

Board of Selectmen  
Municipal Office Complex  
Meeting Rooms 1/2  
February 15, 2020  
Special Meeting Minutes

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

Also Present: B. Auld; E. Blaschik; H. Bogue; M. Callahan; B. Dutch; I. Haines; M. Hansen; Eric Kolasinski; J. Spencer; L. Salicrup; J. Sarnik; R. Turner; S. Wheeler; C. Varricchio; 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 9:08 a.m.

2. 2020-2021 General Budget Review Workshop

Ms. Varricchio distributed information on revenue and copies of her follow-ups from questions raised at the February 12<sup>th</sup> Budget Workshop. She called the Board's attention to adjustments in several budgets and stated she would provide a summary of Special Revenue funds at the next meeting.

Finance Director Varricchio noted that the Town no longer receives funding from the state for the Circuit Breaker program and there was a general discussion regarding unfunded state mandates.

Ms. Varricchio reviewed revenue from tax receipts, grants, state and local PILOT payments, and various other sources.

A. Public Safety Budgets

1. Fire Department Operating & Capital: Ms. J. Spencer stated that the department's goals are to continue to improve its compliance with NFPA guidelines and to continue its public outreach. In response to a question, she confirmed that most of the department's equipment is in good shape; however, some of it needs to be replaced or refurbished. She noted that they are working on a FEMA grant for a Quint fire apparatus.

Ms. Spencer stated that the item that will have the main impact on their 2020-2021 budget is the department's request to add a full-time person to their staff. She advised that there are times during the day when there is no coverage by a regular fire fighter because the scheduled part-timers have been called into work at their full-time jobs. In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Ms. Spencer confirmed that the full-time position would provide coverage during the period of 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. She noted that, with the addition of another staff member there may also be additional overtime.

Mr. Sarnik advised that the department is completing a FEMA grant for a Quint ladder truck which will require a match of approximately 10% from the Town. The Town's grant process was discussed and Mr. Sarnik stated he would work with Finance Director Varricchio on the grant application.

In response to questions from Mr. Smith, Ms. Spencer provided information on the department's request to increase the Equipment Maintenance line by \$15,000.00 and why the 2019-2020 Building Maintenance line was over budget. Several other operating budget lines were discussed such as Building Maintenance, Fire Ponds, uniforms/gear and communications.

The Board and Fire Department members discussed the department's 2020-2021 Capital requests. Mr. Sarnik and Mr. Kolasinski stated that the FEMA grant for the Quint has a cap of \$1M but they are trying to keep their request to no more than \$750,000.00 to improve their chances of getting it approved. They noted that they are trying to include as many required equipment and accessories into the grant as possible. In response to a question from Ms. Varricchio, there was a brief discussion concerning what the department would do if the grant is not approved. Mr. Smith noted that it was his understanding that the Quint would replace two fire trucks and Mr. Sarnik not necessarily by ISO rating standards and stated the department would like to repurpose reserves to refurbish one of the trucks.

Ms. Spencer and Mr. Sarnik reviewed several other Capital requests such as air pack replacement, video access cameras, hydraulic extrication equipment, AED/thumper, fire hoses and thermal imaging camera. Ms. Spencer and Mr. Sarnik responded to several questions from the Board.

The Board agreed to take a brief break at 10:30 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:42 a.m.

#### B. General Government Budgets

1. Elections/Registrars: In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Ms. Hansen and Ms. Salicrup stated that they were happy with the switch from an hourly rate of pay to an annual stipend. The Registrars noted that their budget was flat other than the 2.5% salary increase placeholder. Ms. Hansen recommended that the Town begin planning for replacement of the voting tabulators. She confirmed that the state determines when the machines must be replaced and the projected expense will be \$30,000.00 to \$40,000.00. Ms. Varricchio stated she will make a note to include it in reserves for the next two fiscal years.

The Registrars and Board discussed moving the old polling booths to the old Town Hall for storage. Ms. Hansen stated the Town should establish a back-up voting location and having the old booths at the old Town Hall would make the transition smoother for any potential temporary re-location.

#### C. General Government, Health & Social Services, Recreation & Leisure Budgets (Building & Grounds Budgets)

Ms. Varricchio noted that most of the Building & Grounds budgets are relatively flat with minimal increases.

1. Building Maintenance and Operations & Capital: Ms. Zemienieski provided a line-by-line review of this budget, which includes the budgets for the River House and Annex property, the old Town Hall, the Grange Hall and Millington Schoolhouse. She reviewed several minor repairs that have been completed and should be completed at the Millington School House and there was a general discussion about the potential for the public's use of the building. In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Mr. Turner advised that window replacement at the Grange would cost approximately \$30,000.00.

2. Town Office Building: Ms. Zemienieski reviewed this budget and noted that there had been a slight increase to the sewer charge for the former Town Office site. Sewer use fees continue even though the building is unoccupied. She responded to several questions from the Board.
3. Municipal Office Complex/Central Services & Capital: Ms. Zemienieski advised that the Municipal Office Complex/Central Services budget is a combined budget and several lines include the expenses for multiple departments and buildings in the Town, such as the contracts for photocopiers, etc. She provided a line-by-line review of the budget and responded to several questions from the Board.

In response to a question from Mr. Smith concerning a Capital request, Mr. Turner confirmed that he believed re-surfacing the Municipal Office Complex's parking lot would extend its life.

4. Cemeteries: Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the history of the Town's assuming responsibility for the regular maintenance of the cemeteries. She noted that, with the exception of four or five cemeteries that have contracted grounds maintenance, the Facilities Department Grounds staff performs all of the required grounds maintenance. In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Mr. Turner advised that he had researched doing repairs to headstones and that, in addition to being a very expensive undertaking, it would be complicated by trying to secure family approval for the work.
5. Town Green, Grounds and Fields & Capital: Ms. Zemienieski provided a line-by-line review of this budget. Mr. Smith noted that the request to install a well at the Harris Property Community Gardens had not been given a high priority rating by the Long Range Capital Improvement Project Committee. There was a brief discussion regarding the Capital Projects rating procedure.

The Board discussed the Libraries' Capital requests. Ms. Varricchio advised that \$16,000.00 would be a realistic budget to conduct a feasibility study for a new library building. Ms. Varricchio stated that the Long Range Capital Improvements Project Committee had asked which Capital repairs would need to be completed if the Town decided to sell the buildings. Mr. Turner discussed the requests to replace the boilers in both buildings. He noted that the Rathbun Library's boiler is scheduled to be replaced in this fiscal year and Ms. Varricchio noted that sufficient reserves had been set aside for that project to complete boiler replacements in the East Haddam Free Public Library and Rathbun Library.

Mr. Turner discussed the request to replace the windows at the Rathbun Library. It was noted that the Rathbun is in a historic district and there was a general discussion regarding the age of both library buildings. Ms. Varricchio stated she would look into historic building restoration grants.

Ms. Varricchio reviewed the libraries' endowment payments to the Town and advised that she believes there will be a net \$4,000.00 annual increase in the payments when the Town assumes ownership of the East Haddam Free Public Library building; however, she will confirm that with Mr. Gilroy.

#### D. General Government Budgets

1. Economic Development Commission: Ms. Haines reviewed this budget, including the request for \$10,000.00 to conduct an engineering feasibility study to extend the sewer line up to the Four Corners area. She noted that the project is included in the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. She stated that the proposed study will include the practicality of

modifying zoning regulations for lower Town Street to that of a village district. Ms. Haines responded to several questions from the Board and there was a brief discussion regarding an alternative route to bring the sewer lines to the Moodus area.

There was a general discussion of the Town's tax incentive program and Ms. Haines agreed to provide Ms. Govert with a written overview of the program. In response to a question from Ms. Govert, Ms. Haines stated that she was not aware of any formal survey of business owners regarding their wants/needs; however, as part of her job, she regularly conducts informal discussions with business owners. She stated that most of their concerns are tied back to state statutory requirements and not issues with the Town.

Ms. Haines advised that she is working with the Land Use department to capture requests concerning business opportunities in Town. In response to a suggestion from Ms. Govert, Ms. Haines agreed to reach out to the Tax Collector to try to identify financially stressed businesses for EDC to reach out to.

Ms. Haines provided the Board with information about a 5-town economic development collaboration. She advised that the group is participating in a project to create a presence on the Explore CT Shoreline website, a new on-line tourism marketing site.

The Board agreed to a lunch recess at 12:33 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 1:34 p.m.

#### E. General Government, Public Safety, Health & Social Services, Culture & Recreation Budgets

1. Regional Probate Court: Ms. Zemienieski noted that there is a slight reduction in this budget and advised that the allocation for the Regional Probate Court is based on Town's grand list.
2. Selectmen: It was noted that this budget is relatively flat other than the 2.5% increase placeholder in the Salaries line. Ms. Zemienieski provided a line-by-line review of the budget. Ms. Varricchio elaborated on the Cell Phone expense. There were general discussions regarding the statutory requirements for posting public notices and the Town's volunteer recognition program.

In response to an issue raised by Mr. Smith, the Board discussed how the salaries/stipends of the staff and the Board of Selectmen compare to those in other Connecticut towns of a similar size and make-up. Ms. Varricchio stated should would ask the Connecticut Council of Municipalities to do a study of same and she will provide the Board with the findings.

3. Insurance (Risk Management): Ms. Zemienieski stated that CIRMA has not yet finalized any changes to their premiums; however, the Town's representative had given her maximum placeholders to use in her projections for this budget. She reviewed the Workers Comp and Liability/Auto/Property coverage projections and noted that there was a very slight decrease in the Insurance budget.

Ms. Zemienieski stated that CIRMA offers a Rate Stabilization program in which the Town participates. She noted that, through the program, the Town's increase is capped at 3% this year. She responded to several questions from the Board.

4. Legal Services: Ms. Zemienieski stated that the two largest lines in this budget are the General Counsel and Labor Counsel expenses. She advised that she had put placeholders of \$25,000.00 in both lines. There was a general discussion regarding the legal expense related

to union negotiations and Ms. Varricchio advised that, over the last ten years, the expense has ranged from \$10-50,000.00 per contract. Mr. Smith noted an anticipated Open Space legal expense.

5. Paramedic Services: Mr. Smith and Ms. Zemienieski reported that, several years ago, the Town signed a contract with Middlesex Hospital for paramedic services. He noted that the contract originally established a fee of \$1 per capita for the service and stipulated an option to increase the fee by \$1/per year. He advised that this is the fourth year of the contract and that Middlesex Hospital has never increased the \$1/per capita fee. Mr. Smith noted that the 2020-2021 budget reflects a slight decrease due to a small decline in the Town's population.
6. Chatham Health District: It was noted that there was a 6.7% increase in this budget and Ms. Zemienieski noted the Chatham Health District (CHD) fee is based on a per capita rate. She provided a line-by-line review of the budget. Ms. Varricchio stated that she will move the water testing expense over to the Building Maintenance budget.

Mr. Smith reviewed the staffing and responsibilities of CHD. He advised that the Town will now contribute \$2,500.00 for the Everbridge communication system which is approximately one-third of its cost. He stated that the Town relies on Everbridge for communicating with residents and he feels it is well-worth the expense.

In response to a question from Mr. E. Blaschik, Mr. Smith advised that CHD retained the fees charged for its services. There was a brief discussion regarding the previous concerns about CHD's customer relations and the improvement to its services.

7. Human Services: Ms. Zemienieski stated that this budget reflects the donations the Town makes to various non-profit organizations that provide services to the Town's residents and responded to several questions from the Board. Ms. Varricchio agreed to compile a report for the Board with information on the number of citizens each individual agency provided with benefits during the most recent fiscal year.

#### F. General Government Budgets

1. Finance Office: Ms. Varricchio reviewed staffing for the Finance office and noted that the only increase to this budget was the 2.5% placeholder on the Salaries line.
2. Fringe Benefits: Ms. Varricchio noted that the 13.8% increase to this budget is primarily due to the Town's mandated contributions to the Connecticut Municipal Employee Retirement System (MERS) and the three requested additional full-time positions. In response to a request from Ms. Govert, Ms. Varricchio agreed to provide a breakdown of salaries and benefits related to the requested additional positions.

Ms. Varricchio discussed the Town's program for employees to accept a stipend in lieu of health insurance coverage. She stated that the Town has a very good relationship with its current health insurer; however, she will be putting the health insurance out to bid this year.

3. Board of Finance: Ms. Varricchio provided a line-by-line review of this budget and noted that the 24.2% increase was primarily driven by transfer of contingency funds related to the Student Resource Officer and a gate for the Transfer Station in the 2019-2020 budget.

#### G. Debt Service: This agenda item was postponed.

H. Interfund Transfers: This agenda item was postponed.

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

J. Other Budgets Items: The Board discussed the following Other Budget Items:

- The Libraries Capital budget was discussed earlier in the meeting and is reported on in the minutes above.
- Ms. Varricchio advised that Ms. Zemienieski has not yet been successful in scheduling a Budget Workshop appointment with a representative from the Lakes Association. She noted significant increases in the Lake Hayward lines in the Operating and Capital budgets.

The Board discussed the projected Capital expense request for repairs to the Lake Hayward dam and Mr. Smith stated he would research whether or not the repairs are the state's responsibility; Ms. Govert noted that there could be grant opportunities for the project. Ms. Varricchio advised that Lake Hayward has its own taxing district and agreed to email the Board information on its tax revenues, etc.

3. Public Comment: There was a general discussion regarding the Town employee's post-tax retirement savings plan.

Mr. E. Blaschik advised that the Municipal Office Building Committee will use the balance from its construction project budget to re-build the tennis courts.

4. Adjournment: Mr. Smith stated that the agenda for the February 19<sup>th</sup> Board of Selectmen's meeting was very light and recommended cancelling the meeting in lieu of extending the time for the Budget Workshop scheduled for 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The Board agreed with his recommendation.

There being no additional business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned the meeting at 3:56 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,  
Theresa Govert, Secretary