Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 22, 2025
Special Meeting Minutes

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

Also Present: V. Belles; M. Callahan; L. D'Aquila (remotely); S. Deguzis; D. Distefano; T. Gelston; L. Hover; C. Mansfield; B. O'Mara; L. Woodward; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public.

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. 2025-2026 General Budget Review Workshop

A. Emergency Management Operating/Capital – This department's Operating budget reflects an overall increase of 1.8% ($3,431.00). Director of Emergency Management Mansfield advised that, other than the standard 2.5% increase in Salaries & Wages, the only other increase was contractual for the Town's and Valley Shore's 9-1-1 partnership.

Mr. Mansfield reviewed the department's Capital budget:

- Out of Cycle Replacement of Radios – He stated it will not be necessary to fund ($10k) this Capital program for FY2025-2026.

In response to a question from Mr. Dill about the Fire Department's request for $10k "Communications (Pagers & Radios)" in their Operating budget, Mr. Mansfield stated he believes that expense can be eliminated since EMS provides the equipment; however, he would like to confirm with the Department whether or not this is, in fact, a duplication of expenses.

- Replacement of Radio Equipment – Tower sites – Mr. Mansfield reported that the state is currently bonding to build out two tower sites which will have a significant impact on the reception in East Haddam.

A discrepancy of $30k was noted between Mr. Mansfield's records and Ms. Belles records regarding the balance of funds in the Radio Replacement capital account. Ms. Belles stated she will research the issue.

Mr. Mansfield noted that, going forward, he would like the Town to consider assigning the EMS Department one of its vehicles that is scheduled to be replaced.

B. Ambulance Association – Ms. D'Aquila joined the meeting remotely. Ms. Belles stated that the expense side of the Association's FY2024 P&L does not tally up to the reported total of $435,344.54. Ms. Woodward researched the discrepancy and provided clarification that resolved the issue.

Ms. D'Aquila reported that the Association has had difficulty attracting qualified EMT's and, consequently, they raised their hourly rate which should result in a reduction in overtime. She noted, however, that Haddam and East Hampton plan to raise their hourly EMT rates again soon and, therefore, she expects the Ambulance Association will have to do the same. In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Ms. D'Aquila confirmed that she has eliminated the stipend from the FY2025-2026 budget.

Ms. D'Aquila advised that the Association's mutual aid rate is down to 3%-4% and they have also improved their response time. There was a general discussion about the number of calls they receive and the possibility of doing some non-emergency transport. Ms. D'Aquila reported that their state license precludes them from doing transport services.

Mr. Dill noted that if the Town will be subsidizing the Ambulance Association on an on-going basis, he would like them to have a partial budget on CleanGov so that there is full transparency for the public as to where their tax dollars are being spent.

Ms. Haines stated that she expects to have a new contract with the Ambulance Association in place by the beginning of July. Ms. Belles advised that there is currently $300k in reserves for a new ambulance.

C. Regional Probate Court Operating – This budget reflects a decrease of 0.3% (-$56.00). It was noted that the municipality's share in this budget is based on its Grand List and is not optional.

D. Selectmen Operating – This budget reflects an overall increase of 3.2% ($6,130.00). Ms. Haines advised that, with the exception of the Executive Manager line, Salaries & Wages were increased by the standard 2.5%. She stated that, due to the long hours that the Executive Manager works, her broad based skill set, expertise on municipal operations, and historical knowledge, she gave her an additional 1.5% increase.

Ms. Haines noted that the only other increase in this budget was an additional $500.00 in the Advertising/Legal Notices line.

Ms. Belles reviewed the FY2025-2026 Revenues and noted a reduction of $29,561.00 in the PILOT – State Properties line. She confirmed that she will add the Investment Income back into the Revenues budget.

Ms. Belles reviewed the state's budget and advised that Education Cost Sharing (ECS) is being phased out over the next five years and the East Haddam BOE will see a $80k

reduction in that expense in FY2025-2026. There was a general discussion regarding the state's funding of public education.

E. Legal Services Operating – There was an overall 6.3% ($5,000.00) increase reflected in this budget. Ms. Haines explained that hoarding and other blight related problems are often manifestations of underlying mental health issues. She noted that addressing these problems are often sensitive situations which can require legal guidance. Ms. Haines advised that dealing with blighted properties falls under the jurisdiction of the Planning & Zoning Commission and they have asked to include $5k in this budget for that purpose.

F. Insurance (Risk Management) Operating – There was an overall 1.6% ($4,000.00) increase reflected in this budget. Ms. Zemienieski provided information about this budget. She noted that the Town is in the last year of a stabilization program for its liability insurances.

In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Ms. Zemienieski agreed to get quotes from the insurance broker using higher deductible amounts. Ms. Zemienieski responded to questions from the Board.

G. Paramedic Services Operating – There was an overall increase of 0.2% ($22.00) in this budget. Ms. Zemienieski advised that Middlesex Hospital bases this fee on a per-capita rate.

H. Resident State Trooper Operating – There was an overall increase of 7.4% ($10,000.00) in this budget. Ms. Zemienieski advised that the billing for the Town's Resident State Trooper does not get submitted until June and that the rate is based on the pay-grade of the assigned trooper. She stated that she has projected a $10k increase for FY2025-2026. Ms. Zemienieski confirmed that the Town is billed yearly for this expense and responded to additional questions from the Board.

I. Chatham Health District Operating – There was an overall increase of 2.7% ($3,456.00) in this budget. Ms. Haines explained that the fee Chatham Health District charges the municipalities it serves is based on a per capita rate that will fund its current budget. Ms. Haines reviewed the services the CHD provides the Town.

J. Human Services Operating – There was an overall increase of 21.6% ($1,000.00) in this budget. Ms. Haines stated that this budget encompasses the human services agencies that support the Town's residents that are in need of medical, mental health, dental, food, clothing, energy and housing assistance. She stated that the ask is always much greater than the Town can afford; however, she did project a small increase in the contribution to most of the agencies on the budget. Ms. Haines responded to questions from the Board.

K. Board of Finance Operating – There was an overall increase of 82.3% ($126,598.00) in this budget. Ms. Belles advised that the increase is exclusively related to the expense of funding the Town's extended FY2024-2025 audit and the cost of actuarial services to calculate the value of the Firemen's pension plan.

Ms. Haines recognized and thanked Finance Director Belles, Finance Assistant Snow, and Executive Manager Zemienieski for all of the work they did to get the Town back on track after the turn-over of two Finance Directors in the past three years. Board of Finance Chairman Gelston echoed Ms. Haines words of appreciation.

L. Finance Office Operating – There was an overall increase of 2.6% ($2,044.00) in this budget. Ms. Belles stated that the increase is due to the standard 2.5% increase in Salaries & Wages and an additional $200.00 in the Telephone/Cell Phone line.

M. Fringe Benefits Operating – Ms. Belles stated that this budget has not yet been completed. She advised that there had been a projected 19% increase in last year's employee health benefits; however, the Town joined a consortium and was able to reduce that amount to a 3% increase. She stated that the projected increase in the consortium's premium for FY2025-2026 is 13%. Ms. Belles noted that the consortium's cumulative increase over FY24-25 and FY25-26 is still less than what the Town would have experienced in the open market during the same period.

Further discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

N. Debt Services – Ms. Belles stated that this budget has not yet been completed. She said that the short-term bond anticipation notes for the athletic complex, the Kronberg property, and the BOE envelope and HVAC projects will retire in June. She advised that the Board of Finance is meeting with Mr. Lindsey, the Town's financial advisor, next week and she expects he will provide a new bond payment schedule.

Further discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

O. Interfund Transfers – Ms. Belles advised that this budget works in conjunction with the Debt Service budget. She explained how the Town's goal of maintaining a "budget neutral" capital plan works and stated that Mr. Lindsey tells the Town how much to put into capital project savings each year. Ms. Belles responded to questions from the Board.

The Board recessed for lunch at 12:39 p.m. and reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

P. Lakes Association Operating/Capital – There was a 48.1% ($16,304.00) increase reflected in the FY2025-2026 Operating budget. The following individual lake budgets were discussed:

- Moodus Reservoir – Ms. O'Mara reviewed the request for an additional $3,750.00 for Lake Restoration and noted that gas and maintenance for the hydro-weeder is their biggest expense. She stated that they have good community support and are hoping for increased donations from the residents.

  Ms. O'Mara advised that they are requesting a drawdown of the lake which is reflected in the $2,000.00 increase in the Miscellaneous line. In response to a question from Ms.

Haines, she confirmed that they have received a letter of approval of their Carp net plan from the Public Works Department; however, DEEP may not approve it.

- Bashan Lake – Ms. Deguzis reviewed their requested $12,304.00 increase in Lake Restoration and $252.00 increase in Aquatic Plant Monitoring. She responded to questions from the Board and there was a general discussion regarding milfoil and Hydrilla issues.

- Lake Hayward – There was a reduction of $1,750.00 in the proposed Lake Hayward FY2025-2026 budget. Ms. Hover provided information about a geese deterrent program they have in place and advised that they are working with Chatham Health District to try to curb runoff into the lake from the nearby farms.

  Ms. Hover stated that DEEP has signed off on their dam repair application and they are hoping to begin the work at the end of this month. Ms. Belles advised that there is $107,385.00 in the Capital budget for this project and noted that the lake association is requesting an additional $15k in FY2025-2026. In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Ms. Hover confirmed that the Lake Hayward Association owns the dam but the Town is responsible for the culvert behind it.

In response to a question from Ms. Bourgoin, it was confirmed that Lake Hayward does water testing and water stream sampling but Bashan Lake does not; and Moodus Reservoir relies on the testing done for the Town beach.

In response to a question from the Lakes Association representatives, Ms. Belles stated she will check to see if funds can be transferred between the associations during any fiscal year.

Q. State Budget Review – This agenda item was discussed earlier in the meeting and is reported on in the above minutes.

R. Other Budget Review Items – The following budgets were discussed:

- Libraries – The Selectmen considered the number of hours needed to provide coverage at both libraries vs. the number of cumulative work hours available from the existing staff. Ms. Belles noted that the Board had done a significant amount of work last budget season to bring the Libraries' Salaries and Wages budget line back to a good place.

  Ms. Bourgoin suggested the Library Director might consider staggering the hours of the two libraries to facilitate more coverage.

  The Board agreed there was a potential savings in the Salaries & Wages, Library Page/Intern budget lines. They also agreed to consult with Facilities Director Angersola about the need for the requested $5,440.00 in the Repairs & Maintenance budget line to install a fence in the parking lot between the Rathbun Library and the Post Office.

Ms. Zemienieski noted that the window replacement capital project was not resubmitted and commented that the board should follow up with Facilities Director Angersola to confirm there was adequate funding in the FY2025-2026 budget to replace or repair windows as needed. She also noted that it looked like the Annual CLA Conference and Staff Development budget lines had been combined. Ms. Belles stated she would update the Library Fees & Fines amount in the Revenues budget. She expressed concern that the Finance Department had not been made aware of, and therefore didn't budget for, an increase in the libraries' hours this year. There was a general discussion concerning the Children's Librarian position.

- Agriculture Commission – No changes were made to this budget.

- Fire Department – Ms. Haines noted that the $10k in the Communications (Pagers & Radios) line is a potential savings. The Board discussed the request for $50k in the Equipment (Gear) budget line and made no changes at this time. Ms. Belles stated she would like to receive more detail from the Fire Department to document their staffing and Salaries & Wages requests.

  It was confirmed that the $96,096.00 for part-time EMTs will be eliminated from the budget and the $41,147.00 increase in the Salaries & Wages, Full Time Firefighter/ EMT budget line is meant to attract more applicants for the positions. Ms. Haines noted that if the full-time Firefighter/EMT positions are fully staffed, it would eliminate the need for the Ambulance Association to back-fill some of the EMT shifts.

  Ms. Haines noted that the Captain is only making a very small amount more than the Lieutenants. She solicited input from the Board regarding her recommendation to create a part-time Public Safety Director position to coordinate staffing, scheduling, and budgeting issues among the paid staff, volunteer staff and the Ambulance Association EMTs.

  Ms. Bourgoin stated she is not opposed to the idea but she would like to see a job description and reporting structure before she makes any commitment. Mr. Dill stated he feels he could support the position if the candidate has the expertise and interpersonal skills needed to accomplish the tasks in the job description. Ms. Haines agreed to provide them with that appropriate documentation.

  No additional staffing changes were discussed.

  There was a general discussion regarding the $7k increase to the In Service (Training) budget line but no changes were made at this time.

  The following Capital requests were discussed

- New Engine (Replacing Rescue 4-15/Engine 6-15) – Ms. Haines stated she will clarify why there is a difference of $300k in the purchase of this vehicle and the other replacement Squad if both are the same.

- Air Pack Replacement (FY2025-2026 request $50k) – Ms. Haines will get information about the cost of the replacement air packs.

- Fire Hose (FY2025-2026 request $15k) – Ms. Belles confirmed that this capital fund has a current balance of $32k. The Board noted this budget request as a potential for savings.

- Wetsuits & Cold Water Accessories (FY2025-2026 request $18k) – Ms. Haines reiterated that the Department has seven wetsuits and would like to replace four in FY25-26 at a cost of $2k each. The Board noted this budget request as a potential for savings.

- Ropes/Repel Gear (FY2025-2026 request $18k) – No changes were made to this capital request.

- Redevelopment Agency – It was confirmed that $50k will be moved from the Purchased Professional Service line in the Agency's Operating budget to a Capital Budget request. No other changes were made at this time.

- Ambulance Association – Ms. Belles stated that she will have to work through the logistics concerning transferring funds from the Board of Finance's Contingency line to the Ambulance Association. Ms. Zemienieski suggested transferring $50k to the Association's Operating budget for FY2025-2026 and, if additional funds are needed, the Ambulance Association can petition the BOF for them.

  Ms. Belles reiterated that there is $300k in the Capital projects budget for the purchase of a new ambulance and Ms. Zemienieski advised that, according to the terms of the Town's current contract with the Ambulance Association, the Town is responsible for purchasing all replacement ambulances going forward. Ms. Belles recommended reserving $60k per fiscal year for this purpose. Ms. Haines noted that repairs and maintenance for the ambulances is carried in the Fire Department's budget.

  Mr. Dill requested that the Association create a budget on ClearGov, similar to those populated by Youth & Family Services and the Lakes Associations, to provide transparency to the public about their tax dollars are being spent.

Ms. Bourgoin stated that Liberty Bank informed her that the Town has two dormant accounts with them and if no action is taken on them soon, the balances will be turned over to the state. She advised that one is the Land Use Bond Fund and the other is the Green Village account. Ms. Belles will email the bank representative and instruct her to keep the accounts active.

3. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to adjourn the meeting at 3:07 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary