

Board of Finance March 19th, 2024, Special Meeting
Minutes

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Minutes of Board of Finance March 19th, 2024, Special Meeting - 03/19/24

Date and time: 03/19/24 05:30 pm to: 03/19/24 07:52 pm

Present: Brooke Stevens, Rec Secretary (* Ms. Stevens was not in attendance), Jay Ginsberg, Richard Steel, Lauren McNamara, John T. Birmingham, Paul Maxfield, Denise Hall, Chairperson

CC: Kevin Gervais, Finance Director, Dan Cunningham, First Selectman, Joe Bragaw, Director of Public Works, Lisa Timothy, Director of the EL Public Library, Kristen Caramanica, Senior Center Director

Location: East Lyme Town Hall, Upper Conf. Room, 108 Pennsylvania Avenue
Niantic, CT, 06357.

Topics

1. Call Meeting to Order & Pledge

Note Chairperson Hall called the March 19th, 2024, Special Meeting of the Board of Finance to order at 5:31 p.m. and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Delegations

Note There were none.

3. New Business- Budget Reviews

Note Ms. Hall noted that Lisa Timothy, the EL Library Director, has an additional meeting this evening.

Decision MOTION (1)

Mr. Steel motioned to move budget #5 to budget #1's position on the agenda.
Mr. Maxfield seconded the motion.
Motion carried, 6-0-0.

3-1. 420 EL Public Library

Note Ms. Timothy came forward to discuss the library budget and some of the following was mentioned: Christopher Larson is also in attendance, he's the new Assistant Director, and here to learn the budget process.

The library proposes a straightforward budget with a 2% increase, addressing slight increases in fees and inflation costs.

The library opened a new multimedia conference room thereby expanding its services.

The library reported a doubling in summer reading program participation, showing enhanced community engagement.

An increase in attendance at baby story times was noted, reflecting growing interest in early childhood literacy.

The library is working with the Historical Society to store and catalog town archives to preserve local history.

The library is undergoing a strategic planning process to best serve the town's needs over the next five years.

A survey is being conducted to gather input for the library's strategic plan, emphasizing community feedback.

The survey is available online or via paper at the library.

Note Mr. Maxfield expressed his appreciation for the library's contributions to the community.

Note Mr. Steel said he also appreciates all of their efforts and pointed out a typo in their budget document. Ms. Timothy clarified that they don't have 11 million dollars in the bank; the QuickBooks system is pulling the value of the building, which the town owns, into their operating fund.

Note Ms. Timothy also discussed library e-book pricing challenges, publishers charge libraries \$80 to \$90 lease an e-book 26 times or two years and then they have to pay for it all over again. The state legislature is looking at procurement law and trying to craft something that will make it illegal for publishers to sell books at a different price to public libraries than they do to the consumer; currently it's not good use of taxpayer funds, it's exploitation of taxpayer funds.

Note Ms. Timothy further added that Connecticut is one of the first states to prevent publishers from charging public libraries higher prices for e-books than consumers. She added that e-book circulation has increased from 2-5% pre-COVID to a steady 10%, indicating a shift in library material usage.

Note Mr. Ginsberg said he wants to acknowledge their fundraising efforts and Ms. Timothy thanked him, and replied with the following:

We do have a healthy fund drive and an East Lyme Foundation, both of which help them a great deal.

They try not to turn to the town for any of their capital costs, carpeting and painting aside.

All of their computers and furniture they pretty much fund themselves.

They have a great town government who funds them adequately.

And they have people who are really on board in helping them out when they need it.

Note Ms. Timothy thanked Mr. Steel for leading their men's book discussion group, noting he's done a great job with it.

3-2. 104 Building Department

Note see attached budget.

 [104-Building-FY25.pdf](#)

Note Ms. Hall asked about the 23% increase in personnel and Mr. Gervais explained that the increase includes both the union contract and the additional 12 1/2 hours added to the department; the Land Use Department now has two full time, 37 1/2 hours per week employees.

Note Mr. Ginsberg asked if the hourly rates are reasonable, noting they seemed high to him. Mr. Gervais replied that the rates are contractually negotiated with the unions, and they also depend on years of service.

Note Ms. Hall said there's money budgeted for building permit software, which to her, sounds like they would be more capable of not necessarily doing things manually.

Note Mr. Gervais offered the following response:

He thinks this is a larger conversation in the Land Use office.

If you look at capital projects, there was around \$75,000 to digitize the office next to them, which is filled with maps and paper.

The big driver here in the budget was the additional 12 1/2 hours for the second admin, as well as this permitting software.

The permitting software is actually coming from a quasi-governmental organization out of New Orleans and is a great deal as far as like permitting software goes.

It's going to streamline a lot of things.

That office, when we talk about Land Use, encompasses the Building Department, Zoning, Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning, Inland Wetlands, and the Conservation of Natural Resources.

Where he came from in Brookfield, that department had four full-time admins.

If you spent 15 minutes downstairs, those two admins are running around doing about 15 tasks in those 15 minutes.

Note Ms. Hall asked about the costs associated with the software and Mr. Gervais explained it's around \$20,000 for the subscription and \$5,000 for the implementation.

Note After further discussion Mr. Gervais added that the goal is to implement the new software on July 1st, since the current software we're using is sunsetting. The current software is also not supported and is pretty archaic.

Task Ms. Hall noted it probably would have been helpful to see how the office has been impacted, are more building permits being issued than ever before, and is the development that's going on in the town impacting how busy the office is? She asked him to follow up with David Garside, so that data can be provided to support his request.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

3-3. 113 Building Maintenance

Note Joe Bragaw, Director of Public Works, came forward and explained that he will be presenting the next three budgets. He really wants to preface the presentation by acknowledging how great the work of this department is. The umbrella of Public Works encompasses 23 people in the Highway Department, seven in Building Maintenance, and four in the Engineering Department.

Note see attached Building Maintenance budget.

 [113-Maintenance-of-Town-Building-FY25.pdf](#)

Note Mr. Bragaw shared some of the following:

We have a 30-hour Custodian here at the Town Hall.

A 30-hour Custodian at the Public Safety building.

We have two custodians at the Community Center, one during the day, one at night.

The Custodians at the Community Center are more like a master of ceremonies.

Rarely do they even get the chance of doing a lot of cleaning because they're too busy moving tables and moving operations.

That number is sitting at 12% because we don't really have much of building maintenance itself, people that are painting, doing carpet work, fixing things, light bulbs, and so forth.

The current main focus is on cleaning, so they've included 20 hours in this budget to dedicate to these types of items.

They're actually using someone right now in a smaller capacity, he's doing a phenomenal job, and they'd like to keep him on.

If we don't do the proper maintenance of these buildings, things will continue to deteriorate.

Note Mr. Bragaw further explained that they keep overtime down as much as possible for building maintenance, any incurred is primarily due to alarm calls, but their biggest obstacle is the coverage at the Community Center on the weekends. He added that this was cut by \$10,000 for the current year, and Building Maintenance, Parks & Rec, and the library are each covering 1/3 of the cost, which is the only way they are able to have coverage this year.

Note Mr. Bragaw clarified that the budget presented this evening puts back the full funding, to accommodate eight hours on Saturday, and four hours on Sunday, to keep the senior center open on the weekends.

Note Ms. Hall asked if there is an actual staffing addition, and Mr. Bragaw responded that they're currently paying someone 15 to 20 hours for maintenance, and they're proposing changing this position to 32 hour, 4 days a week, benefited position.

Note Mr. Gervais detailed discussions with the First Selectman about the Building Maintenance position and noted the following:

There are 23 positions in the Highway Department.

The proposed budget is to have the 23rd position be a seasonal position.

And the benefits go from the 23rd position on the highway over to this position.

There's no added position, because it's a wash in terms of benefits.

Note Mr. Bragaw briefly discussed the increase in service contracts and explained that fire protection has been moved to Fire Services since it has nothing to do with Building Maintenance, and the telephones are moving under the IT umbrella, since the phones operate via the internet.

Note Mr. Bragaw briefly detailed the new electricity contract and discussed it with the Board.

3-4. 317 Public Works

Note see attached Public Works budget.

 [317-PublicWorks-HwySanitation-FY-25.pdf](#)

Note Mr. Bragaw shared some the following remarks:

Much of this budget is about garbage pickup, while in other towns such as Montville, garbage is not part of your taxes.

Waterford, East Lyme, and New London are the only towns that pick up their own garbage.

All the other towns around have contractors and contractor rates are going through the roof.

The monies budgeted for a new garbage truck is going to replace a vehicle that is 13 years old.

They have two newer trucks, this would be the third, and every day they have three trucks at a minimum, on the road.

Anywhere there is an unaffiliated position, it's listed as "0", because they're carrying any kind of salary increases in the wage contingency line.

Union (UPSEU) contracts stipulate 2.75 GWI and a 2.5% step.

At the same time, our pay scales are \$3 to \$4 dollars lower than the other towns, so he occasionally needs to provide upgrades to retain staff.

Note Mr. Bragaw and the Board discussed how the town faces challenges in maintaining roads and infrastructure, with a focus on addressing drainage issues and the need for repairs.

Note Mr. Bragaw and Mr. Gervais discussed how the cost of trash and recycling services is increasing, with efforts to manage expenses while maintaining services.

Note Mr. Bragaw shared that the town is undertaking projects to bring the town hall into ADA compliance, including installing a lift, renovating bathrooms, and redoing the ramps and front entrance; we're under consent by the Department of Justice by to be in compliance by October of 2025. These renovations will be funded by LOCIP, where comes from a state grant.

Note Mr. Bragaw added that some of our historic buildings in town that really need some help, such as the Brookside Farm Museum, which really needs to be painted, but LOCIP cannot cover paint jobs.

Note Mr. Bragaw also detailed how the Community Center requires a roof replacement due to leaks and aging, with a shift from a metal to an asphalt shingle roof to reduce costs.

Note Mr. Bragaw discussed how a steep grant and town funding are allocated for the repair of the dam located by the Rustic Cafe, significantly reducing the projected cost. The initial cost estimate for a project was \$750,000, but after further analysis, it was adjusted to \$500,000 with an additional \$95,000 for engineering expenses.

Note Mr. Bragaw clarified that LOCIP, (Local Capital Improvement Program), funds can be requested for capital projects without needing additional approval, serving as a financial safety net for unforeseen expenses. The town allocates funds for the maintenance of dams, using road reconstruction money for inspections and LOCIP funds for actual repairs.

Note The Board discussed Mr. Bragaw's presentation.

Note Ms. Hall said thinking about finalization of the land purchase, is the town is going to be required to do anything to maintain any of the property that was purchased?

Note Mr. Gervais reported that the town officially closed on the land, and the only impact the properties would have on the town's budget would be insurance.

Task Mr. Gervais added that we will take out debt in August to pay back the \$2 million of cash we borrowed against ourselves, but he doesn't believe Parks & Rec picked up any additional responsibilities as far as maintenance. He said he will confer with the Parks & Rec Director for confirmation of this.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

3-5. 105 Engineering

Note see attached Engineering budget.

 [105-Town-Engineer-FY25.pdf](#)

3-6. 418 COA

Note Kristen Caramanica, Director of the Senior Center came forward to present her budget and discussed some of the following with the Board:

The Senior Center offers a wide range of programs and services including fitness, recreation, art, games, education, trips, transportation, and social services like energy assistance and Medicare assistance.

The senior population (60+) is rapidly increasing, with significant percentages in Connecticut and East Lyme.

East Lyme has a total of 538 senior housing units, with more planned for the future.

In terms of transportation services, two buses are currently operational for seniors, with a third expected.

Services are free and cater to various needs like medical appointments and grocery shopping.

For 2022-2023, there were 179 unduplicated riders, with an average of 282 riders and 788 rides per month.

Seniors are limited to 24 rides per year with Dial-A-Ride, and many use both this service and the Senior Center transportation.

In terms of Meals on Wheels and cafe lunches, in 2022-2023, 9,010 Meals on Wheels were served, and 746 cafe lunches were served.

Programs like Renters Rebate and Energy Assistance are offered, with an increase in participants for both.

Budget adjustments include an increase in part-time driver hours, hiring a new social worker, and reallocating funds from the ARPA and other sources.

After meeting with Mr. Gervais and the First Selectman they decided to use the Tombari Funds for program services.

 [418-Commission-on-Aging-FY25.pdf](#)

Note Mr. Gervais explained that Ruth Tombari passed away in 2022 and left the town and library around \$94,000, as well as setting aside certain monies for the Community Foundation of Eastern CT, which pays us a couple of thousand dollars annually in perpetuity. He added that the idea is to use part of the \$94,000, to pay for program supplies, program subsidy, and program services; it amounts to around \$8,200 a year.

Note Ms. Caramanica noted that the IRA the funds are distributed from said that amount would be higher each year.

Note Mr. Steel asked about telephone service and Mr. Gervais clarified that the \$23,000 in the Building Maintenance budget is for town-wide landline telephone service, which includes the departments at the Community Center and Library. Ms. Caramanica added that each driver they employ has a cell phone for work related use.

Note Mr. Ginsberg asked what random testing is and Ms. Caramanica explained that it's for random drug testing of drivers.

Note Ms. Caramanica detailed how the Senior Center offers various classes and services, with subsidies for those who cannot afford them. She added that the addition of a Social Worker will help them ensure that the people who really need assistance, are getting it. The Social Worker also works with agencies such as Care & Share, Ledge Light, and Cactus Jack, who's just helping tremendously folks who are less fortunate.

Note Mr. Steel asked about Sift and Ms. Caramanica explained that Sift has been wonderful to them and donates baked goods on an almost daily basis.

Note Ms. Caramanica said they also have a new coffee and tea station, and the \$5,000 cost was funded by the AARP grant they were awarded.

Note Mr. Ginsberg asked if it's someone's job to look for grants and Ms. Caramanica replied that the Commission on Aging actually found this particular grant and asked her to apply. She noted that she's also part of the Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel, and the state has a new field rep, so she does learn of potential grants from these two avenues.

Note Mr. Gervais said in the general fund, they have \$12,000 proposed for a grant writer.

Note Ms. Caramanica reviewed their 10-year projection, which included the feasibility study recently done. Plans include expanding the senior center, increasing programs, and improving community outreach.

3-7. 999 Capital Projects (CNRE)

Note see attached summary.

 [FY2024-25-Budget-Operating-Summary.pdf](#)

Note Mr. Gervais said he can highlight some items and they can discuss them more thoroughly with each associated department.

Note Mr. Gervais discussed the goal of moving towards cash capital to reduce reliance on debt and manage future capital projects.

Note Mr. Gervais explained that the Board of Selectmen added \$250,000 to cash capital to bring that number to a million. The idea is instead of taking out a bond or a loan, we're going to pay for it in cash. He noted we got rid of the leasing program, now it's really moving between the bond and cash, instead of having three financing options, we're down to two. They'll take out a lease if absolutely necessary, but the ultimate goal is to rely on cash.

Note Mr. Birmingham asked what he would recommend for cash capital for next year, and Mr. Gervais replied one and a half to two million if we can, depending on what the year looks like, but that number needs to keep growing.

Note see attached 10-Year Capital Plan.

 [FY2025-10-Year-CIP.pdf](#)

Note see attached Current Year Capital Plan.

 [Current-Year-Capital-Projects-Budget-Proposal-FY2024-25-UPDATED.pdf](#)

Note Mr. Gervais referenced the summary of the 10-Year Capital Plan and noted it doesn't include the high school major recapitalization in 2030 or the major renovations of the central office in 2028. He added that there are also some open items on top of that 100 million ask.

Note Mr. Gervais discussed the Current Year Capital requests and mentioned some of the following: AEDs require replacement batteries, replacement pads, this is really a once in every couple year request. The Planning and Zoning vehicle was eliminated from the budget.

CAD software and equipment- this is an annual recurring item here for the engineering department to get updated CAD software and equipment.

The assessment re-evaluation is next year.

We'll set aside another \$75,000 and that should be enough to cover the reval.

New ballot machines, that was initially put in, but after conversations with the Town Clerk and the Registrars, we're feeling pretty confident that will be covered by a grant.

The radio tower replacement, there's going to be three items that really tie into this particular one.

We have the \$100,000, this is IT related for the radio tower replacement costs.

This is to move network switches, hard drives, all the infrastructure that's going to be needed when we install the new public radio tower around the Public Safety Building.

The \$300,000 in the Emergency Management line for the Public Safety radio tower ties into this.

The \$100,000 is the IT portion and the \$300,000 is the construction portion of that tower.

Under Police, there is a radio tower communications base station for \$30,000 as well.

communications base stations for \$30,000 as well.

Going back to the general fund, townwide computer replacement for \$15,000.

This amount was originally \$24,000 and they reduced the amount to \$15,000.

Network switches fall under the hardware portion of IT as well.

Office furniture replacement program.

He put this in here because he noticed some of the desks around town hall are about 50 years old.

The \$10,000 that is left that is really to update, replace old chairs, items of that nature, and possibly to put some cubicles in, to maximize some space.

Land Use map digitalization project- \$75,000 was a placeholder, for every bank box we fill with paper, it's \$750.

We cut this back to \$10,000, which is 100 bank boxes.

Now that we have the two full-time land use admins, we'll get a couple boxes done each month, see what we're capable of getting scanned in, and then come back hopefully next year.

Conference room AV upgrade- he spearheaded this one after they held a Board of Selectman meeting in that room.

It was not conducive to a meeting, and although they cut this amount to \$15,000, it will go a long way in helping them obtain some cameras and microphones to make it a more functional meeting room.

They're doing the digitalization project because space at the town hall is limited.

We only have two conference rooms, the conference room we're in right now, and the other conference room that we have meetings in doesn't have much audio-visual capabilities.

There's also a room downstairs that is roughly the same size as that conference room that is just filled with maps, so it's really being underutilized, and freeing another room will give them more options.

Note Mr. Cunningham explained that with these initiatives, they're really trying to stretch the utility of this building, which will save them money down the road.

Note Mr. Gervais continued his review and offered some of the following remarks:

The Emergency Management vehicle has been taken out of the budget.

For the Police, two vehicles will be outfitted.

The marine vessel- every couple of years this vehicle goes in for service and whether it needs a new motor, or some major overhaul done.

Firearm replacement program- we are switching the current brand of handgun to a different model.

Tactical team equipment- this is a Police partnership, and it requires them to keep up on equipment and training.

East Lyme Fire Service- there are plans to consolidate fire services under town management for better resource allocation.

The expectation to get a fire truck now is 48 months, so between 36 and 48 months, they order a fire truck, and we will not see it in service for approximately three to four years.

A tower truck costs over \$2 million.

For now, they're putting aside \$75,000 for this.

They're going to present a more detailed of when we're going to turn over and expect to replace these items with a more robust Capital Improvement Committee when that comes online.

Four sets of turnout gear for \$24,000, for both the NFD and the FFD.

The Chief and the Deputy Chief can allocate the gear based on needs for across town as opposed to individual fire companies.

Assorted hoses, appliance replacement, we cut that back to \$6,000 after discovering that there was \$5,000 left from this year's capital plan.

They signed for a scheduling software today, for the Fireman, which will replace the current paper copies. It costs \$600 per year and will put structure around the Fire Service.

A portable water tank for the FFD, which will give us a new tool for better service.

It costs \$2,500.

Intercom system within the Fire House which is a healthy and safety issue.

The NFD did their own last year.

Note The 2006 Ford Expedition currently used by the fire marshal will be repurposed for Park and Rec's summer beach staff.

Park and Rec does not have a vehicle in their budget due to the repurposing of the fire marshal's vehicle.

A new pickup truck with a plow and a body will be purchased for \$92,000.

They will be replacing the open-air trailer with an enclosed trailer to secure equipment and improve efficiency.

They will be replacing a 10-year-old Toro Workman and a Polaris ATV used by lifeguards, which is severely corroded.

The initial estimate for park maintenance increased from \$300,000 to \$400,000 for a more robust seawall construction.

The budget for the park improvement program was reduced to \$25,000 from \$50,000.

The \$450,000 request for Darrow's Park enhancements was broken down into smaller projects.

In terms of the funding for the Peretz Park renovations, ARPA money will be reappropriated for restroom improvements and field renovations.

The Board of Ed projects qualify for a 40.7% state reimbursement, reducing the overall bonding requirement.

Note Mr. Gervais and the Board discussed bond anticipation notes.

Note Mr. Gervais noted that the town has \$6 million in bond anticipation notes due, contributing to a total bond of \$16 million for the year.

Note Mr. Cunningham discussed how the artificial turf replacement fund was not properly maintained, leading to a lack of funds for replacement.

4. Public Discussion

Note Betsy Goetsch said she has sat for the last three nights or more as Mr. Cunningham, Mr. Gervais, and the rest of the Board of Selectmen work through the budget, and it was a masterful job to watch them work at it, make cuts, and ask questions, all while being civil. She added that the Board of Finance is probably already aware of this, but a great amount of work was done prior to what they received here tonight.

Note Ms. Hall thanked Mr. Gervais and Mr. Cunningham for the work they did, which makes the Board's job easier.

5. Board Comments

Note There was none.

6. Adjournment

Decision MOTION (2)

Mr. Birmingham moved to adjourn the BOF March 19th, 2024, Special Meeting at 7:52 p.m.

Ms. McNamara seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

Note Respectfully Submitted,
Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary

Task Summary

New Tasks

Task Ms. Hall noted it probably would have been helpful to see how the office has been impacted, are more building permits being issued than ever before, and is the development that's going on in the town impacting how busy the office is? She asked him to follow up with David Garside, so that data can be provided to support his request.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

Task Mr. Gervais added that we will take out debt in August to pay back the \$2 million of cash we borrowed against ourselves, but he doesn't believe Parks & Rec picked up any additional responsibilities as far as maintenance. He said he will confer with the Parks & Rec Director for confirmation of this.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

Open tasks from previous meeting(s)

Task Mr. Cunningham said he will send the Board a copy of the additional Code of Ethics as well as the Procurement Policy.

Owned by Dan Cunningham, First Selectman

Task Ms. Hall asked Mr. Gervais to circulate the revised bylaws and to file them with the Town Clerk.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

Task Mr. Gervais said he will bring an example of the private duty billing to demonstrate how everything is broken down, to their next meeting. He will also invite Chief Finklestein in case he wants to contribute to this discussion.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

Task He further explained that in the prior few years, despite having use of fund balance in the budget, we haven't had to use it, and he will do a projection for them to see where we stand.

Owned by Kevin Gervais, Finance Director