Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 19, 2025
Special Meeting Minutes

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

Also Present: B. Auld; V. Belles; J. Cotter; W. DiCristofaro (remotely); C. Leidemer; R. Swol; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. 2025-2026 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. Fire Department Operating/Capital – This department's Operating budget reflects a 40.4% ($239,082.00) increase. Chief Auld provided opening comments and introduced Captain Leidemer.

   Captain Leidemer discussed the challenge in attracting qualified applicants for the paid firefighter positions and noted the main difficulty is the level of salary offered by the Town. Ms. Haines reviewed the Salaries & Wages category and advised that the PT EMT budget line can be eliminated for a savings of $96,096.00. There was a general discussion about the shift schedule for the full-time Firefighter/EMT positions and Capt. Leidemer confirmed that there was coverage until 6:00 p.m. every day. He also confirmed that the stipend for the Lieutenant, which had been carried in the Extra Duty Hours budget line, is being eliminated and replaced by an increase in that position's salary.

   In response to a question from Ms. Haines regarding the $7,000.00 (38.9%) increase in the In Service Training budget, Chief Auld advised that the justification for the increase is included in the supplemental documentation for the FY2025-2026 budget that the department had provided. Ms. Haines suggested that there could also be an opportunity to reduce the additional $15k in the proposed budget for Repairs & Maintenance.

   The Fire Department staff responded to questions from the Board. Mr. Dill noted that only $260.00 had been expended this fiscal year from the Communications budget and Deputy Fire Chief Swol advised that the Fire Department gets its radio supplies from the Town's Emergency Management Services Radio Committee and also utilizes DEEP matching grants to pay for the equipment.

   In response to a request from Ms. Haines, Finance Director provided clarification about what happens to the unexpended funds in departmental Operating budgets at the end of each fiscal year.

Chief Auld advised that NFPA recommends replacement or refurbishment of apparatus after 20-years of service. He reviewed the following FY2025-2025 Capital requests:

- New Engine to replace Rescue 1-15 and Engine 2-15 (FY2025-2026 request $1.5M) – Chief Auld noted that Rescue vehicle 1-15 is 12-years old with significant electrical issues that makes it unreliable and Engine 2-15 is a 28-year old vehicle. He stated that the proposed new Squad engine is a combination rescue and fire fighting vehicle.
- New Engine to replace Rescue 4-15 and Engine 6-15 (FY2025-2026 request $1.5M) – Chief Auld noted that Rescue vehicle 4-15 is 22-years old and Engine 6-15 is a 19-year old vehicle. He reiterated that the proposed new Squad engine is a combination rescue and fire fighting vehicle.
- Air Pack Replacement (FY2025-2026 request $50k) – In response to a question raised by Ms. Haines, Captain Leidemer advised that all of the department's air packs are currently within date but he expects the department will have to replace 10-15 units in 2027. Ms. Belles requested Mr. Leidemer provide her with information on the cost of the air packs. Captain Leidemer advised that the department will submit grant applications for a portion of the cost of replacing the air packs and stated that he believes $50k will be sufficient to purchase the needed replacements in 2027.
- Fire Hose (FY2025-2026 request $15,000) – In response to questions from the Board, Chief Auld provided clarification on this capital request. He stated that the department did not have to replace a significant amount of hose last fiscal year.
- Wet Suits and Cold Water Accessories (FY2025-2026 budget request $18k) – Captain Leidemer stated that the Fire Department has 7 wetsuits and should replace 3-4 next year. In response to a question from the Board, he stated that the replacements will cost approximately $2,000.00 each.
- Ropes/Repel Gear (FY2025-2026 request $18k) – Chief Auld stated that the department no longer has a rope/rescue team; however, a number of the staff attend rope rescue classes.

Ms. Haines advised that the Board of Finance will be investigating short-term bonds to purchase the requested fire apparatus and, in response to a question raised by Mr. Dill, Ms. Belles advised that any bonding for equipment and a new firehouse will be approved in separate resolutions.

B. Redevelopment Agency Operating – There was a 154.7% ($47,500.00) increase reflected in this budget. Mr. DiCristofaro joined the meeting remotely. He advised that the Agency had not had any legal expenditures in FY2024-2025; however, he expected they will in FY2025-2026 since the Agency anticipates attracting developers in that fiscal year. He stated that he also included an increase in Salaries & Wages for the clerical person since more of recording secretary's time will be required next fiscal year.

Mr. DiCristofaro noted that the primary increase in the FY2025-2026 proposed budget is a request for an additional $47,500.00 (182.7%) in the Purchased Professional Services

budget line. He stated that the Agency had hired Victoria Ebright to write a State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) grant request for help with developing a master plan for the Village area.

Ms. Haines noted that numerous studies and plans have already been developed for the former Town Office site and suggested a marketing plan might be more helpful at this time. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that the Redevelopment Agency's charge covers a much larger section of the Village than just the 2-3 acres the Town owns, which was the basis for the previous studies, and the Agency wants to develop a comprehensive plan for entire area under their responsibility.

Mr. DiCristofaro noted the need to collaborate with the Goodspeed Opera House, which is the largest land owner in the Village, to develop a theme for the proposed master plan that is consistent with the other businesses in the area.

Ms. Belles suggested putting a portion of the Purchased Professional Services funding into Capital and offered to work with Mr. DiCristofaro to set-up the capital request. Mr. DiCristofaro agreed with her proposal.

There was a general discussion regarding the status of the brownfield testing on the former Town Office site. Mr. DiCristofaro also assured the Board that the Agency will pull together all of the previous studies and plans for the site to use in developing a comprehensive master plan for the Village area; he also noted that the master plan will include a marketing study.

In response to a question from Mr. Dill, Ms. Belles confirmed that $15k was included in the FY2025-2026 Board of Selectmen Legal budget line for this project.

C. Agriculture Commission Operating – No increases or decreases were reflected in this budget. Chairman Gross was not in attendance at the meeting. No changes to the budget were discussed.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Bourgoin, Ms. Zemienieski advised that the leasing fees for the Harris Property community gardens goes into a Special Revenue fund that tracks revenues and expenses related to the program. There was a general discussion regarding the existing Farmers' Markets in the Town.

The Board discussed the following budgets:

- Animal Control Officer – Ms. Haines corrected the Columbia contribution to the Animal Control Special Revenue Fund for their use of the East Haddam pound to $250.00 quarterly. The Board discussed ACO Olzacki's request for wage increases and agreed to increase the Salaries & Wages budget line amount by the contractual 2.5% plus the requested $5,000.00 for the Animal Control Officer and $2,500.00 for the staff, which will be split equally among the Assistant ACOs. Ms. Belles

confirmed that the increase should be shared equally by East Haddam and East Hampton.

- Fire Department Operating – The Board agreed to eliminate $96,096.00 for the part-time EMTs. Ms. Haines spoke about the difficulty in attracting qualified candidates for the full-time Firefighter/EMT positions and recommended approving $39k for a new part-time Public Safety Director position who will coordinate on issues related to the paid staff, the volunteer staff, and the Ambulance Association.

3. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to adjourn the meeting at 6:36 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary