

TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 21, 2019
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 and 2

Mr. DiCristofaro called the Board of Finance meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and recording devices started.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members

William DiCristofaro, Chairman
Gregory Lauria, Secretary
Bruce Dutch
Todd Gelston
Harvey Thomas

Others

Emmett J. Lyman, First Selectman
Robert Smith, Selectman
Debra Denette, Town Clerk and Recording Secretary
Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director
Linda Zemienieski, Executive Assistant to the First Selectman
Jay Moreau
David Holahan

Mr. DiCristofaro noted that lots of hours are being devoted to preparation of the budget. He thanked all for their time.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None.

BOARD OF FINANCE BUDGET REVIEW

Mr. DiCristofaro noted there is a Board of Finance meeting scheduled for April 8 and the Public Hearing for the budget will be held on April 10. He suggested that the April 8 meeting be cancelled and any business that needed attention could be combined with the meeting on April 10. There was no objection.

Public Works

Beth Lunt, Director of the Public Works department thanked the Board for providing many of its questions in advance. She spoke at length about the challenges facing Public Works, these included:

- Staffing shortages, staff is prohibited from taking vacations during the winter months to be available for plowing. There are over 1,200 hours available for current staff to be utilized over the summer. Medical matters are adding to the shortages.
- A September, 2018 storm created approximately \$3,700,000 in damages to the town's roads. 75% of these costs are FEMA eligible.
- There are well over 1,500 dead and dying trees due to drought, and insect infestation.
- The same equipment is needed for both storm remediation and tree removal.
- Regular work such as, drainage maintenance, tree trimming, road side mowing, street sweeping still must occur.

Mr. DiCristofaro inquired how priorities were established. Mrs. Lunt responded that the first priority is always public safety, followed by prevention to future damage to the infrastructure. Mrs. Lunt stated that she makes recommendations to the First Selectman to establish priorities. Further dialog ensued relative to the storm damage; Mrs. Lunt noted that the roadsides have been temporarily stabilized, however, to prevent further damage topsoil and vegetation are needed. She noted that this is not a safety issue.

Regarding the staffing shortages, it was noted that an additional four people are needed. It was also noted that the town can utilize staff hours in lieu of the 25% match associated with FEMA. The three major projects resulting from the storm, that also need engineering are Neptune Avenue, Bonfoey Road and Hemlock Valley Road. Gravel roads make up the majority of the monetary damage, in some cases up to five feet of material washed away, new bases need to be established. The lack of a roller was an additional challenge.

Responsive to inquiry from Mr. DiCristofaro, Mr. Lyman noted that this presents a good picture that there is not enough manpower and highlights other challenges.

Discussion was held regarding the costs and benefits of hiring temporary personnel, increasing personnel and hiring contractors. It was noted that roadside mowing is much more cost effective to do in house then to hire out.

Discussion regarding the Transfer station ensued.

Mrs. Lunt noted that revenue collection does not correspond with intake of bulky waste. She noted that the bulky waste is not covered, and that results in water retention of many of the items, particularly furniture, drywall and cardboard. She stated that a textile bin has been added. Mrs. Lunt noted that the traffic pattern is being rerouted to better control access and that a camera system is being installed. Waste leaving the facility is now being weighed to verify costs associated with waste received. Mrs. Lunt noted frustration with the lack of authority to enforce the rules. Mr. Dutch inquired what good the cameras would do as there is not an enforcement component to it. Mrs. Lunt suggested that it would keep people honest.

The cost of recyclables has increased. Historically we received a credit, we will begin paying \$40.00 per ton. The need to better educate our residents was emphasized. Tracking is now occurring of the weight of items from the schools and municipal departments. Mr. Gelston suggested that the scale may not be properly calibrated.

Mr. Thomas suggested that an electric gate would be better obeyed than an orange cone. Mrs. Lunt stated that was her recommendation but it was not well received.

Mr. Thomas sought clarification on the proposed "bag system". Mr. Lyman stated that citizens will pay to dispose of waste, but not recyclables. This in turn should encourage recycling. Mr. Thomas also stated it may increase litter and spoil recyclables as items may end up there that do not belong there. Mr. Lyman stated that the theory is that less waste will end up in the hopper. It was noted that the process is contingent upon what happens with the commercial haulers.

Responsive to inquiry from Mr. DiCristofaro, Mrs. Lunt stated that staff is supposed to be issuing the stickers. She reiterated that there is not an enforcement aspect. She further inquired what staff should do when people become confrontational. Mr. Gelston suggested that better signage would be appropriate. Mrs. Varricchio added that a petition may be presented to stop the "pay as you throw" concept.

Mrs. Varricchio noted that the Public Works budget requested two additional full time employees and the purchase of a bucket truck with a budget impact of \$418,803. The Board of Selectmen removed the hiring of additional personnel, eliminated the bucket truck and added \$125,400 for purchased services regarding tree removal. It was anticipated that this would allow for the removal of 375 trees by a vendor and Public Works employees would do clean up. Mrs. Lunt stated that staffing the clean up would not allow for other work to be done.

Lengthy discussion was held regarding the reasons for the dead and dying trees. It was noted that the scope of the increasing problem will be more visible when the trees leaf out. Mrs. Lunt noted that the method in which the trees are dying is causing the trees to become very brittle making cutting and pushing them over dangerous from falling limbs from above. Mr. Gelston noted that if Eversource would shut off the power to allow an entire street to be worked on, it would be much more cost effective. That was not noted to be an option.

Mr. Thomas noted the costs for tree work being undertaken in other towns and inquired whether East Haddam had more risk.

Mr. Lauria noted that there are still not enough employees to address the workload within the Selectmen's proposal. Mr. DiCristofaro inquired how helpful would it be to take out all of the FEMA work and provide temporary personnel to avoid permanent hires. Mrs. Lunt stated that it would be very helpful.

GENERAL BOARD DISCUSSION

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that Public Safety discussion will occur on Saturday. He stated that he would like to wrap up those discussions by noon and after lunch have discussion with the goal to vote on a budget to send forward.

Mr. Dutch noted that it appears that many of the items presented are pay now or pay later, but either way we need to pay. Mr. Lyman noted that Mrs. Lunt is not in an enviable position and he commended her for work performed. He added that enforcement of rules is an issue at the Transfer

Station and what do you do when the public becomes belligerent and defensive. Mr. Thomas stated that most people are cooperative and honest, and the rules should not be relaxed for all because of a select few.

GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

David Holohan inquired if there would be a town vote on implementation of the bag system. Mr. Lyman stated that Town Counsel has advised that the Selectmen can implement it. He added, however, that a town vote would be required to eliminate the commercial haulers from utilizing the Transfer Station, as the ordinance presently allows it. Mr. Holohan inquired about a time frame, none was given. Mr. Lyman did state that there will be education prior to said implementation of a bag system, particularly small forums would be targeted. He also noted that there is a likelihood that a petition may be brought forward to maintain status quo.

Motion was made Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 8:53 pm. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette