

TOWN OF EAST HADDAM

Special Meeting

March 12, 2015

Town Grange

The special meeting of the East Haddam Board of Finance was called to order at 6:24 pm by Chairman Susan Link.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members:

Susan Link, Chairman

Bruce Dutch

Harvey Thomas

Ray Willis

Others:

Mark B. Walter, First Selectman

Deb Denette, Town Clerk and recording secretary

Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director

Approximately 12 individuals in the audience, in and out throughout the meeting.

2015-2016 BUDGET WORKSHOP

a. Public Works

Public Works Administrator Beth Lunt began with an overview of the snow budget for 2014-2015. She stated that if no additional events occur, the line is \$43,000 over budget. She noted that so many of the snow events came on Sunday evenings. Mrs. Link inquired where the funding for the overage would come from. Mr. Bennett suggested contingency. Mrs. Varricchio suggested a special appropriation in June. Mrs. Link stated that funding from contingency has already been taxed, she would prefer to take it from there. It was also noted that there is only \$40,000 remaining in contingency and the line is \$43,000 over on March 12. It was reiterated that no determination needs to be made at this time. Mr. Thomas suggested that perhaps the methodology of estimating the snow removal budget should be reviewed. Mr. Willis suggested that the extreme years be discounted from the five year rolling average.

Mrs. Lunt began a review of the 2015-2016 proposed budget. She noted that salt costs have escalated. She stated that she tried to keep the budget as flat as possible. She noted that salaries are being determined by union contract, which is under negotiation. There was again discussion that the maintenance (cleaning of town buildings) line should be moved from Public Works to Central Services. Mr. Dutch inquired who oversaw the cleaning crew. It was noted that it depended upon the building.

Mrs. Link inquired about the summer workers. Mrs. Lunt replied that typically two college students are hired at the rate of \$10.00 per hour. Examples of duties were noted to be keeping site lines clear (weed whacking), assist Park and Recreation with set up of the stage and trim bushes, painting out buildings, etc.

Responsive to inquiry from Mrs. Link, it was noted that the Transfer Station receives \$60,000 in revenue and costs \$560,000 to operate. It was noted that costs have gone up due to increases in hauling fees (renegotiated for the next two years from \$136 a ton to \$140 a ton) and propane. Again, the possibility of a charge for a dump sticker was referenced.

The vehicles the town maintains are on a ten year replacement cycle. This year it is time to replace truck #15, which is a more expensive vehicle. The current winter was noted to have been particularly hard on the trucks. When a truck is replaced, the older vehicle is retained as a spare. When it can no longer be utilized by the town it is auctioned. Typically there is very little value left to the vehicle at that time.

O'Connell Road Extension is the major road being undertaken this year. It was noted that in addition to the \$427,000 budgeted there is \$63,000 in the capital projects fund from prior years that will be used for this project. Orchard and Landing Hill are also targeted.

Determination on where the funds for the purchase of the truck would come; general fund vs. reserves was left to the Board of Finance to determine as the Board of Selectmen could not agree.

No capital was requested for the Transfer Station. Mr. Walter reminded the Board, however, that a STEAP grant in the amount of \$500,000 was applied for in order to effectuate upgrades at the Transfer Station facility.

Other Budget Discussion:

Mrs. Varricchio reported that she had transposed a number resulting in a \$10,000 reduction under the transfer to the Animal Control Special Revenue Fund.. She stated that this reduction takes the proposed mill rate impact to the budget from 1.08 to 1.07. Mr. Bennett asked to be reminded what dollar amount a mill impacted the average homeowner. He was referred to a chart in the beginning of the book, 1.07 would have an approximate \$180 to \$200 annual assessment increase to the average homeowner.

b. Conservation Commission:

Rob Smith and Todd Gelston joined the Board at the table. Mr. Smith noted that the Board of Selectmen reduced the budget, which they hoped to have reinstated.

He noted that the walking trail guides are very popular and should be published again shortly. He noted other educational materials and trail guides. He also noted endeavors with the Boy Scouts. Mrs. Link questioned what the Conservation Commission utilized for supplies. Mr. Smith responded that it is paint for marking trails, gravel for parking and other wet areas, equipment rental, post rails and signage. Mrs. Link inquired if there was a list for what was needed. Mr. Smith reported that the Commission establishes priority areas, and addresses supplies as dictated by the terrain. Rose Farm, and Hemlock Valley Preserve are priorities and will need bridges,

the size and amount will depend on where crossings occur, which is determined predominantly by ledge. A parking area is also targeted for the Lord Wellington preserve.

Mr. Walter was asked to address why the Board of Selectmen reduced the Conservation Commission budget. Mr. Walter responded that the Board felt that as it has the equipment the Conservation Commission is looking to rent, that it could be handled through Public Works. Mr. Smith stated that it was hopeful that Public Works would do this work, however, they were too busy. He stated that when he met with Mr. Walter and Ms. Lunt, Ms. Lunt stated that the supplies needed could not come from her budget so they were put in the budget which Mr. Walter cut out. His frustration was noted.

Mr. Gelston added that when Public Works did address some work for the Commission, it was "Just Done". The Commission was not notified, so that no one was there to oversee; the bulldozing that occurred was way above the scope of what they wanted accomplished.

Mr. Walter stated that with better communication and instruction a better scenario can occur.

Mr. Smith added that supplies are provided when the Boy Scouts do a project. They have built a campsite on the Hatch lot and are adding kiosks with trail mapping.

Mr. Walter stated that he did not object to restoring the budget as requested by the Conservation Commission. The Board agreed to add \$4,500 back to the Conservation Commission budget.

Mr. Willis stated that it baffled him that the Town spends \$5,000,000 on purchasing open space and then chintzes on \$4,500 so that it can be utilized.

Lastly it was noted that the town budgeted for \$15,000 for a bridge and that it was hoped that the Commission could generate matching funds. Mr. Smith reported that it is receiving the funding in the form of a several grants. They have met the project matching requirement and hope to get started when the ground clears. Engineering is occurring.

c. Fire Department:

Shawn Daigle, Mickey Pear and Mike Cooley presented. They noted that they endeavor to keep the budget as flat as possible. He noted that the reporting methodology has changed with breakouts to career and volunteer. Increases to gear lines were included as the volunteer force has grown (thankfully) and that the career firefighters require multiple sets. It was noted that some savings may be generated by purchasing gear that is not rated for interior fires.

The continued goal to increase fire ponds was noted. It was also noted that the first fire hydrant is going in at Dutch propane.

Regarding facilities, the boiler at company #3 is failing and the boiler at company #2 is starting to have problems. The tanker is 20 years old, however, rather than replace it at the approximate cost of \$350,000 we are in the process of refurbishing at an estimated cost of \$120,000 to \$130,000.

It was also noted that all air packs were procured simultaneously as the result of a grant obtained in 2004. These are only allowed to be in service for ten years and then must be replaced. It was suggested that reserves should be appropriated for replacement. Fuel and gas savings were noted.

d. Fire Marshal:

Donald Angersola stated that his budget request was roughly status quo. He stated, however, that the Board of Selectmen cut his line on educational materials which is problematic for continuing education at the schools. Mr. Walter stated that Mr. Angersola was not in attendance when the Board reviewed his budget and they thought that this was a one-time expense that had already occurred. Mr. Walter stated that he did not object to the funding being reinstated. Mr. Angersola stated that he is okay with the cuts the Board of Selectmen had made to equipment.

The technology request was reviewed. The request is for integrated software for reporting requirements. Presently there is one computer that tracks on a system that is ten years old. The new program is web based and can be done from anywhere with internet connection.

e. General Budget Discussion:

The Board began discussion at this time regarding where it felt the budget should be. Mr. Willis stated that he was concerned with the education budget. With declining enrollment the budget should not be escalating at the rate that it is. Mrs. Link responded that there are a lot of items that are not controllable in the Board of Education budget. Mr. Willis stated that he didn't feel enough of an effort was being made to reduce costs. Mrs. Link stated that the Superintendent is only in his first year. Mr. Willis continued that he felt that the administration has not made enough effort and that it lacks business experience.

Mr. Thomas stated that the proposed increase is \$930,000. He stated that he would be able to support a budget with a \$400,000 increase, but not with any more than that. He added that he would like to think about all that was presented over the weekend.

Mr. Dutch concurred that he did not want to cut the budget too much, Mr. Willis stated that reducing the budget would force them to be more prudent with the dollars they receive. Mrs. Link noted the increases to salaries and benefits. Mr. Willis stated that he could accept the suggestion offered by Mr. Thomas. He further noted that plans and strategies need to be developed to address the declining enrollment and that he was not confident that it is being addressed.

Mr. Dutch stated that he concurs that cuts need to be made, his feeling is that it is somewhere between no cuts and the \$500,000 cut Mr. Thomas suggested.

It was noted that the proposed budget represents a \$245,370 increase to general government and a \$694,312 increase to the Board of Education. Mr. Dutch asked Mrs. Link how sensitive the Board of Education would be to the concerns raised by Mr. Thomas and Mr. Willis? She stated that they are very sensitive, they are looking at money they cannot budget for, trying to figure out what can do with the people that we have, trying to bring special education back to town. Mrs. Link stated that she will ask the Superintendent to come to Monday's meeting.

Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 8:27 pm. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette