

**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
BOARD OF FINANCE
Special Meeting**

March 19, 2012
7:00 pm
Town Office Annex

Call to Order

The Special Meeting of the East Haddam Board of Finance was called to order by Chairman Paul Maxwell on Monday, March 19, 2012 at 7:12 pm at the Town Office Annex.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members:

Paul Maxwell, Chairman
Bruce Dutch
Susan Link
Harvey Thomas
Dan Alexander

Others:

Mark Walter, First Selectman
Cindy Varricchio, Finance Administrator
Denise Dill, Tax Collector
Deb Denette, Town Clerk and BOF recording secretary
Beth Lunt, Public Works Administrator
Board of Education Members:

Nancy Haslam, Chairman
Bryan Perry
Susan Taylor
Bill Barney

Dr. Ellen Solek, Superintendent of Schools
David Scata, Director of Pupil Services

Agriculture Commission Members:

Scott Mackinnon
Jessica Stone

Police Representatives:

Resident Trooper Jeff Rhoades
Resident Trooper Ian Hawes
George Corbeil
Craig Mansfield

Fred Weissbach

2012-2013 Proposed Budget

Public Works:

Mrs. Lunt noted that she is new to the process, she inquired if the Board wanted her to make a presentation, or answer questions raised from the Selectmen's presentation of the budget. Mr. Maxwell responded that the Board raised questions regarding pavement management and whether the budgeted amount was sufficient to maintain and/or improve current road conditions. Mrs. Lunt responded that a \$500,000 investment would result in a slight decrease

in overall road conditions, whereas a \$600,000 investment would slightly improve overall conditions. She stated that the proposed budget allocates \$700,000, which includes maintenance for dirt roads as well, which are not part of the pavement management system.

Responsive to inquiry from Mr. Thomas, Mrs. Lunt explained the process of how the roads were rated and the formula utilized for projections. She also explained that human prioritizing also takes place. After lengthy discussion, Mr. Thomas stated that he would stop by and see Mrs. Lunt so as to not tie up the meeting with his questions. Mrs. Lunt stated that within the miscellaneous budget she hopes to add an upgrade to the pavement management program at a cost of \$6,000. The upgrade will account for traffic flow. She further noted that a full scale re-evaluation of all roads (last done in 2007) would cost \$19,000.

Mrs. Lunt addressed the request for a mini excavator. She stated that the acquisition would be very beneficial for trenching, noting that a back-hoe is presently used, however, due to its large size it does a lot of damage. Mrs. Lunt stated that it is a cumbersome piece of equipment to utilize for the cleaning out of storm water drainage basins. Mrs. Lunt added that needed maintenance is often deferred to avoid damage to well-manicured lawns. Mr. Dutch suggested rubber tracking for the mini excavator. The Board looked for further break down on the miscellaneous maintenance budget to address the cost of the upgrade for the road maintenance program.

Agriculture Commission:

Mrs. Stone summarized that the Agriculture Commission is seeking a grant to reclaim Town owned municipal space (Harris property – Mount Parnassus Road) to farmland. The ambitious goal is to remove woody growth to make room for equipment to clear, open, till and cover. The Town's EDC coordinator, Peter Simmons, is working on a grant, up to \$50,000. It was noted that there is a matching component and that in kind services by the Town qualifies. Mrs. Lunt stated that the mild winter, has allowed public works to address its back log and can assist with machinery and operation.

Mrs. Stone stated that the Agriculture Commission is looking to clear between four and 12 acres. Mr. Maxwell inquired what revenue the Town might see from the venture. It was noted to be very minimal; however, the social and educational opportunities were emphasized. Mrs. Stone stated that the focus will be organic.

Mr. Maxwell inquired why the site reserved for future municipal use was targeted and not the open space parcel. Mr. Thomas responded that the site is flat, has better soils, was a former farm site, is less forested than other areas and is close to the road.

Mrs. Lunt and Mrs. Stone departed the meeting at this time.

Farmers' Market:

Mr. Fred Weissbach, representing the Economic Development Commission and Jeff Savitsky (who has organized the Colchester Farmers' Market) spoke to the Board about the EDC's initiative to create a farmers' market. The farmers' market will run every Wednesday from June 20th through October 17th (except for July 9th due to the Lion's auction) at the Grange Hall. Mr. Weissbach noted that Mr. Savitsky started the farmers' market in Colchester three years ago. The funding sought is for start-up costs associated with signage and advertising, no personnel will be paid. The Commission would like to create a special revenue fund and fund it with \$1,000 both for this year and next year and hopes that after that it will be self-

funding through proceeds from vendor fees. The fees anticipated would be one hundred for the season or \$10 per week. Donations will also be solicited.

Mr. Walter questioned whether it would be more advantageous to regionalize with other successful markets. Mr. Weissbach responded that the market would be more successful if people did not have to travel. Mr. Walter also questioned the impact to local businesses such as Ballek's and Staehly's. Mr. Weissbach stated that Staehly's hopes to participate, if they have the help. He noted that the market will not have the larger offerings available at either business. He added that no conversations have been held with Ballek's. It was also noted that because it is an initiative of EDC it will fall under the Town's insurance and hopefully the Town can assist with any necessary legal fees keeping the start-up costs down for the initiative. Vendors will be required to be insured. It was the consensus to increase the budget by \$1,000 to provide funding for the Farmers' Market. The Board of Finance will need to take separate action on appropriating an additional \$1,000 for the current fiscal year.

Police and Emergency Management:

Resident Troopers Rhoades and Hawes and East Haddam Police Officers Mansfield and Corbiel joined the Board at the table. Trooper Rhoades noted that staffing levels are a concern not just for more man power but for safety reasons. Trooper Rhodes stated that the proposed budget includes a request for a full-time officer. The number of patrol hours was reviewed, along with the call volume, which was over 6,000 calls last year, of which 342 were crimes and 115 accidents. Officer Mansfield advised that the trend is actually down slightly from the prior year.

Trooper Rhoades added that a school resource officer used to be funded with grant funding, and that no longer available. When a school program is going on, there is even less patrolling available. He also added that paperwork today is much more complex than when he started 19 years ago. Trooper Rhoades added that he would like to see a full time officer added this year and another next year.

Responsive to inquiry from Mr. Maxwell, Trooper Rhoades stated that he would like to see four full time officers in ten years. He further stated that with existing staffing levels, it is very difficult to be a pro-active police force.

Mr. Maxwell inquired what drives crime in East Haddam. Trooper Rhoades stated that much of the burglary and larceny is attributable to drug addiction. He stated that additional patrols will help with that, particularly when one officer is conducting investigation or busy with paperwork, another officer can still be available for patrol or back up.

Discussion was held relative to a third resident state trooper versus a full time officer. The cost benefit of a full time officer was emphasized.

Mr. Thomas inquired about the proficiency rating of the current police force and whether throwing additional hours at them would make a difference. Trooper Rhoades advised that the State Police do an accreditation, however, the study Mr. Thomas referred to, cannot be done on non-full time departments.

Mr. Thomas also inquired what pro-active measures would be undertaken with additional coverage. He was advised that more neighborhood canvassing could occur at a crime scene, Trooper Hawes added that being more proactive would not eliminate crime, but having a more visible presence would deter it. Further, while one officer is investigating a crime scene he would not have to leave it to attend another call and then get back when

he can, which is likely after the crime scene had been disturbed. Trooper Rhoades added that East Haddam has professional police, most with 15-25 years of experience.

Mr. Walter noted that one officer works nearly full time now. The remaining hours after bringing one officer up to full time would be for increased coverage amongst the other officers. Officer Rhoades described the model he would propose for coverage based on a rotating shift of five days on and three days off, with overlapping coverage for the change in rotation days.

Responsive to inquiry from Mr. Alexander, it was noted that no additional equipment or vehicles were necessary to accommodate the increased hours. It was also noted that there would be no gaps in the schedule with two full time officers.

Emergency Management:

Emergency Management Director Craig Mansfield advised that an RFP went out today with two different phases for an overall communications network for the Town.

The first phase would be to identify coverage deficiencies, recommend equipment that would address all of those deficiencies and identify the costs necessary to move forward.

Phase two would be to write the bid specs to address the deficiencies identified.

Officer Mansfield noted that due to the timing, there would be no impact to this year's budget regarding costs associated with the RFP. The \$10,000 in in the proposed budget is to put a telecommunication box on a State owned tower on Mt. Parnassus Road. The State will allow us to utilize the tower. The costs are for the equipment and labor.

Mrs. Varricchio stated that the Board could authorize a supplemental appropriation should it wish to proceed on the first phase of the bid specs when they come in. Responsive to inquiry from Mr. Alexander, Mr. Mansfield added that the \$10,000 is a band-aid and that the solution is neither a quick fix, nor an inexpensive one. Once in place, however, deficiencies will be addressed that plague emergency services and public safety Town wide.

Board of Education:

Mr. Maxwell noted that he had the Board of Education go last so that they could see other financial considerations that the Board of Finance needs to weigh.

Dr. Solek began by showing the per student costs. She noted that disparity between one figure and another is contractual increases. She further explained that the State per pupil cost is calculated much differently and is more complicated, taking into account special education grant funding. She added that the data can be found on the state website under strategic school profiles.

Regarding the cost for full day kindergarten, there were two different figures that caused confusion. She advised that one estimate included actual salaries of the teachers anticipated to move to that program, the other took into account a masters +5 salary. To clarify the confusion, she stated that the current program (half day) cost is \$326,992.90. She stated that transportation costs are \$71,000. She stated that to add 1.5 teachers and 1.5 paraprofessionals and operating costs brings the total to operate full day kindergarten to \$495,967. She reiterated that the \$71,000 transportation costs associated with the mid day run would be eliminated.

Mr. Maxwell noted that another option for the Board of Education would be to eliminate the proposed new staffing and reduce rather than re-align current staffing.

Dr. Solek distributed a listing of staff changes to address the reduced enrollment since 2008-2009. Mr. Thomas opined that the figures are misleading in that they are cumulative. Dr. Solek referred him to page 9b for overhead costs and non-direct expenses.

Mrs. Link noted that the Board negotiated a 0% gross wage increase, yet salary still increased for teachers. It was noted that step increases are contractual obligations. Mrs. Link noted that three certified staff went up 3.3% or approximately \$3,700 per person. This was noted to be the Business Manager, Superintendent and Director of Pupil Services. Mrs. Link opined that this appeared to be a gigantic increase in a year when no one was supposed to get a raise. Dr. Solek stated that in years past staff was generally looking at a 5-6% annually with a general wage increase and a step increase.

Mrs. Link noted that the stipend was negotiated at a 0% increase for the next three years; she questioned why the figure for stipends had increased 2.4%. It was noted that it is for a running coach at the middle school. Student activity and coaching break outs were requested.

Mrs. Link noted confusion with the fuel costs. Mrs. Varricchio explained that when we contract for fuel, we own it, unused fuel can be stored at a per gallon cost and utilized the following year, and can be liquidated. She noted that fuel usage is estimated on a five year average. This year's warm winter resulted in a fuel surplus. She stated that by June 30, 2012 tanks will be topped off. She also noted that actions taken at the old middle school have resulted in using approximately 12,000 gallons less fuel usage from the prior year. Further discussion ensued and Mrs. Varricchio was charged with providing a fuel oil summary encompassing the costs associated with fuel storage and liquidation both for the Board of Education fuel usage and the Town's.

Mrs. Link questioned the Board of Education technology budget. She noted huge disparity between the budgeted amount and what was actually spent. In particular, she noted that one year \$25,000 was budgeted and \$132,000 was spent. She inquired where the extra funding was found and questioned why it was not in the budget. She also noted that the expense came the second week of June.

Mr. Maxwell echoed the frustration that a real figure for technology costs cannot be calculated. Dr. Solek responded that the needs for technology are identified within the Town's technology plan. She noted that there is a planned refresh cycle every 3-5 years.

Mr. Maxwell continued that enrollment costs are down 14% yet per pupil costs have increased 22% over the same period. He noted that in the last three years the budgeted amount for technology was \$140,000, yet \$407,000 has been spent. He questioned how the Board of Finance could have faith in any of the figures presented.

Mr. Thomas suggested that the way to fix it would be to provide for a 0% budget increase to the Board of Education as a reduction is not permissible by law.

Dr. Solek responded that the majority of the technology funded was pursuant to a one-time grant. She stated that the goal was to bring technology at the elementary and high school up to the standard that was set at the new middle school. She noted that this year's budget begins the refresh cycle for the new middle school. She added that she hopes that the

Board of Finance does not cut the budget increase to 0% as that would create further setbacks. Mr. Maxwell added that the Board of Finance has no power to change any line item presented, however, the Board is elected to assure that the taxpayers funds are not spent frivolously.

Regarding technology, Dr. Solek added that by 2014 the State will mandate that all state testing be administered electronically. Mrs. Link questioned where the 60 computers budgeted will be utilized. Dr. Solek stated that she believed those were for refresh at central office and for the elementary school. Dr. Solek stated that she would bring back the breakdown. She further noted that \$400 note books can now do the job of a \$1200 laptop. She further noted that tablet technology has yet to be incorporated into the school curriculum.

Mr. Thomas stated that to achieve a 0% increase, the Board would need to find \$895,000. He suggested the Board of selectmen inquire of its departments what it would need to do to find \$1,000,000. Mr. Maxwell stated that exercise has been done for each of the past few years. He noted that on the Town side, it has meant positions, he noted that full time positions have been converted to part time positions for the Assessor, Zoning Enforcement Officer and now the Assistant Tax Collector position is being eliminated. Mr. Maxwell further advised that only \$370,000 can be cut from the Board of Education budget and that any further reductions on the Town side would need to come from capital.

Mr. Maxwell asked the Tax Collector what are the biggest complaints from the folks that pay the taxes. Mrs. Dill responded that complaints are that they get very little for their taxes, and would particularly like to have trash pick-up.

Motion was made by Mr. Thomas to adjourn at 9:45 pm. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette