Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Roons 1 & 2
February 24, 2025
Special Meeting Minutes

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

Also Present: D. Angersola; V. Belles; C. Brownell; R. Casner; D. Denette; R. Dill; A. Lord; J. Sina; K. Stofko; J. Ventres; 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. Town Office Building Operating – A 9.3% ($500.00) increase was reflected in this budget. Mr. Angersola advised that this building's budget reflects only basic maintenance requirements because it is vacant. He stated that the electricity is being kept on to run the alarm system and the parking lot lights and the increase in that item is due to the general increase in electrical rates. He stated that he is looking into replacing the parking lot lights with LEDs. Mr. Angersola responded to questions from the Board.

   B. Town Meeting Hall Operating – There was no increase reflected in this budget. Mr. Angersola stated that the Town Meeting Hall had recently been painted using ARPA funds.

   C. Riverhouse/Annex Operating – A 10% ($200.00) increase was reflected in this budget. Mr. Angersola advised that this building's budget reflects only basic maintenance requirements because it is vacant. He stated that the increase in the Electricity line item is due to the general increase in electrical rates.

      Mr. Angersola advised that the porch to the River House is in bad shape. He reviewed several problems with the Annex building. He said he does not think it would be prudent to spend money repairing the structure and, consequently, recommends tearing it down. He stated that the only vehicles currently stored there are the Senior van and medical vehicle.

      Mr. Angersola stated that he has not been able to secure quotes for the demolition work; however, he has submitted an estimated Capital request of $150k for the work.

   D. Grange Hall Operating – A 0.06% decrease (-$100.00) was reflected in this budget. There was a general discussion regarding the Building Maintenance line item and Ms. Zemienieski advised that the $9,000.00 building maintenance budget line contains funding for window replacement or repair, as needed.

E. Millington School House Operating – An 850.8% ($10,380.00) was reflected in this budget. Mr. Angersola stated that the Schoolhouse is basically in good shape; however, some clapboards need to be replaced and the building needs to be painted. He said that the flagpole bracket and front steps also need to be repaired. He suggested that two sides of the building can be painted in each of the next two fiscal years.

F. Municipal Office Complex/Central Services Operating/Capital – A 8.2% ($30,806.00) was reflected in the Municipal Office Complex Operating budget. It was noted that the primary drivers of the increase were due to mandated Water Testing costs (34.2% - $1,300.00) and the overall increase in utility expenses (22.2% - $20k for electrical and 19.5% - $6,250.00 for bottled gas). In response to a question from Mr. Dill, Mr. Angersola stated that he projected the cost of the phone system will stabilize with the new system. Ms. Zemienieski provided additional clarification and also noted that the line item includes all of the Town's phone and fax services.

Mr. Angersola reviewed the following proposed MOC Capital projects:

- Parking Lot Resealing ($26,907.00) – In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Mr. Angersola recommended getting this project done in FY2025-2026 and also to put it into a regular Capital projects rotation going forward.

- MOC LED Sign ($50,000.00) – Mr. Angersola stated that the electrical conduit for a LED sign was installed when the building was renovated. He stated that he has projected $50k for the sign and a foundation. He agreed to ask Craig Mansfield, who chaired the Municipal Office Building Committee, if there are funds still in the Committee's budget for this project. He also agreed to follow-up with the Planning & Zoning Commission to determine if the sign will comply with P&Z regulations.

G. Fire Marshal Operating – A 8.4% ($478.00) increase was reflected in this budget. Mr. Angersola reviewed increases in the Repairs & Maintenance line (200% - $1,200.00), the Telephone/Cell Phone line (6.6% - $34.00), and the Gasoline/Diesel line (66.7% - $1,000.00).

H. Cemetery Maintenance Operating – A 338.4% ($24,700.00) increase was reflected in this budget line. Facilities Director Angersola recommended budgeting $60k over three years to removed all of the dead trees in the Town's cemeteries.

I. Town Greens, Grounds and Fields Operating/Capital – A 36.8% ($55,048.00) was reflected in this department's Operating budget. Mr. Angersola stated that there are two full-time workers in the department covering 38 Town properties and; therefore, due to work loads, he is requesting another full-time Grounds Maintainer be added to the budget. He reviewed the job responsibilities for this position and responded to questions from the Board. Ms. Belles noted that this expense should correctly be carried in the Grounds Maintenance budget line.

In response to a question from Ms. Bourgoin, Mr. Angersola stated that the increase in the Gasoline/Diesel line reflects more usage as well as anticipated increases in the cost of both types of fuel. He noted that the department uses more diesel fuel than it does gasoline.

Mr. Angersola reviewed the following Capital requests:

- Service Truck 24EM ($88,563.00) – Mr. Angersola stated that he would like to replace a 2015 Ford 250 and plow and the proposed vehicle would be used for plowing, sanding, and leaf removal.

- Ventrac Tractor ($21,500.00) – Mr. Angersola stated that this capital item would replace a 2013 Ventrac tractor which is used for snow removal on all of the Town owned sidewalks. There was a general discussion about leasing this piece of equipment.

J. Land Use Office Operating/Capital – A 15.2% (32,591.00) increase was reflected in this budget. Land Use Director Ventres stated that the increase is primarily related to a $4,000.00 (400%) increase in the WPCA Engineer line. He reviewed a recent system failure which he stated could have had catastrophic consequences. He advised that there were design and construction issues with the system.

Mr. Ventres said that the construction problems have been addressed but new design that allow for regular maintenance of the system should be drafted. He stated that DEEP requires engineered drawings to approve any modifications to the system.

Mr. Ventres agreed with Ms. Belles recommendation to move the $7,500.00 from the Engineer-WPCA line to the Transfer to WPCA line. He responded to several questions from the Board. In response to questions from Ms. Haines, he stated that the plant and pump house are situated above the current floodplain stage. Mr. Ventres noted that the plant building that houses all of the systems electronics and UV system will need a new roof in a few years and he has a preliminary estimate of $12k for that work.

Mr. Ventres and the Board discussed blighted properties and Ms. Haines stated that funds were added to the Town's legal budget for these issues. Mr. Ventres confirmed that he did not increase funding for any of the other Board or Commissions carried in the Land Use Operating budget.

The following Capital projects were discussed:

- Moodus Center ($30,000.00) – Mr. Ventres requested this Capital request be resubmitted.

- Plan of Conservation & Development ($40,000.00) – Mr. Ventres requested this Capital request be resubmitted.

Mr. Ventres and the Board discussed the need for more a grant writing expertise. There was a general discussion about the availability of grant funds for municipalities and how to best staff a grant writer(s) program.

In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Mr. Ventres confirmed that there were no changes to the Zoning Board of Appeals, and Historic District Commission budgets; he stated that there is an $1,000.00 increase in the Open Space Commission's FY2025-20126 budget for Signage.

K. Conservation Commission Operating – An 11% ($1,600.00) increase was reflected in this budget. Mr. Sina reviewed the increase to the Conservation Commission's FY2025-2026 budget. He stated that the Commission is encouraging people to use the QR codes for the open space trail maps but there are still some that request paper maps. He noted that there are potential savings if the Board wants to eliminate funding for Books & Periodicals and reduce the Conference budget line. Mr. Sina responded to questions from the Board.

L. Economic Development Commission Operating/Capital – A 1.8% ($487.00) increase was reflected in this budget. Mr. Casner noted that the only increase in the Operating budget was the standard 2.5% increase in Salaries and Wages.

Mr. Casner expressed a need for a Town Planner and/or Grant writer position and Ms. Haines filled him in on the discussion about establishing funding to support retaining grant expertise for the Town.

The following Capital items were discussed:

- Bike Path – Mr. Casner confirmed that he would like to have this Capital request submitted for $12,000.00 in FY2025-2026. There was a general discussion regarding the funding for the bike path and Ms. Belles reviewed the funding history for this Capital request. Mr. Casner noted that the project is also supported by Haddam and Chester and, as a multi-town project, would be a good candidate for grant funds. In response to a question from the Board, he confirmed that EDC would continue to move forward with this project even if Haddan and/or Chester dropped out.

  There was a general discussion regarding EDC's Heritage Market initiative.

M. Cemetery Committee Operating/Capital – The Cemeteries Maintenance Operating budget was discussed earlier in the meeting by Facilities Director Angersola and that item is covered in the above minutes.

Ms. Denette stated that there are ten Town-owned cemeteries to be maintained. She stated the Committee is requesting $2,000.00 for their FY2025-2026 Operating budget for a workshop, clean-up day, supplies and/or grant matching funds. She noted that they have submitted a grant application for the expense to remove dead/dying trees around the cemeteries.

Mr. Sofko noted that the fence at Bashan Lake cemetery is gone and the stairway and railing at the entrance of the Warner cemetery also need to be rebuilt.

Ms. Haines advised that the Cemetery Troopers had spoken with Board of Finance Chairman Gelston about the tree problem at the cemeteries and Mr. Gelston had instructed Facilities Director Angersola to request $20k be added to the Cemeteries Maintenance budget for the next three fiscal years to address the problem. Ms. Zemienieski stated that there is also the standard $10k in the FY2025-2026 budget for general maintenance of the cemeteries.

There was a general discussion about what level of input the Cemetery Committee should have on general maintenance work at the cemeteries. Ms. Haines suggested the Committee members work with the Facilities Director to plan for and implement repairs at the Town-owned cemeteries.

The following Capital request was discussed:

- Annual Work on Cemeteries & Surveys – Ms. Denette stated that, in keeping with the Committee's charge, their capital goal is to establish and layout a new public cemetery. In response to a question from Ms. Belles, Ms. Denette confirmed that the Cemetery Committee would like to resubmit this capital request and increase it to $13k for survey and appraisal work.

  In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Ms. Belles confirmed that there is currently $12,825.00 in this account.

  Ms. Haines reported that Land Use Administrator is working on acquiring additional ground for the Smith Road/Mt. Parnassus Cemetery. She recommended establishing a Capital account or bonding plan for land acquisition for a new/expanded public cemetery.

N. Other Operating/Capital Budget Discussions – The following budgets were discussed:

- Libraries (Repairs & Maintenance) – In response to a question raised by Ms. Haines, Mr. Angersola confirmed that installing a wooden guard rail between the Rathbun Library's and Post Office's parking lots should be done in FY2025-2026 to avoid further damage to the parking lot. There was a general discussion about disrupting the library's overflow parking in the Post Office lot during evening events and Mr. Angersola noted that there could be room to pick up some additional spaces along the lawn on the library side.

- Libraries (Heat) – Mr. Angersola noted that the increase in the Heat expense ($7,000.00) is appropriate because the mini-splits at the Rathbun need back-up from the oil furnace when the temperatures drop below a certain degree. He said he can look into shrink wrapping the windows next winter.

- Rathbun Library – Capital – Ms. Zemienieski noted that a Capital request for replacement of the Rathbun Library windows is pending resubmission and Mr. Angersola advised that the window plan is "fix as needed" rather than replacing them. He confirmed that she could close out the Capital request.

- Public Works – Capital – In response to questions from the Board, Mr. Angersola confirmed that applying rubber over the metal roof on the Public Works shop is the best option and noted the process has a 10-12 year life span. He stated that he is still trying to secure bids for this project and, if necessary, it could be pushed out to FY2026-2027.

- Senior Center – Capital) – Mr. Angersola confirmed that the Senior Center boiler has been operating well and that it could be repaired if necessary; however, he emphasized that it is 20-years old and at the end of its useful life.

- Recreation Commission (Capital) – In response to a question from Ms. Haines, Mr. Angersola confirmed that there is space at the Town beach for an outdoor volleyball court; however, the proposed location may present problems for Public Works and his crew to gain access to the beach buildings. He stated he would discuss appropriate locations at the beach for the volleyball court with Recreation Director Conroy.

- Shared Services – There was a general discussion regarding the Salaries & Wages budget line. Ms. Belles advised that the IT salaries that the BOE approved in June 2025 did not align with that fiscal year's budget. She stated that she wants to ensure that the BOE's June 2026's approved salaries align properly with the FY2025-2026 budget.

Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the February 26th budget workshop agenda.

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 7:47 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary