Town of Easton CT
Board of Finance – Special Meeting Minutes
Date/Time: Wednesday March 29, 2023 – 7:00 pm
Location: Easton Senior Center, 650 Morehouse Road; also on Zoom
Recording: https://vimeo.com/showcase/easton-board-of-finance

Attendees: Members in person: Art Laske, Andy Kachele, Michael Kot, Jackie Kaufman, Ira Kaplan
Alternates in person: Gregg Saunders, Maureen Williams, Michael Gutowski
Absentees: Member Paul Skrtich
Guests: Christine Calvert, Treasurer and Finance Director
Dave Bindelglass, First Selectman
Bob Lessler and Kristi Sogofsky, Board of Selectmen
Robert Klem and Steve Waugh, Fire Chief and Assistant Chief
David Smith and Dori Wollen, Registrars of Voters
Call to Order: By Chair Art Laske at 7:01 pm

Art appoints Gregg as alternate in place of Paul, per Paul's request at earlier meeting.

1. (Agenda item #1) The Board of Finance will make revisions and prepare final recommendations for the budget document to be presented at the Annual Town Meeting on April 24, 2023 to include any and all departments with specific attention to the following:
    a. Fire Department (7:03)
    b. ROV (7:44)
    c. Any other budget as deemed necessary (8:18)

Rob and Steve answered questions about the Fire budget. We discussed the proposed $5,000 increase for supplemental workers compensation insurance for eligible volunteers. There is dissatisfaction with the current coverage. We discussed how this would apply not only to Fire but to EMS and other volunteers, whether we need a new policy or a new insurer, state law mandating inclusion of certain volunteers, and the value of coordinating this effort with the Insurance Commission. There was consensus to remove the $5,000, lowering the Services and Fees line to $33,700, with the understanding that when more investigation is done, the BOF would look favorably upon a special appropriation to support the insurance request. We next discussed the $12,500 increase in Material and Supplies for a home safety program, and there was agreement to support it. We discussed the $85,000 cost under New Equipment Capital Project Fund for a command vehicle. Mike K expressed concern about the expansion of funding year after year. There was discussion of response time and brushfires. Art noted we had a consensus to support the command vehicle request.

David Smith and Dori presented ROV estimates of the increased costs for early voting. The legislature has not made any decision so they presented estimates based on the three proposals for 10, 14, or 18 days, and the cost per election associated with each. State grants to subsidize the costs are extremely uncertain, and we will not count on any. We will likely have two or perhaps three (conceivably more) elections in the upcoming fiscal year 2024 that will be subject to early voting, and are considering the costs for those levels. There was consensus to fund a middle level of costs in the ROV budget, and that the Contingency budget would be called upon to cover the rest if needed (and that the Contingency budget would be discussed later). We had a consensus to increase the ROV budget by $30,000. Chris will work on how that is allocated to line items so that this can be part of the final budget for our next meeting 4/4/23. We reviewed the budget without early voting, and determined the final number for line

#5121 was $33,848, for a total ROV budget excluding benefits of $101,719, which will be increasing for early voting to $131,719.

Art identified other budgets to be discussed: Tree Warden (and Stipends), Cemetery, FICA, Treasurer, and Contingency.

Andy asked about the increase in the Tree Warden stipend (8:20), and Art noted the various stipends that were similarly increased. Mike K expressed concern about the usage of and reliance on stipends, and how it is part of a move away from the traditional volunteer model of Easton. We discussed which departments had stipends and the process for determining them. There was dissatisfaction, but consensus to accept the stipends as presented. The was also consensus to accept Andy's urging that the BOF convey to the Board of Selectmen, concerning any future stipend increase, that the BOF is not ok with a large uniform percentage increase, and request more per department analysis and review.

Chris discussed the request for an increase in the Cemetery budget. (8:42) FY23 was at $1,220, the earlier request for FY24 was $1,500, and they now express that they want $7,700, but are requesting an increase to $5,000. We noted that the town is legally responsible for the property. There was discussion of grants that could offset the costs. Motion to increase the Cemetery budget to $2,500, by Jackie/Ira. Result: passes 6-0.

Ira requested a decrease of the FICA budget (8:52) from the current proposal of $575,000 to $560,000, noting conversations and emails with Chris about this. Chris accepted this proposal, and there was consensus to accept it.

Ira requested an increase in the Treasurer budget (8:55) of $20,000 for the unfilled HR position. Dave B and Chris felt the increase was unnecessary, and that more progress is now being made in the search. Art and Andy expressed reluctance about the BOF getting involved in compensation setting for individual positions. Ira withdrew the request.

Andy requested a change in approach to the Contingency budget (9:00), expressing that it was better practice to set and keep a fixed level every year, rather than attempt to speculate on individual retirements or the outcomes of specific contract negotiations. Allowing for ROV estimates for early voting, and our history of Contingency budget usage, he recommended $150,000. There was consensus in support.

Chris's internet connection had been poor the entire meeting, so updating the budget document was impossible. At our next meeting (4/4/23) she will use a different approach, and we will act on the final budget at that meeting.

2.   Motion to adjourn by Mike K/Andy. Result: passes 6-0 at 9:16.

Submitted 3/29/23 by Ira Kaplan, BOF Clerk