-2026 request $128,000.00) – Ms. Velez confirmed that these funds are used for regular road maintenance.

- Road Reclamation and Repaving (FY2025-2026 request $5,158,768.00) – Ms. Velez and the Board discussed the situation with Daniels Road and the potential for deferral, or re-strategizing, the work on this road. There was a general discussion about Director Velez's capital request for this work. Ms. Velez confirmed that it will take approximately $30M over 5 years to bring the Town's roads back into good condition after which time regular maintenance would still be required. Ms. Haines stated that the Board of Finance is looking into bonding to fund this capital request.

- Beebe Road Removal of Process from Road Washout (FY2025-2026 request $42,00.00) – Director Velez provided information about this capital request. She noted that the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission had requested Public Works arrange to have the materials removed and she had gone out to bid for the work. She responded to several questions from the Board.

- Beaver Deceiver Beebe Road over Molley Brook and Pine Brook (FY2025-2026 $6,240.00) – Ms. Belles stated that since this request is less than $10k, it should be moved to the Operating budget.

- Sheepskin Hollow Road South Bridge culvert repair (FY2025-2026 request $250,000.00) – Ms. Velez provided information about this capital request and advised that she had met with Savy and Sons and they proposed a "semi-permanent" alternative solution to replacing the bridge which will last 100+ years and significantly reduce cost. She stated that all of the back-up materials are out on ClearGov.

- Beebe Road Culvert Replacement (FY2025-2026 request $1.405M) – Ms. Velez reported that the original cost for this capital item was $750k and noted that the increase is related to state requirements since they are funding 50% of the project.

  Ms. Velez reported that there is funding from the state bridge program to replace the Beebe Road over Molley Brook culvert and stated that the town has already requested two time extension on this project and noted that if it did not get started soon we would be in danger of losing our 50% commitment to fund agreement with the State. Ms. Zemienieski noted that the AP Gates Culvert capital project detail is missing from the Public Works' capital requests and Ms. Velez confirmed she would add it back onto ClearGov.

- Repair Metal Roof applying rubber roofing over metal (FY2025-2026 request $196,341.00) – Ms. Velez reported that Mr. Angersola had suggested this work because the original roof is from the 1980's and is currently leaking in at least 4 locations. She stated that she does not have much detail about the quote since Mr. Angersola had secured it. She recommended the Board present their questions about this capital request to Mr. Angersola.

- Salt/Sand Pole Barn Door repair and install of rear door (FY2025-2026 request $25k) – Ms. Velez reported that, after an engineering audit, it was recommended to bring the door into compliance with DEEP requirements.

- Replacement of Current Tire Machine (FY2025-2026 request $31,056.00) – Ms. Velez stated that the current tire machine is 20+ years old, does not balance the tires, and is a safety hazard because tires sometimes spin off of it. She noted that the mechanic also uses the machine to replace tires on the vehicles assigned to the other Town departments.

- New Fan for circulation in mechanics garage (FY2025-2026 request $6,295.00) - Ms. Belles stated that since this request is less than $10k, it should be moved to the Operating budget.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Dill, Public Works Director Velez confirmed that she is not requesting any vehicles this year.

- Transfer Station – Skid Steer Plow Attachment (FY2025-2026 request $4,618.00) - Ms. Belles stated that since this request is less than $10k, it should be moved to the Operating budget.

B. Police Department Operating/Capital – This department's Operating budget reflects an increase of 11.1% ($59,633.00) primarily due to an increase in the Salaries & Wages line. Ms. Belles noted that the FY2025-2026 Salaries & Wages line includes the last fiscal year's increase plus an anticipated 2.5% increase for this fiscal year. In response to questions from the Board, Officer Rhoades stated that the new Police Officer Collective Bargaining Agreement would start July 1st and that the Salaries and Wages line item anticipates the same level of staffing.

   Officer Rhoades confirmed that there is a capital request to replace one vehicle and Ms. Haines provided some background information related to the request. There was a general discussion about the status of the police fleet and the department's need for a pick-up. It was noted that an Explorer would cost $4k-$5k less than a pick-up truck.

C. Recreation Commission Operating/Capital – This department's Operating budget reflects a 5.2% ($9,170.00) increase. Recreation Director Conroy discussed increases in the Salaries & Wages budget line. She stated that the increase for the summer intern was to keep pace with minimum wage. Regarding the increase for the Assistant Director, Ms. Conroy reported that the Assistant Director is responsible for a 22% increase in revenues, a 20% increase is program registrations, and a 18% increase in programs and activities.

   Ms. Conroy advised that it is difficult to find qualified lifeguards and noted that she currently has a qualified, reliable staff and she would like to retain them. Ms. Conroy stated that the average hourly rate for lifeguards is $19.75.

It was noted that, other than a $9.00 increase in the Miscellaneous category, the rest of the Recreation Commission's Operating budget was flat.

Ms. Conroy discussed the following FY2025-2026 capital requests:

- $25k for an Outdoor Volleyball Court at Town Beach;
- $100k for a Community Playground on the Municipal Office Complex property, and
- $150k for a Recreation Field Plan at the Municipal Office Complex.

Ms. Conroy responded to several questions from the Board and confirmed that there is not a need to contribute to the Recreation Field Plan capital project for FY2025-2026.

D. Town Clerk Operating – This budget reflected an overall increase of 2.7% ($6,260.00). Town Clerk Klinck reported that recordings by the department have increased resulting in a $2,000.001(3.3%) increase in that budget line and that the cost of supplies is also up $500.00 (38.5%).

E. Assessor Operating/Capital – The Operating budget for this department reflected an increase of 0.8% ($923.00). Ms. Belles noted that the FY2025-2026 Longevity expense for the Assistant Assessor did not carry through and must be added back into this budget.

Assessor Luciano noted that, other than Salaries & Wages, all other categories in her budget are down. She advised that the only FY2025-2026 capital request from her office is $38k for the mandated Revaluation.

Ms. Luciano expressed concern about a potential loss of revenue resulting from the state's change in how motor vehicles are valued for property tax purposes. There was a general discussion about the status of the Town's Grand List and the fact that it could be negatively impacted, beginning in FY2025-2026, by how vehicles are now being valued by the state.

F. Collector of Revenue Operating – This budget reflected an overall increase of 3.4% ($3,594.00). Tax Collector Dill noted the standard 2.5% increase in Salaries & Wages and a 10% ($1,697.00) increase in the category of Other Purchased Services, mainly driven by the increase in the cost of printing tax bills.

The Board discussed several adjustments in the proposed budgets they had reviewed, including a potential savings of $15k in the Public Works' Catch Basin Cleaning budget (line item 50520).

The Board recessed for lunch at 12:32 p.m. and reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

G. Elections/Registrars Operating – This budget reflected an overall increase of 16.3% ($14,988.00). Registrar Hansen reported that the staff's work load had increased by 70% due to the state's early voting requirements and other state requirements. In response to questions from Ms. Haines, she stated that the Registrars are elected officials and she did

not know if their salaries could be changed and the increase in Dues & Fees is because Registrar Wonneberger is pursuing her required certification.

Ms. Hansen discussed the state's roll-out of new voting machines. She stated that she had requested East Haddam receive their voting machines by April 1, 2025.

H. Board of Assessment Appeals Operating – This budget remained flat. Mr. Blaschik discussed how the assessed value of motor vehicles will be changed going forward.

I. Building Department Operating – This budget reflected an overall decrease of 4.1% ($5,421.00). Building Official French noted that the only change to the FY2025-2026 budget is a decrease in the Salaries & Wages line due to staffing changes.

J. Youth & Family Services/Food Bank Operating – There was an increase of 2.4% ($5,805.00) in the Y&FS's FY2025-2026 request to the Town for its contribution to their budget. Director McCabe advised that she will be retiring this year and stated that she expected her replacement would come in at a lower salary, due to the number of years Ms. McCabe performed the role.

Ms. Haines thanked Ms. McCabe for her good work over 25 years of service to the Town.

K. Senior Services Operating/Capital – This Operating budget reflected an overall increase of 2.7% ($4,987.00). Director Parker distributed materials to the Board. He noted that the Senior Center membership is down this year due to mortality. He noted that, excluding Salaries & Wages, there was only a $1,300.00 increase in the FY2025-2026 Operating budget, which was primarily a result of the increased cost of utilities.

Director Parker stated that he has submitted a capital request for a new boiler for the Senior Center. He noted that the existing boiler is 20 years old; however, it is performing well and, if the Town needs to make cuts to the FY2025-2026 capital requests, he is comfortable putting off the replacement for 1-2 years.

L. East Haddam Public Library System Operating/Capital – This department's Operating budget reflects an 11.6% ($53,735.00) overall increase. Library Director Morgen discussed the requested increases in the Salaries & Wages category. She noted that, between 2024 and 2025, they have lost 51.5 hours of staff time which makes covering sick and vacation time taken challenging.

Director Morgen reviewed her objectives for requesting the FY2025-2026 Salaries & Wages increases and responded to questions from the Board. She and Ms. Belles briefly discussed the appropriate journal entry for the annual donation from the Library Friends. Ms. Morgen agreed to maintain the Communications budget category at $3,000.00.

There was a general discussion regarding the dissimilar phone services at the Rathbun and East Haddam branches. Director Morgen and the Board also discussed the Children's Librarian's salary.

M. Regional Animal Control Operating – There was an overall increase of 1.85% ($2,106.00) to this department's related Special Revenue Fund expenses. The Board discussed the Town's annual contribution to the Regional Animal Control account and Ms. Belles noted that the program has been operating at a deficit for a number of years.

It was noted that the Town's contribution to the Regional Animal Control account has historically been lower than East Hampton's contribution and Ms. Belles recommended it be increased to $59k for FY2025-2026. Ms. Haines reported that she has been talking with the Town of Columbia about their use of East Haddam's pound. She stated that the fee they have discussed for the agreement is $250.00 monthly.

Animal Control Officer Olzacki noted the need for a larger vehicle and there was a general discussion regarding reserving for same. He reported that the staff's workloads have increased due to more calls about wildlife issues because the state agencies often fail to show up.

Mr. Olzacki advised that state statute requires that, when a population being served exceeds 25,000, a full-time Animal Control Officer is required. He stated that the combined populations of East Haddam and East Hampton is currently 22,500 and he expects the 25,000 population cut-off will be reached in 3-5 years.

3. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to adjourn the meeting 4:03 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary