

EAST LYME BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING OF MARCH 24, 2021
MINUTES

This meeting was held via Zoom online meeting services and was available for the public to view, listen and participate via videoconference and dial-in options.

This meeting, in its entirety, is available to view by visiting the East Lyme Town Hall webpage.

PRESENT: Mark Nickerson, Kevin Seery, Marc Salerno, Rose Ann Hardy, Paul Dagle and Dan Cunningham
ALSO PRESENT: Senator Paul Formica and State Representative Holly Cheeseman

Mr. Nickerson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Legislative Update

State Representative Holly Cheeseman was present and gave her legislative update. Regarding the American Rescue Plan funds, she stated that while discussing how to use the funds, it is important to remember that the funds cannot be used to reduce taxes or any other such purpose. She reported that the current public hearing that is ongoing today is discussing the Governor's bonding bill and the Governor's budget. The bill that is getting the most discussion is one introduced by House Chair Sean Scanlon that addresses a CT Childcare Credit for households making up to \$210,000 annually, would be phased in over a four-year period, and will cost the State taxpayers approximately \$450M. The challenge as always will be how to fund these programs, and there are numerous bills currently in finance that will help to fund some of these programs going forward through proposed tax increases, which she stated that the Governor is adamantly against, but it is all out there for discussion. Ms. Cheeseman stated that the Governor is looking into alternate revenue opportunities such as sports gaming and the Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI), which is essentially a regional gas tax program that Connecticut would join in on and the money (~35%) would go to specific programs in underserved communities within the state. The Governor is also looking into revenues from legalizing retail marijuana. One of the bills that passed unanimously in both the house and senate will give the legislature a say in how the Governor spends the federal recovery dollars that are received. A couple of the noteworthy bills that will be addressed in the next couple of days are addressing zoning regulations that allow for outdoor dining, as well as extending the Governor's executive powers through May 20, 2021.

State Senator Paul Formica stated that as a follow up to Ms. Cheeseman's discussion on the TCI initiative; he explained that some years ago a lock box was instituted for transportation funds to be held, and this new initiative has not yet revealed how it will work with that lock box program already in place. He stated that this bill focuses on the use of electric vehicles and reducing the need and use of fossil fuels, but he feels as though these discussions need to happen on a federal level as what happens in Ohio ultimately affects the east coast states, and so on. Senator Formica reported that they passed a modification to the use of force language in the Police Accountability bill, and which also allows for an extended due date on specific training required under this bill. Sports gaming is an option that will not only create jobs in Connecticut, but it will create a new revenue stream to benefit the state as well as put additional funds into programs related to problem gambling. Senator Formica reported that since the pandemic they are meeting and deliberating online but that they are voting in person at the Capital. Regarding the energy bill, he believes that this is being addressed by the environmental committee, and that what the energy committee is working on is updating a discrepancy in the solar property tax law, the battery storage laws, and variable rate contracts for rate payers and better ratepayer transparency on invoices. They will also be working on requiring more accountability on performance and customer service from the utility companies. Senator Formica stated that there is a large amount of money being divvied up to all the towns in Connecticut as part of the American Rescue Plan, and that if anyone has any further questions on how that money can be utilized to contact his office in Hartford. He reported that there are several proposed taxes and tax increases in the works, and that they have been working hard on trying

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April 13, 2021 AT 8:50 AM/PM
Brenda Horner ATC
EAST LYME TOWN CLERK

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to come up with alternative ways of increasing revenues. The affordable housing laws propose a change in which the planning and zoning departments would lose some of the decision-making tools, such as public hearings, to make towns and communities more diverse. They are also suggesting that the term “character” be removed from the zoning regulations and no longer would a project be approved or disapproved based on how it fits in with the character of the area. It was discussed that for our community the incentivized housing plan would work much better than the blanket 10% threshold. Senator Formica explained that house resolutions 58 and 59 deal with new voting requirements; 58 is the change to allow for no excuse absentee ballots and 59 is an early voting initiative. Early voting was voted on last session but did not make it because it only passed by simple majority; if it passes this time by simple majority it will move forward either way because this is the second time voting on it. If anyone from the public would like to share their thoughts on any issues, please reach out to Senator Formica through his webpage at SenatorFormica.com.

3. American Rescue Plan Discussion

Mr. Nickerson stated that no action will be taken tonight, and that this Board will just be discussing possible uses for the anticipated American Rescue Plan funds. He noted that we will not be making any formal decisions on how to spend the money until we are in receipt of the funds in our account. He stated that there are parameters in place as to what the money can be spent on, such as capital projects, recreation, water & sewer, and IT, for instance. These funds cannot be used for daily operations of the Town. Mr. Nickerson stated that we are expected to receive a total of \$1,800,000; \$900,000 in approximately 90 days and the remaining \$900,000 in a year from now. He stated that we are also expecting to receive additional funds through the county level, and if that is paid per capita we can expect to receive approximately \$3.6 million, with half paid in the next 90 days and the remainder being paid in a year from now.

Mr. Cunningham stated that he would like to see some concentration on making our Main Street and Town a shopping destination. He stated that the malls are becoming less popular, especially after the pandemic, and we might serve our community well to look at how to make this area an outdoor destination and look at parking, sidewalks, sitting areas, what to do with the former police station, etc. Mr. Dagle stated that we should allow the public to weigh in on how they would like to see the money spent and give suggestions on projects that would benefit the community, and all agreed that all suggestions are valuable and are welcome.

Mr. Seery stated that some of the items that should be re-considered to assist in getting more people outside and walking around the Main Street area are the installation of dingy docks at the end of Smith Street and/or the Grand Street area, and increased usage of the kayak docks and expansion of these handicap accessible docks at Cini Park, both of which have open permits and are ready to be worked on. In the North end of town, we could concentrate on expanding the Darrow Pond park area, for example. Mr. Seery suggested that we have individuals and organizations come to the Board with their suggestions as to how these funds can be used.

Mr. Nickerson stated that we should break this wish list into two categories; things that should be addressed immediately and things that can be put on a long-term to-do list to be prioritized. One of the immediate needs is Niantic Main Street; they have not been able to fund raise due to the pandemic, and it was just announced that Celebrate East Lyme will be cancelled this year for the second year in a row. Keeping this group funded is essential to keeping people visiting our downtown shops and beaches. Other priorities are Care and Share and the Shoreline Soup Kitchen and Pantry; Care and Share not only offers food but also emergency assistance both direct to the utility companies or in the form of a gift card for direct payment. Keeping our residents clothed and fed is a priority to these groups should take priority. Intermediate needs are those such as enhance outdoor recreational activities, which we already have done a good job of creating and maintaining these areas.

Mr. Salerno stated that he agrees that the dingy dock and handicap kayak dock should be on the priority list as they are fully approved projects that are properly permitted and ready to go and are only on hold waiting for funding. He feels that we should look carefully at the Capital Improvement Plan and work off that list. The sidewalks all around town need a lot of attention and our existing plan of action should be reviewed and possibly moved along quicker, especially on West Main Street where the sidewalk stops abruptly. Mr. Salerno stated that the pandemic has taken its toll on the mental health of our residents, and this should be

addressed. Mr. Nickerson agreed that the mental health aspect should be put on the priority list and addressed right away, especially to get the resources where they are needed like the Youth Services Department. He noted that Mr. Putnam has previously requested, and this Board approved the addition of a mental health worker to support the Youth Services department; this was removed from the budget by the Board of Finance. Mr. Nickerson strongly feels that now is the time to bring one and possibly two people on to support the mental health of our residents at a time when this support is very needed.

Ms. Hardy suggested that this Board invite a member from each board and commission to present the items that will benefit their commission, such as sidewalks to be presented by the Zoning commission, and Mr. Nickerson agreed and suggested that the department heads work with their respective boards and commissions.

Mr. Nickerson stated that the Board of Education is separate from Town Government in that they are receiving their own funds which are to be used for Covid related expenses, but he noted that they will work together overall to make sure that all our residents and students needs are being met using these funds, especially in mental health. Mr. Dagle stated that the conversation about our residents' mental health needs should also include Youth Services and the Senior Center, and he would like to hear from them directly what they need and how we can assist them.

It was discussed that a form would be created to send out to all businesses in town to assist them in communicating their needs.

Ms. Hardy suggested that we also ask Mr. Putnam to consider extra resources that may be needed for Parks and Recreation for the upcoming beach season. With social distancing rules still in place, there may be additional staff needed to enforce these enhanced rules, for example additional gate attendants and security. It was agreed that the following groups would be invited in for a discussion at an upcoming regular or special meeting on what their needs are; Youth Services and Parks and Recreation, the Senior Center, Niantic Main Street, Care and Share and Shoreline Soup Kitchen and Pantry.

Mr. Nickerson identified a few long range projects to keep in mind; participation in the Everbridge system for a community emergency notification system, turf fields, move all of the emergency communications equipment from the current dispatch center over to the new public safety building with a new tower, upgrades to the Morris building, enhancements to Main Street and Flanders four corners, rehab work on the Samuel Smith House and Brookside Farm Museum, In addition to all of these items, we should also discuss the work that needs to be done to upgrade our IT and water and sewer infrastructures. Sidewalks and dam repairs will also need to be discussed, as well as the many recreational items that we should consider. A special meeting will be set up for March 31st and then again on April 7th to get these discussions started.

A couple of additional items that the Board would like to address are the needs of the Veterans in our community and the adequacy of lighting at the senior center. Mr. Seery noted that he spoke with the Water and Sewer Commission and asked them to begin thinking about their needs. Mr. Nickerson noted that if anyone comes up with any additional ideas to please pass them along to him and he will add them to the list for their next meeting and discussion.

MOTION (1)

Mr. Seery MOVED to adjourn the March 24, 2021, special meeting of the East Lyme Board of Selectmen at 8:35 p.m.

Seconded by Mr. Salerno. Motion passed 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted By:



Sandra Anderson
Recording Secretary