

Town of Easton
Board of Finance – Special Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: Thursday, March 3, 2022 – 7:00 pm
Location: Easton Senior Center, 650 Morehouse Road, Easton, CT
Virtual meeting using the Zoom app.
A recording of this meeting is located at:
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/easton-board-of-finance>

Attendees: Members: Art Laske-Chair, Jackie Kaufman-Clerk, Andy Kachele, Paul Skrtich, Ira Kaplan, Michael Kot; Alternates Present, Maureen Williams; Alternates present but not seated: Michael Gutowski, Gregg Saunders
Absentee(s): --
Guest(s): Christine Calvert-Finance Director/Treasurer, Dr. David Bindelglass-First Selectman, Kristi Sogofsky, Second Selectmen,
Call to Order: Meeting called to order at: 7:02 pm by: Art Laske

I. *Appointment of Alternates*

Maureen Williams was seated for Jackie Kaufman who was expected to arrive after the meeting opened due to a professional obligation. Jackie Kaufman joined the meeting at 7:16 p.m.

II. *Review Department Budgets*

Each of the following departments presented its budget request to the Board of Finance and answered questions from the Board Members:

A. Pension and Employment Benefits

- Alan Goldbecker, Chairman, presented and answered questions from the Board. He summarized that the portfolio is sizable and that the goal is to maintain it as such. As of 7.1.21 – 113.6% funded. The expectation is that the percentage will grow.
- The total asset value is \$233 million.
- Actuary is compensated via a modest fee; monthly summaries provided.
- 13.8% cash; Fixed income, 19.6%; Alternative investments, includes a fund which invests in residential real estate
- Fees: Yearly increase on state fee; State just reduced from 7% to 6 3/4 % - it will increase yearly from here (fire and police)
- Town is obligated to match contributions. Mr. Kot observed this is an important area to focus on.

B. Insurance Commission

- Sulim Bartok (consultant, appeared online) presented, together with Jerry O'Brian, Chair and answered questions from the Board. The stated goal for the budgetary request to is ensure the Town has proper insurance coverage at a reasonable price. The price increase for 22-23 budget year is 8.42% (\$750,000).
- General Liability/Property & Auto: request increase is 5% – numbers will be finalized in May.

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- Cyber Insurance: \$1M for BOE, \$1M for Town Hall – it may be up to 50% more. This covers ransomware or cyber-attack and the costs of rebuilding the network. There have been no claims to date.
 - Workers Compensation coverage expected to increase by 5%.
 - Expectation if for general increases for all productions; except Pollution, which has no increase.
 - Final numbers will be prepared as soon as possible.
 - Effective Date on policy: July 1.

C. Commission for the Aging/Social Services

- Allison Whitterby, municipal liaison, presented together with Social Services Director and answered questions from the Board.
- Goal for 22-23 budget: assist senior citizens with caregiving, Medicare enrollment, education, provide resource desk (oil, finances, insurances, therapists)
- Budget is nearly identical to 21-22; but transportation is decreased because travel has decreased due to COVID and Zoom opportunities and fewer grocery deliveries.
- The average household may receive between \$500-750 of fuel assistance. Our current funds permit the Commission to assist, on average, about 5+ families; however, we use outside sources to help as many as possible (such as the Salvation Army).
- 5-15 households benefit from Commission's assistance; and it is growing.
- Development of a local prevention council is underway to broaden awareness of the Commission.
- Ms. Whitterby pursues grant writing when possible; but with limited staff, she can only do so much.
- Additional funding (grants) will be received from the United Way (about \$2000.00) and gift cards that can be distributed.

D. Building Department

- Peter Howard, Interim Building Official, presented and answered questions from the Board.
- Mr. Howard earned a part time salary and confirmed the part time status provides enough time to manage the work. He articulated his goal is to improve the permitting process experience.
- Discussion regarding requested budget, including, educational & professional literature (code books, dues, new code cycle upcoming) required expenditures to complete office work; modest office supply budget, expenditures are modest, but necessary (folders, paper, etc.); transportation costs; inspection vehicle requires new tires.
- Building Permit fees for the 21-22 year: \$124,000+/-; and July 1, 2021-February 2021: \$163,000.

E. Zoning Board of Appeals

- Ms. Calvert presented and answered questions of the Board. No change since 21-22. Hiring a new person; but it's a shared salary with P&Z so there is a decrease.

F. Planning and Zoning

- Ray Martin, Chair P&Z Commission; and Justin Girolando, Land Use Consultant/P&Z director, presented and discussed various budget needs, including: Education & training, cell phone/communications costs for staff; consulting fees for Justin's time, last year that line item decreased, but it's been added back in due to increased time necessary to engage and answer the public's questions about permits and revised zoning regulations; travel reimbursement costs have increased; but new ZEO is sharing a truck with the Building Official, but the need to use the vehicle has increased; 14% decrease because Zoning staff retired and position was filled with a non-benefit position.

- Discussion regarding \$7500 allocation request for Town of Easton Gateway signs. Two signs in the works and two additional requested.

G. Library

- Lynn Zaffino, Director, and Mary Beth Rassulo, Assistant Director presented Library budget needs and answered questions from the Board. 2022-23 budget represented a 5.9% increase over last year, largely to restore programming budget post covid, restore furloughed covid staff position (total staff 5 full time and 3-4 part time), and pay for increased Library Association fees. Ms. Zaffino articulated that operational costs did not significantly change, but HVAC and heat pump improvements are required and there is a constant need for building maintenance.
- Discussion ensued regarding: number of library visits per year and number of people with library cards (3,903 of 7500 Easton residents); attendance and usage during covid and now that covid is ending; possibility to charge for usage, which Ms. Zaffino stated went against a library's core values; the value of the requested budget represents an expenditure of 29 cents per resident/per day and was described as an "economic resource"; the justification for the inclusion of longevity payments after it had been eliminated from past budgets.
- Veronica Rose, Chair of Library Board spoke over zoom on behalf of the budget request and emphasized the value of the Library to the community, describing it as, "the core of Easton;" and describing the cultural value it serves for the Town and impact on value of real estate and homes.

H. Other Budgets:

- *Fringe Benefits:* Ms. Calvert provided an overview of an anticipated increase in health insurance costs (awaiting guidance from state, hoping for below 8%), but notes number of retirements or employees not using or ineligible for the benefit will likely result in a decrease in expense. Long term disability/life insurance has slight increase. Unemployment bill at \$7000.
- *Morehouse Road:* Ms. Calvert provided an overview of capital improvements expenditures for Town assets, including: increase in materials for 660 Morehouse Road roof replacement & HVAC costs. Current increase is \$57,000 + \$3,000 for HVAC; hoping for 60% delivery in April and remainder in July. \$10,000 increase expected for asphalt before July. Insurance company covering 50% of costs. \$37,500 is what we need to budget. Since its going to be in July, we can apply this to next year budget. Net cost to Town decreases because we budgeted this last year as a Special Appropriation.
- *Tech:* Ms. Calvert provided an overview of the tech upgrades and cybersecurity required at Town Hall and answered questions from the Board. More discussion at next week's meeting.
- *Tree Warden:* Ms. Calvert provided overview of Tree Warden budget and answered questions from the Board. Budget appeared to increase but catches up from prior years; decrease on materials and supplies, rentals for dumpsters for wood removal are gone, safety investment.

III. *Fill-in Budgets*

The following Fill-In Budget departments/categories were discussed among the Board with no presentation, other than commentary and context provided by C. Calvert: Treasurer, Debt Services (decreased by \$900,000 decrease), First Selectman's Office; Professional Services, Probate, Town Hall (operations), Cemetery (maintenance), Contingency (decreased by \$25,000), Auditors/Board of Finance, Town Attorney (fees).

IV. <i>Adjournment</i>			
Action/Motions:	M. Kot made a motion to adjourn at 9:10 pm.	Vote/	Unanimous vote to adjourn.
Motion (Second):	A. Kachele seconded.	Result:	

Submitted by,



Jackie Kaufman – Clerk