

Board of Selectmen  
Municipal Office Complex  
Meeting Rooms 1/2  
February 12, 2020  
Special Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: R. Smith; T. Govert; C. Quinn

Also Present: E. Blaschik; M. Callahan; L. Conroy; D. Denette; D. Dill; M. Gilroy; M. Gleeson; Trooper P. Hawes; B. Lunt; T. McCabe; B. Parker; W. Thody; S. Wheeler; C. Varricchio; L. Zdanys; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public

1. Call to Order: First Selectman Smith called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:22 a.m.
2. 2020-2021 General Budget Review Workshop

Ms. Varricchio provided an overview of the contents of the budget books and noted that each of the departmental budgets contains a 5-year history and a 5-year average for each line. She reported that the Board of Education had approved their budget the previous evening.

Ms. Varricchio advised that the Long Range Capital Improvement Committee meeting was scheduled for later this evening and the Committee will provide their recommendations later in the week.

A. Public Safety Budgets

1. Police Officers & Police Capital: Trooper Hawes stated that the main priorities of the Police Department are to continue to reduce crime and increase their public outreach. He advised that the increase to the Police Officers budget was primarily due to the hiring of an additional officer for the School Resource Officer (SRO) position. In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Trooper Hawes stated that the 50% increase in the Equipment line was for the acquisition of rifle plates, a rifle and a rifle carrier for the SRO.

Ms. Varricchio noted that the union contract is in negotiations; however, the Salaries line for this department includes a placeholder for a 2.5% increase. Trooper Hawes responded to several questions from the Board concerning the department's general budget.

The Board reviewed Capital requests with Trooper Hawes who provided information on the existing vehicles. He confirmed that the department is on a standard 5-year vehicle rotation plan. Ms. Varricchio stated that she would provide information on the miles and cumulative hours of use for each vehicle.

Trooper Hawes stated that the request for a larger police boat has been on the list of Capital requests since 2011-2012. He stated that the current boat works well on the lakes but is not of a sufficient size to operate safely on the river.

Ms. Varricchio advised that a grant may be available for the Capital request to purchase body-cams.

2. Resident State Trooper: Ms. Zemienieski reported that the state will not provide projections for the rate of reimbursement the Town must make for the Resident State Trooper until March; however, she included a 3% increase as a placeholder. She noted that the current rate is 85%.

There was a general discussion regarding the Town's contribution to CT Municipal Employees' Retirement System (MERS).

## B. Public Works Budgets

1. General Highways: Public Works Director Lunt reviewed several increases in this budget. She stated that the department has been without a mechanic and, consequently, routine maintenance was deferred on many vehicles so the increase in this line item reflects catch-up maintenance; also, that the contractor that had been doing the Town's catch basin cleanout no longer does municipal work and the quotes she has received from other contractors are much higher.

Director Lunt advised that a number of routine road maintenance projects have been postponed due to competing priorities and, therefore, she is requesting two additional FTE's so that the department can appropriately manage all of its projects. Ms. Lunt responded to several questions from the Board and there was a general discussion regarding the long-range need for two additional full-time employees. Ms. Lunt confirmed that she believes there will be sufficient on-going work to justify the additional employees.

Ms. Varricchio stated that she would provide the Board with a report on the status of the 2019-2020 Repairs & Maintenance expense for the Public Works vehicles. Ms. Quinn requested additional detail regarding the department's routine projects that it cannot keep up with, road work, etc., to validate the need for the additional employees.

2. Snow Removal: Director Lunt advised that she bases her figures for this budget on a rolling 5-year historical average. She noted that the Wages line in this budget is only for overtime pay and not pay for regular hours worked. She confirmed that her department has sufficient equipment to do all of the Town's snowplowing; however, she must contract out some of the work because there are not enough qualified drivers on her staff to man the Public Works equipment. There was a general discussion about whether or not the expense of hiring contractors could be eliminated if the request for two additional employees is approved.

There was a general discussion regarding cost and environmental benefits of alternative road-treatment programs, to the one used by Public Works, and whether or not the alternative programs would be viable in East Haddam.

3. Tree Care and Removal: Director Lunt advised that the scope of the project to remove diseased/ dead trees has gone up from an inventory of 2000-3000 trees last budget season to 15,000 this year. She stated that the projected expense of \$1.75M for tree removal reflects the use of mechanized equipment and suggested the project could be budgeted over several years. Mr. Smith advised that he has requested an in-depth analysis of the problem and the options available to address it to assist the Board in their decision making for a budgeting plan. He noted that the Town is also negotiating with Eversource to coordinate efforts to mitigate some of the expense.

There were brief discussions about the identification/prioritization/removal process for diseased/dead trees, the potential to sell the wood from the felled trees and the expense of debris removal. Ms. Lunt responded to several questions from the Board.

4. Transfer Station: Director Lunt advised that the major impact to this budget was the cost of disposing of recyclables. She stated that, in the past, the Town had been paid for its recyclables; however, as of March 1<sup>st</sup> it would have to pay \$30 per ton to dispose of them. In response to an inquiry from Ms. Govert, Ms. Lunt provided detail on the cost of disposing municipal solid waste, bulky waste, and recyclables, as well as the hauling cost per trip. There was a general discussion regarding composting of organic waste at the Transfer Station. In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Ms. Lunt advised that the Town leases its recycling containers and related mechanicals from Willimantic Waste.

There was a brief discussion regarding the revenue generated from bulky waste fees and the pros and cons of hiring a part-time employee to staff the scale house.

5. Public Works/Transfer Station Capital: Director Lunt reviewed her Capital expenditures requests and agreed to provide supporting information regarding same. She confirmed that the Public Works trucks are on a 10-year replacement cycle and discussed her request to purchase a new dump truck and a backhoe for the Transfer Station. She also confirmed that the department's vehicles are purchased via a state bid.

Ms. Lunt described the "roof system" for the bulky waste bins included as a Capital request. Mr. Smith explained that debris in the open bins gets saturated in heavy rain storms and, because the fee to dispose of bulky waste is determined by weight, the expense can be significantly reduced if the bins are sheltered.

The Board agreed to a brief recess at 11:38 a.m. The meeting was reconvened at 11:47 a.m.

Public Works Director Lunt reviewed her Infrastructure Capital requests and responded to several questions from the Board. She stated that the planned culvert replacement project on Falls Bashan Road may qualify for a 50/50 local state grant match. Ms. Lunt reviewed the status of the storm damage repair projects and there was a general discussion regarding the related FEMA grant reimbursement.

#### C. Public Safety, General Government, Health & Social Services, Recreation & Leisure Budgets

1. Building Department: Building Official Thody reviewed this department's proposed budget and confirmed that his projected revenues were the same as the previous fiscal year's. The Board noted that the department's budget proposal was basically flat and Mr. Thody responded to several questions.
2. Recreation Commission & Recreation Capital: Recreation Director Conroy reported that the department's programs and revenues had increased from FY 2018-2019 to FY 2019-2020. She reviewed several increases to her 2020-2021 budget requests and suggested using funds from the department's Special Revenue account to pay for the requested volleyball net system. She noted that the subsequent new volleyball programs would help offset the withdrawal from the Special Revenue account. Ms. Conroy stated that the increase to the lifeguard salary expense was due, in part, to adjustments for the increased minimum wage rate. She responded to several questions from the Board and provided information about the Recreation Department's scholarship program.

Director Conroy discussed several capital requests, including the proposed municipal gym basketball backboard replacement project, and recommended postponing any budgetary commitments for refurbishing the municipal playing fields in favor of more imminent capital

needs requests. She discussed the need for a larger playground and reviewed several other capital requests.

3. Town Clerk: Ms. Denette noted that all of the Town Clerk's work is statutorily required and reviewed several of the department's statistics and cost-savings activities. She noted that she has no capital requests at this time. There was a brief discussion regarding the department's sources of revenue and Ms. Denette confirmed that her 2020-2021 revenue projections are flat.

The Board agreed to a lunch recess at 12:48 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 1:31 p.m.

4. Senior Services & Senior Services Capital: Senior Center Director Parker stated that there was only a minor increase in his budget request (2.3%) and responded to several questions from the Board. In response to an inquiry, he discussed the use of the medical car and stated that the \$5 per trip fee is added to a Special Revenue account that will be used to offset the cost of a replacement vehicle. He also explained how the Senior Club operates and noted that their fundraising efforts go to pay for many of the Senior Center expenses.

In response to a question from Ms. Govert, Mr. Parker provided background on the Meals on Wheels program. He explained how Town businesses and citizens provide donations to fill the gap caused by recent cut-backs in the program. Mr. Parker reviewed an extensive list of donations of equipment and supplies which help keep expenses at the Senior Center low.

Mr. Parker reviewed the Senior Services Capital requests with the Board.

5. Tax Collector: Tax Collector Dill stated that her 2020-2021 Budget proposal was basically flat compared to the previous FY's approved budget. In response to an inquiry, she confirmed that she retained the services of a collection agency last year and confirmed that the Town receives 100% of the back taxes and interest collected by the agency. She noted that the taxpayer is charged a 15% fee if their account was referred to collection and the agency received that fee as their payment.
6. Assessor: Assessor Zdanys reviewed this department's budget and it was noted she had requested only a minimal increase (2.2%) as a result of the projected across-the-board salary increase. Mr. Smith noted that the grand list had recently experienced a \$12M "bump" due to new/improved Eversource property assets in Town. In response to a question, Ms. Zdanys explained the Circuit Breaker program. She reviewed the department's Capital requests with the Board.

The Board agreed to a brief recess at 2:30 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 2:40 p.m.

7. Youth & Family Services: Director McCabe stated that the Youth & Family Service's budget was basically flat (1% increase) and reviewed revenue generated from state and BOE contributions and fundraising. Ms. McCabe distributed a condensed financial report and discussed several grants received by the agency.
8. Early Childhood Council: The board reviewed this program's budget and Mr. Smith advised that the program is funded jointly by the Town, the Board of Education and a United Way grant. Ms. Varricchio reviewed the history of the program and stated that Coordinator Kasperowski is carried on the BOE payroll.

9. East Haddam Public Library System & Library Capital: Library Director Gilroy reviewed the libraries' budget and noted an increase to the Books & Periodicals line. He stated that, since many of the library employees earn minimum wage, the increase to the state's mandatory minimum wage is expected to have an impact on the department's Salaries line. In response to a question from Ms. Govert, Mr. Gilroy stated that the expense of the libraries on-line network is carried in the Shared Services budget.

Mr. Gilroy reviewed the libraries' revenue from endowments and trusts. It was noted that a one-time transfer of approximately \$26-\$27k would be sent to the Town when it assumes ownership of the East Haddam Free Public Library building. Mr. Gilroy confirmed that the libraries plan to eliminate the late fee effective July 1<sup>st</sup> and that, as a result, contrary to general logic, it is expected that revenues will go up slightly.

Mr. Gilroy reviewed the Library System's Capital requests and noted that he believes the projected expense to conduct a feasibility study for a new library system is low. Ms. Varricchio agreed to research the cost of similar feasibility studies to determine a more realistic projection.

Mr. Gilroy reviewed the request to replace the boiler at the East Haddam Free Public Library and it was noted that the cost includes asbestos abatement. Mr. Gilroy advised that the boiler is 10 years past its projected life expectancy. He noted that several large capital improvements at the East Haddam Free Public Library and Rathbun Library had been postponed while the issue of transferring ownership of the EHFPL building to the Town was being resolved. He and the Board discussed requests for a new A/C system and new windows at the Rathbun Library. Ms. Varricchio stated she would provide the Board with an up-to-date list of capital projects completed and which still remain on the to-do list.

There was a general discussion about the state of ADA compliance at the libraries and Mr. Gilroy noted that the buildings do not offer sufficient physical space to achieve a fully ADA compliant status.

The Board agreed to a brief recess at 3:32 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 3:36 p.m.

10. Conservation Commission: Chairperson Gleeson reviewed the Conservation Commission's budget request and several planned projects. She discussed a current Eagle Scout project and noted the challenge in acquiring stewardship volunteers. Mr. Smith noted the benefits of the proposed surveying project. Ms. Gleeson responded to several questions from the Board and explained the increase to the Communications and Conferences budget lines. She also noted that the Commission had decreased their Printing budget line since more people are downloading trail maps on-line.
- D. Debt Service: Ms. Varricchio reviewed information in this section of the budget book and noted that the Town's debt ratio is well below the state's statutory maximum per capita ratio. She stated that as debt is reduced, the difference is transferred over to Capital Reserves.
  - E. Interfund Transfers: This agenda item was postponed.
  - F. Shared Services – This agenda item was postponed.
  - G. Capital Improvement Detail – This agenda item was postponed.

H. General Fund Revenue Detail: This agenda item was postponed.

I. Other Budgets Items: Mr. Smith recognized Mr. E. Blaschik who discussed the Board of Assessment Appeals budget.

Mr. Blaschik stated that there was no increase to the Board of Assessment Appeals budget. He noted that most of the Board's activity occurs during the second half of the fiscal year, consequently expenses for the current budget are not reflective of a majority of their activity for the year. He stated that the deadline for property assessment appeals is February 20<sup>th</sup> and the Board presently has received six appeals to consider. Mr. E. Blaschik responded to several questions from the Board and there was a general discussion about the planned 2021-2022 re-valuation.

3. Public Comment: There was no public comment at the meeting.

4. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned the meeting at 3:58 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,  
Theresa Govert, Secretary