

# Minutes of Board of Finance April 2nd, 2024, Special Meeting - 04/02/24

**Date and time:** 04/02/24 5:30 PM to: 04/02/24 6:53 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, Jeffrey Newton, East Lyme Superintendent of Schools, Gary Goeschel, Town Planner, Chris Lund, Director of Facilities East Lyme School District, Maryanna Stevens, BOE Finance Director

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

**Link:** <https://app.meetingking.com/meetings/412924>

## Topics

### 1. Call Meeting to Order & Pledge

**Note:** Chairperson Hall called the April 2nd, 2024, Special Meeting of the Board of Finance to order at 5:33 p.m. and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 2. Delegations

**Note:** There was none,

### 3. New Business- Budget Deliberations

**Note:** Ms. Hall noted that the focus of tonight's meeting is on budget deliberations. She suggested they begin with the Board of Education, given that they have a large contingency from the Board of Ed present.

**Note:** Ms. Hall proposed they cut the Board of Ed budget by \$1.1 million, based on identified savings and adjustments in areas such as health insurance, pension contributions, and energy costs, which the Board discussed.

**Note:** Jeffrey Newton, Superintendent of Schools, agreed with the proposed cut, stating it would not impact students or staff negatively. He discussed some of the reductions they were able to make without negatively affecting educational quality.

**Note:** The Board reviewed the reduction calculations for the Board of Ed budget.

#### **Decision** MOTION (1)

Mr. Maxfield moved to approve the Board of Ed budget for the upcoming fiscal year, for \$60,024,675.

Mr. Ginsberg seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Note:** Ms. Hall discussed budgeting for capital projects, specifically focusing on the needs of East Lyme High School and the allocation of resources for roof replacements and other capital needs. She mentioned the prioritization of roof replacements at Lillie B. Haynes and Niantic Center School, with a suggestion to push off the Niantic Center School roof replacement to alleviate budget constraints.

**Note** Mr. Newton, Mr. Lund, and the Board discussed replacing the roofs in phases, and the aquatic center roof was identified as a critical need due to safety concerns, and it was emphasized that it should be addressed immediately.

**Note** Mr. Steel and Mr. Newton discussed the state reimbursement for the school and aquatic center roofs, highlighting a reimbursement rate of just over 40%.

**Note** The Board briefly discussed whether the financial strategy of bundling projects, including bonding, could potentially save costs.

**Note** Mr. Ginsberg asked about deferring technology upgrades to manage budget constraints and delaying device replacements for the school district. Mr. Newton replied that doing so will hurt them in the following year.

**Note** The Board further discussed the Board of Ed capital projects.

**Decision** MOTION (2)

Mr. Ginsberg moved that they eliminate the Niantic Center School roof project from the Board of Education Capital Plan.

Mr. Birmingham seconded the motion.

Mr. Maxfield said he's concerned that construction expenses will be much more costly the following year, and Mr. Steel concurred.

Vote: Motion carries, 4-2-0.

Nay- Mr. Maxfield and Mr. Steel.

**Note** Ms. Hall noted they discussed moving items out of the operating budget that seemed to belong in the capital plan versus operating. She added that to the extent that they put that in its right place, it helps them going forward in future budgets.

**Decision** MOTION (3)

Mr. Steel moved to add the \$250,000 to the capital plan that came out of the Board of Ed's operating plan.

Ms. McNamara seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Note** Ms. Hall advised that they work directly from the budget book, and if Board Members have suggestions, motions can be made as they go.

### **3-1. 101- First Selectman**

**Note** Ms. Hall suggested reducing the Ad Hoc Committee line item by \$1,000, unless someone is aware of some upcoming expenses. Mr. Cunningham replied that he thinks that reduction is appropriate.

**Note** Mr. Steel suggested moving the \$12,000 from line 311, the grant writer, into the library and having a professional searcher seek out the grants, rather than having someone do it who may have written a few grants but is unaware of all the available grant databases.

**Note** Mr. Cunningham replied with the following comments:

Grant writing it's one of those areas where if you can put a little money into it hopefully you get a lot of money out of it.

To rely on someone going to the library to hit their databases sounds like it might work, but if we can hire someone part-time, who's done it before and really knows the ins and outs of it, it would be a great benefit. We want to make sure it's done right.

**Note** Mr. Steel clarified that he's not disagreeing with hiring somebody on a part-time basis, he merely putting the qualifications around somebody that might be able to get you the best bang for the buck, for that little bit of money that is being invested.

**Note** Mr. Ginsberg said he agrees with Mr. Steel that the qualifications he mentions are important but if we put this money in the library then that person would report to somebody in the library, and he doesn't think that's what they should do; it's better if whoever is hired reports to the town rather than to the library.

**Note** Ms. Hall said she agrees that having the reporting structure here makes more sense, but she hopes they can encourage that person to take advantage of the resources that the individuals at the library could add.

**Decision** MOTION (3)

Mr. Maxfield moved to reduce line 295 of the First Selectman's budget to \$2,000, a \$1,000 cut.  
Mr. Steel seconded the motion.  
Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Decision** MOTION (4)

Mr. Maxfield moved to reduce line 300-292, welfare and general assistance, by \$700, from \$1,200 to \$500.  
Mr. Steel seconded the motion.  
Motion carried, 6-0-0.

### 3-2. 102- Assessor

**Note** Ms. Hall said she was looking at the 200-239 contracted operating services, the proposed budget is for \$5,000, but so far this year she doesn't think they've expended anything yet.

**Note** Mr. Gervais explained this line is for personal property audits, if everything else is good in the budget at the end of the year, if there's money left, she will do audits, depending on how many she can do with the funds available.

**Note** The Board, Mr. Cunningham, and Mr. Gervais further discussed the Assessor's budget and the different audits her office handles.

**Decision** MOTION (5)

Ms. Hall moved to reduce the contracted operating services line from \$5,000, by \$2,000, to \$3,000.  
Mr. Ginsberg seconded the motion.  
Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Note** After some discussion by the Board, Mr. Ginsberg and Mr. Cunningham concurred that miscellaneous supplies should remain at \$8,100.

### 3-3. 103- Tax Collector

**Note** Ms. Hall said she was looking at the miscellaneous supplies, as of March 20th, they're 65% through their budget, so she thinks that amount could be cut by \$500.

**Decision** MOTION (5)

Mr. Birmingham moved to reduce the operating expenses in the Tax Collector's budget line 320, miscellaneous supplies, by \$500, to \$3,000.  
Mr. Maxfield seconded the motion.  
Motion carried, 6-0-0.

### 3-4. 104- Building

**Note** Ms. Hall mentioned the building software in the budget and Gary Goeschel, Town Planner, came forward to speak a bit about it, and offered the following remarks:

The Zoning Department, Building, and he, which includes Planning and Wetlands, have collaborated to say they need some new permit software to track the permits that are coming in.

With that, they do hope to create efficiencies in productivity.

All the data entry that's done now with every permit that comes in is done by the admin staff.

Hopefully this will alleviate the bulk of that, at least 90% of it.

They're looking for digital submission online as well as being able to pay for that permit online.

There's a lot of time that's going to be saved and obviously the admin staff can be redirected to do other tasks.

He knows there was also a question regarding buildings and structures per year.

In terms of residential structures, we average about 60 to 65 structures every decade.

That is based on the last POCD.

COVID kind of changed things.

He's not sure where the census projections are now but he'd be happy to take a look into that if the Board would like him to.

**Note** Ms. Hall noted the sheer amount of paperwork currently in the Land Use office, and Mr. Goeschel said the other benefit is they're actually PDFing in an effort to digitize all of their documents that comes in the door now. He added that part of this project also includes digitizing all of their current hard copies and going completely digital.

Mr. Goeschel further explained that he thinks this will bring the town forward a couple of decades and make access to the information more accessible, particularly for the public as well as appraisers and such that utilize our info.

**Note** Ms. Hall and Mr. Goeschel discussed how online payments are immediately collected, which potentially allows for more interest, all the sooner. They also discussed how Land Use does not currently accept credit cards, and Ms. Hall instructed that the credit card convenience fees be paid by the customers.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked if the cost of the software includes training and installation and Mr. Goeschel replied in the affirmative.

**Note** Mr. Goeschel further detailed that our Building Staff will be able to pull up building plans in the field while they inspect structures, and he hopes to tie it in with our GIS system, so we can create a route for those inspections, thereby allowing vehicles to take the shortest path, save on fuel.

**Note** The Board further discussed the Building Department budget.

### 3-5. 106- Human Resources

**Note** The Board briefly discussed the Human Resources budget and Mr. Gervais noted that he drafted this budget since there was no HR Manager at the time.

**Decision** MOTION (6)

Mr. Steel moved to reduce line 315 of Department 106, employee background checks and line 320, miscellaneous supplies, each by \$1,000, to \$3,000 each.

Mr. Birmingham seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

### 3-6. 107- Town Clerk

**Note** Ms. Hall said there's an overall budget increase of 4.83 and she saw nothing to cut.

**Note** Mr. Gervais said he thinks we can get by with \$1,000 of overtime, so \$806 can be cut from the overtime line in the Town Clerk budget.

**Decision** MOTION (7)

Mr. Maxfield moved to reduce line 214, overtime, Town Clerk-107, by \$806.

Mr. Steel seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

### **3-7. Ledge Light Health District**

**Note** The Board had no reductions for this department.

### **3-8. 109- Information Technology**

**Note** Ms. Hall said she feels like IT and HR were two of the departments that were understaffed.

**Note** Mr. Steel said he's proposing that the new support engineer position start as part-time with no benefits and see how that works out. He also thinks the training for Ms. Ames should go from \$2,200 down to \$1,400, the same as what she had last year.

**Note** The Board discussed how the new position was already reduced by the Board of Selectmen.

**Note** Mr. Cunningham observed that we live in this world now of cybersecurity threats, having our software up to date is essential, as is having backups done in a timely manner. He thinks the workload is overwhelming for Mr. Cleary between Police Station and the rest of the town.

**Note** Mr. Birmingham said for 320, miscellaneous supplies, he thinks that should be reduced by \$1000, to \$4,000.

**Note** Ms. Hall noted that for this year line 320 is 100% utilized.

**Note** The Board further discussed the IT budget.

**Decision** MOTION (8)

Mr. Steel moved that Department 109, Information Technology, Line 220, GIS, New and Continuing Development, to decrease the amount by \$2,000, to \$500.

Mr. Maxfield seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Decision** MOTION (9)

Mr. Steel moved to reduce other IT services, IT training for Ms. Ames, from \$3,600 to \$1,400.

Mr. Maxfield seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

### **3-9. 110- Registrars**

**Note** The Board had no reductions.

### **3-10. 111- Judge of Probate**

**Note** The Board had no reductions.

### **3-11. 113- Building Maintenance**

**Note** The Board discussed the overtime for this department and Mr. Gervais noted it's due to keeping the Community Center open on Saturdays and Sundays, and the \$9,000 that was previously cut is now being split by the Library, Park & Rec, and Commission on Aging, so that this service can continue.

**Note** Ms. Hall asked about miscellaneous supplies and Mr. Gervais said they've spent \$600 of the \$1,800 available.

**Decision** MOTION (10)

Mr. Birmingham moved to reduce the miscellaneous supplies of Department 113, Building Maintenance, by \$800, to \$1,000.

Ms. Hall seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

### **4. Public Discussion**

**Note** There was none.

### **5. Board Comments**

**Note** The Board determined that they would begin with General Government at the April 4th, 2024, meeting.

### **6. Adjournment**

**Decision** MOTION (11)

Mr. Birmingham moved to adjourn the BOF April 2nd, 2024, Special Meeting at 6:53 p.m.

Mr. Maxfield seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Note** Respectfully Submitted,  
Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary