TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 10, 2025
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

Board of Finance Members:
William Barney
Joseph Corbett
Todd Gelston
Maureen Goff
Eric Kolasinski
Harvey Thomas

Others: Valerie Belles, Finance Director
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman
Craig Mansfield, Director of Emergency Management
Joseph McGuire, BETA Group
David Stein, Silver Petrucelli & Associates
Michele Velez, Public Works Director
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

There were no guest or audience comments raised at the meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to move New Business items 9a and 9b up on the agenda for discussion next. Motion was seconded by Ms. Goff and unanimously approved. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Town Wide Pavement Condition Assessment Presentation – Beta Group – Mr. McGuire presented on the findings from the pavement management study that BETA group carried out for the Town. He stated that the results of the study will be used by the Public Works Department as a planning tool that uses the data to make informed decisions on their road management projects.

Mr. McGuire reviewed the approach used by the BETA group and stated that he is currently reviewing the analysis of the existing road conditions with Public Works Director Velez. He said that the next steps are to develop a multi-year plan for the Town's road reclamation projects and then deploy the system and data for the Town's use moving forward. He noted that BETA does not charge any user fees for their software.

He stated that, to date, they have analyzed approximately 107 miles of the Town's asphalt and chip-sealed road and will return to scan the gravel roads when the weather improves. He reported that the overall average rating of the Town's roads, on a scale of 0-100, is 59.27 and noted that the average rating in New England is 68 to 69.

Mr. McGuire informed the Selectmen that BETA estimates the cost of road repairs in New England is as follows: $48/sq. yard for major rehabilitation work; $18/sq. yard for minor rehabilitation work; $9.50/sq. yard for preventative maintenance, and $1/sq. yard for routine maintenance. He stated that East Haddam has 38.46 miles of road that requires major work and 14.12 miles of road that requires minor repair work.

Mr. McGuire projected the total cost to eliminate all of the backlog of rehabilitation work needed is $25.2M. He stated that that figure is for curb-to-curb paving and exclusive of any drainage, curbs, sidewalks or underground utility work along the roads. He recommended the Town establish a 3-5 year reclamation plan which should be re-accessed every 4-5 years.

In response to comments made by Mr. Thomas and Mr. Gelston about the impact of a well-maintained culvert and drainage system on the overall condition of roads, Ms. Velez confirmed that some of the Town's road problems are a result of the subbase infrastructure not being correct when it was laid. She and Mr. McGuire estimated it would cost an additional 15% of the $25.2M for drainage upgrades and repairs and that will be included in her capital projects planning process. Mr. McGuire confirmed that drainage and contours could be added into BETA's GIS system for the Town.

Ms. Velez and Mr. McGuire emphasized that they will need a budgetary figure before they can begin to develop a road reclamation plan. Public Works Director Velez requested $6M annually for a period of 5 years. There was a general discussion about the overall cost of the project and the taxpayers' appetite for funding it. The Board agreed that the next step is to invite the Town's bond counsel, Bill Lindsey, to a meeting to discuss funding options.

There was general agreement that the BOS and BOF need to be transparent with the public about the potential cost of a multi-year road reclamation project. Ms. Belles agreed to try to schedule a special meeting with Mr. Lindsay and the Board. Mr. Gelston thanked Mr. McGuire and Public Works Director Velez for the information they had provided.

b. <u>Moodus Firehouse Renovation Committee Project Update and Request for Funding</u> – Emergency Management Director Mansfield introduced David Stein of Silver & Petrucelli Associates and the members of the Fire Company No. 2 Renovation Committee. He provided background information on the firehouse renovation project and stated that the current building is routinely evacuated during major weather events and noted that the roof has a 1980's snow load rating.

Mr. Mansfield advised that three engineers had concluded that it would be unsafe to renovate and reuse current the Fire Company No. 2 building; consequently, the Renovation Committee has shifted its focus from a renovation project to a building project.

Mr. Stein went over a presentation on the structural integrity of pre-engineered buildings and stated that the Fire Company No. 2 building is well beyond its useful life for energy efficiency and structural integrity. He stated that Silver & Petrucelli had developed a conceptual design for a 14,000 sq. foot building on the existing site and reviewed the plans. Mr. Mansfield noted that the current firehouse is approximately 7,000 sq. feet; however, OSHA and other unfunded mandates necessitate a larger space.

Mr. Mansfield advised that the Committee had worked with Land Use Administrator Ventres to evaluate several alternative sites for a new firehouse and they had determined that the existing location is the best option. He noted that the entry and egress from the existing site is safer than the other properties they considered and it also has the added benefit of the fact that much of the existing infrastructure, including utility lines, the well, and septic system may be reusable. He also stated that the current location is preferable because most of the volunteers live in Moodus and the majority of the fire calls come in from the Moodus area.

Mr. Mansfield advised that the Committee's current goal is to get the project construction ready so that they can begin to apply for grants. He noted that $122,000.00 was approved for the renovation design, $60,000.00 has been paid out and they expect to use the remaining funds for a site survey and environmental work. He projected that it will cost approximately $233,000.00 to keep the project moving forward through 2025, a total of $588,000.00 to see the project through the entire design development phase, and $11M-$14M to construct the building.

Mr. Kolasinski noted that Fire Companies 1 and 2 are in very close proximity; however, Fire Company 3 is a 25 minute drive away. He stated that during the 9 years he was at Fire Company No. 2, the discussions had always been that the Harris property, which is a 12 minute drive from any point in Town, should be the location for any new firehouse. He noted that while Moodus may be the most populated area of East Haddam, he cautioned against forgetting about taxpayers in the rest of the Town.

There was a general discussion about the budgetary requests and appropriate location for the new firehouse. Mr. Thomas said that he agreed with Mr. Kolasinski's concern for considering all of the taxpayers when deciding on a location for the new firehouse. Mr. Gelston agreed and stated that, since the committee's charge had changed from a renovation project to a building project, he felt it should be presented to the citizens and voted on at referendum.

Mr. Gelston recognized former Town Clerk Deb Denette who recommended the BOS schedule a Town Meeting to ask citizens if it should appoint a Firehouse Building Committee and appropriate a specific amount of dollars to it to do its work. She noted that, in that way, the public can provide input and the Town achieves a public vote on the project. The Board agreed with Ms. Denette's recommendation.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence discussed at the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES=

a. Regular Meeting – January 13, 2025 – Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to the minutes of their January 13, 2025 regular meeting in their meeting packets.

Motion made by Mr. Barney to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 13, 2025 as written. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion. Ms. Goff abstained from the vote and the motion was approved by a majority of ayes. Motion carried.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

b. Board Sub-Committee Reports

i. Communications – Mr. Gelston reported that the Communications Sub-Committee published an article in the most recent edition of the East Haddam News listing the Budget Workshops schedule. He stated that the next article to be published will define financial terms for the public. He also advised that the Committee will begin work on updating the Citizen's Guide to the Budget.

ii. Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee – Mr. Thomas reported that the LRCIC last met on January 29th and input the evaluation ratings for the remaining capital projects for FY2025-2026 into ClearGov. He stated that the Committee's next meeting is scheduled for February 20th and that the BOF should have a fully ranked list of capital projects in time for their upcoming budget meetings.

iii. Financial Policies – There was no new update on this agenda item. Ms. Haines reminded the Board that she had submitted a request to update their Grant Approval policy. She stated that she would like them to consider waiving the BOF's approval requirement for small grants that do not require any matching or on-going expenditures for the Town.

c. Liaison Assignments – Mr. Barney reported that he has spoken with the Town Clerk, the Library Director, and the Director of Youth & Family Services concerning their FY2025-2026 budget plans. He stated that he will also reach out to the Director of Recreation.

Mr. Barney stated that, at her request, he had met with the Superintendent of Schools. He stated that he had asked for their projected enrollment figures and most recent standardized test scores. He stated that he believes that information is important for the taxpayers to know.

Ms. Goff reported that she will be reaching out to the Chairmen of the Boards of Selectmen and Education, as well as the Finance Department before the BOF's budget workshops begin.

FIRST SELECTMEN'S REPORT

First Selectmen Updates – Ms. Haines reported that two weeks ago, the bridge had failed an opening when one of the cables malfunctioned. She advised that a replacement cable was ordered and the crew will do the repair when it is received. She stated that the sidewalk is not open yet because the contractors are using sections of it as a staging area and added that they are still working on repairs to the pylons which will require lane closures on the bridge

Ms. Haines advised that the construction company is still anticipating completing the bridge work by the end of February with a formal opening in early March. She noted, however, that there will be one more 63-hour closure before then.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Belles explained that it has been an extremely busy time for the Finance Department and that, although the December 2024 financials are 90% completed, she was not comfortable providing incomplete financials for this meeting. She stated that the December 2024 and January 2025 financials will be available for the Board's next meeting and will be posted on the Town's website.

a. FY 2023-2024 Audit Update – Ms. Belles reported that the FY 2023-2024 audit is going very well and are targeted for a March or April closing. She advised that she did not recommend going out to bid for new auditors at this time. She stated that the facts that the Town has had two late audits and the FY 2023-2024 audit has not yet issued suggest complications and trouble with the financials which could have a significant negative impact on the bids the Town receives.

   Ms. Belles advised that the current firm has provided her with a quote for a 1-year contract and, with the agreement of the Board of Finance, she would like to request the Board of Selectmen approve a one-year bid waiver so that they can get back on track with regularly scheduled audits. She added that the Town could then go out to bid for a 3-year contract in the normal timeframe in the fall of 2025.

   Ms. Belles responded to questions from the Board and confirmed that CLA's bid for a 1-year contract includes a 5% increase over this year's fee. The Board concurred with Ms. Belles' recommendation and she stated she would put together a letter requesting the bid waiver to the BOS for their February 19th meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed at the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Town Wide Pavement Condition Assessment Presentation – Beta Group – This agenda item was discussed earlier in the meeting and is covered in the above minutes.

b. Moodus Firehouse Renovation Committee Project Update and Request for Funding – This agenda item was discussed earlier in the meeting and is covered in the above minutes.

c. Grant Application – 2025 Neglected Cemetery Grant – Ms. Denette provided information concerning the conditions of the cemeteries and how the plan is to utilize grant funding for tree work. It is a competitive grant.

Motion made by Mr. Barney to approve a 2025 Neglected Cemetery Grant application for $5,000.00, with no matching funds required. Ms. Goff seconded the motion.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to adjourn the meeting at 9:32 p.m. Mr. Barney seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
William Barney
Secretary