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TOWN CLERK

**EAST HAVEN BOARD OF FINANCE
BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 12, 2024**

The East Haven Board of Finance held a Budget Workshop Meeting on Wednesday, March 12, 2024, at 6:30 P.M. in the Mario Giamo, Joseph Vitale Meeting Room, Lower Level in order to transact the Following:

Roll Call

Mayor Joseph Carfora and Ralph Vitale were not present. Richard Esposito, Beth Purcell, Al Purzycki, Chris Perdo and Ron DeSena. Jim Keeley, Finance Director was also present.

a. Assessor/Board of Assessment Appeals (107/108)

Sandy Santos, Deputy Assessor presented for this department. Sandy stated there were not a lot of changes. The salaries are contractual. The only other thing that changed is data processing. That is due to the change in the fees for Quality Data. Rich asked about the drones if they were implemented. Sandy stated she did not believe so. They are working on it. Chris stated the Fire Dept. used to take the Assessor out on the boat to get the views of the houses on the water. Sandy stated she used to go out and do that and it was helpful and made a difference.

Board of Assessment Appeals, we put in for advertising. Al asked when the Board meets and what happened at the meeting. Sandy stated the meeting happened on March 11, 2024 and the minutes would be filed with the Town Clerk. The values went up in 2021 because of the revaluation. Sometimes it takes the mortgage companies to catch up and so they were just finding out last year.

b. Mayor (103)

Michelle Benivegna presented for this department and stated it stayed the same with exception of we increased regular salaries for cost of living for the mayor's administrative assistant. We added some funds to part time wages. His assistant has vacation and we need to cover. We used to have 2 full time assistants. For cost saving measures we moved one to part time and so when his assistant is out we need coverage for half of a day. We had slight increases in training and office supplies

because costs have gone up. Al asked what the big equipment maintenance service request was this year. Jim stated that was on the wrong line.

c. Community Services (880)

Michelle Benivegna presented for this department. We requested a little less. We did add a new item to this for community dining for \$5,000.00. We partnered with them late fall. They have a grant. We started a little slow. Due to some of the requirements for kitchen, we decided Hayes is ideal. It will take a minimal amount of money. We are serving every other Wednesday serving 150 people free of charge. It is not just food, there are crafts for the family, social service component, FRC comes, diaper bank, snap, heat assistance. We are looking to expand the program by offering more nights. A series of 9 dinners on the green as well. There are to go packets. We were able to go through some of the other areas that we did not need as much and moved money around to get us the \$5,000.00. They are very appreciative of it. YMCA is housed there as well so this will spread news about programs, etc. Al asked where advertising is coming from for this. The community dining room is grant funded and they do all the advertising and we share the information. Chris asked about the after prom, given the money was expended fully, that this is the biggest decrease. Michelle stated they got money for 5 years. Then they stopped for 5 and they did request it because they had a shortage, but this year is the first year the Mayor's office received a fund-raising request from them. The Town gave \$500.00. Michelle stated we needed to balance things out. The Town always support events. Beth asked about the community dining room if this was just a donation. It was pure discretion and they were happy to help after seeing how many families are receiving services we thought this would help. They have multiple sources.

d. General Services (885)

Jim presented for this department and stated over all it is a \$35,000.00 increase. I brought down special assignments \$30,000.00; ARPA is drying up. Chris stated the department request is \$700,000, and the mayor's request is \$20,000.00 more. Jim stated it means that he had cut this a little too thin and then had it added it back in. Al asked how we are doing with revenue from the special assignments. Jim stated we are doing good. Special assignments are a little difficult because we only book the revenue when we receive it. Now with Munis system we are hoping to get to a point where we get recorded on a receivable basis. Now I make the adjustment manually at the end of the year by a report. We have to see how things are coded in Munis. Jim stated the Town requested Police overtime is increased. The last couple of years this is where the number has been at and it is a real number. The wages are not going lower. Street and traffic lights and utilities have gone up, not dramatically but some where in that 12 to 15% range. Chris asked about the phone and stated he thought

that was supposed to help us save. Jim stated it was supposed to, but the verdict is still out whether it is saving us. The phone system is better. Beth stated, this is just telephone expenses. Jim stated yes. Al asked about electricity and how much we get from the solar field that we have a deal with. Jim stated it off sets that street and traffic lights account. Chris stated he knew the Town was looking at a program for solar on town buildings, has that gone through. Jim stated we had a presentation. I wanted a breakdown on savings per building. I did get a second revision but have not had the time to review it all. Al stated sometimes things that are free cost too much. Chris asked about contingency. Jim stated there is a transfer right now for \$325,000.00. My theory has always been if you have a budget with real numbers contingency should always be dropping back into our fund balance. Ideally you do not use contingency. When it is needed for a line item, we transfer out of that line item to where it is needed to be able to trace the cost back.

e. Fire/Civil Prep./Board of Fire Comm. (333,334)

Chief Marcarelli presented and stated the Fire Commission account is flat funded. Civil Preparedness is included in the Emergency Operation Center and the Police Chief will speak on that when he presents for his department.

Increase in salary lines are contractual wage increase. The water bill I have asked for an increase up to \$650,000.00. Last year we appropriated \$530,000.00 and anticipate we will go over that and we already did a transfer for that this year. Our budget is not based on the consumption of water it is based on the maintenance of the infrastructure of the public water supply system which is based on inch/feet of water main and inaudible by Regional Water Authority. In the past it is a moving target because the RWA do not have to set their rates until after our budget is passed. We are thinking it will be around a 12% increase this year. We have never included damage to hydrants, which we are responsible to pay for and repair. If a vehicle strikes a hydrant and if the vaulted driver does not have insurance for the hydrant to get repaired it falls on the Town. Or if they happen to catch someone and they are prosecuted we may see money down the line if the person has the ability to pay. We have received amounts of \$25.00 for a \$20,000.00 hydrant, which is a waste. There are some hydrants that must be replaced if there is not a redundancy in the water supply system. I have asked Jim if we could put a little bit of a cushion in so we do not have to transfer money from another account where it may be needed to replace a hydrant that is damaged. We are aggressive about subrogating with insurance companies that do hit and we are averaging about 6 hydrants per year. Gas and diesel, I asked for an increase and that line has been transferred to public works. Last year we did get a cut to \$40,000.00 in our EMS supply line. I asked that to be restored to what it was in 2022/2023 to \$55,000.00. We hover around that every year in consumables. Other contractual services I decreased by about \$4,000.00 +/- We have gone to a new software

reporting management system that includes some other the programs that we were paying separately for. I did work closely with the Finance Director and the Mayor with the creation of my budget to be as reasonable as possible due to money that we did receive from ARPA for the use of protective clothing and safety supplies, it allowed me not to increase those lines and that will not be the same for next year. Everything we are seeing with our business the cost for one set of firefighter protective clothing went from \$2300.00 per set to \$3,500.00 per set and with ARPA and CARES we were able to replace some of the firefighter clothing which also gave us some to keep in stock if we hire new firefighters. Rich asked about staffing. Chief stated there is one recruit in the academy and another candidate that we will be giving a conditional offer to in April or May. He was offered the position ahead of the recruit class that started in February. He was a senior at UNH and wanted to finish his degree. There is some contractual contract language that was changed that will allow him, because of his certifications to go on staff as long as he participates in the next available academy which is in August. That would have been a vacancy carried from April until August. He is graduating from the paramedic program. We have one vacancy for battalion chief, which if promoted would create a vacancy for captain, which then would create a vacancy for a firefighter position. It is continually difficult to get staff because of our job requirements. Rich asked if anyone was on W/C. Chief stated we have one firefighter on long term injury and the fire marshal on long term injury. My department can not sustain any more cuts. All of what we do is increasing in costs and I was kind and hopeful at the same time that I will not incur any unusual catastrophic failures of fire apparatus but as our fleet ages it will drive up the cost of ownership so I am asking you not make any additional cuts. Rich asked how the CMED fund works. Chief stated we funded that out of an additional contract line, other contractual line this year, and we are restoring that back to a regular line item. We pay an annual subscription fee and what that money goes to is our paramedics have to have a direct line of communication with both hospitals who provide them medical authorization to administer drugs that are not on standing order and it is based on per capita rate. Al stated here it states you are taking part time fire inspector and going to full time yet you have a part time and showing a part time fire inspector. Chief stated it was a typo. Chief asked for it full time last year, but it is staying part time. Al stated there is a big change or something with Garcia. Chief stated Garcia number is driven up based on how much overtime there is. It is a moving target. We do not currently have a lot of vacancies so the Garcia number typically would be lower, but we also have a department that is also getting an increase in seniority which equates to them getting more time off which equates to other fire fighters getting Garcia pay. In East Haven, any firefighter that works over 212 hours on a 28-day cycle, is entitled to pay under the FLSA at time and a half over their hourly rate. Currently they are on straight time when they work overtime but

once they hit the 212 hours on a 28-day cycle, all their overtime is time and a half. Chief stated the price of radios went up too.

f. Recreation/Ice Rink (661/662)

Liz Franco Spano presented and stated 661 she is very happy with what she asked for and the Mayor's recommendations. He sees we are improving with programing. We asked for extra money in our seasonal wage which we can pay for our instructors and we are always in the positive. We went up in a couple items. Rich stated they are doing a great job with pickle ball. Liz stated the classes sell out quick. Beth asked where the pickle ball courts were going. Liz stated Hudson Street. It will be tennis; pickle ball and the other side will be a playground area and a basketball net will be there. Chris stated rental equipment went up from \$2,000.00 to \$5,000.00. Liz stated we are doing more events. Movies on the green, screens, etc. Rich stated American Legion baseball is done. Liz stated we left it in there because if you get the kids we need it. There are not a lot in Foxon either. Chris asked about Fox on Rec League umpires and the Center. The Center is (inaudible) Liz said soccer is up and little league is doing good, football is so so, hockey is not great. Beth asked about seasonal wages for instructors and if it was all year long. Liz stated yes. Programing, instructors, supervisors, lessons, etc. Chris asked about basketball (everyone talking at once, inaudible)

Liz stated 662, ice rink is doing fantastic. We went up in contractual because an increase in service contract. Professional training is new and Chris is going away to get trained and I think in the long run we will save money. You need have a license to go on the scissors lift. He is learning a lot. Our skate shop we sharpen skates but we have vending machines and are saving a ton of money because we do not need staff there and we get a percentage from the vending machines. Al asked about services. Electricity, natural gas, etc. are we in arrears or are we doing good with costs. Jim stated we are doing better than expected and this is the first year the rink is up and running so last year was a guessing game. Electricity is hard to gauge, depending on how busy we are. Roller skating is going great. Beth asked what the increase on regular salaries. Jim stated because it is a new department, everyone still has steps and the increase is greater. Al asked about the ice rink skating hours. Liz stated Fridays and Sundays for public skate and birthday parties and special events. Liz stated we try and do what the public wants. Al asked about midnight adult. Liz stated we had not had anyone calling about that but we are always open to suggestions. Learn to skate program has taken off. Chris asked about funding for that, if that was in with Youth Hockey. Liz stated that was different. Liz stated we have an instructor. Al asked Jim how it is looking compared to what we are bringing in to what we are spending. Jim stated I looked back to where we were prior to Covid. Jim stated we are up, I do not think it is where we want to be right now but we did also have some problems first getting into the system and seeing where the payments are going, because everything went electronic so I have a feeling we are behind a month, but even with that, we are ahead of where we were the way it was run in the past, prior to COVID. Rich stated it was a cash free facility. Liz stated correct. We have received more now for the ice rink. Liz stated we are still learning

and gauging on the busy times. Jim stated it will be a good 3 years to really see. Chris asked if Liz heard any word, he stated when we were going through the process when we were redoing the ice rink it was stated by that company that some of these other companies of some of the surrounding towns are going to have to re-do their ice rinks soon. Liz stated Northford had 3 sheets of ice, we have one. The dead time we brought in field trips, etc. We are also keeping it reasonable for our residents. Out of Town we charge more. Al asked what the field East of the ice-skating rink is used for. Liz stated adult soccer and youth football used to play practice there. Al was wondering if solar should be on the roof.

Youth Services (664) new department.

Andrea Kenny is running the department now. Andrea stated we are increasing services in Town and currently run off a grant, but fears of losing the grant so she is appreciative of having it in the budget now. We have the Teen Center now, which we run twice a month. We have a pool table, ping pong, movies, gaming, arts, and crafts, etc. And we have group games. We have a new concept we have a care closet, and we have hygiene projects and hoping to make it also for school supplies, no questions asked. We have snacks. We are planning on doing a pizza event. We started with 8, and the last couple we had 21. Al stated it is \$57,000.00 and wondered how much is covered by the grant. Youth stated it is separate. Jim stated we get reimbursed a little over \$20,000.00 from the state. The criteria are always changing for the grant. This enables us to keep it going if the grant money ends. We are collaborating with many different programs and organizations. Chris asked about Hayes layout. The YMCA, historical, youth services, pickle ball. Liz stated it works out well, everyone is there usually different times. We have our designated rooms. Chris asked how the utilities are split. The building is under the Recreation budget per Jim.

g. Tax Collector (106)

Shayna Acampora presented there are a couple of decreases. Professional development and training are one. This is not because we are doing less, it is because there are not as many classes required. Shayna is certified, Amberleigh and Mheegan who are in the office are in class 3 and have only one class left after that and they will be certified. That is where the bulk of the money has gone in the past. Office supplies: we bought new desks for 23/24, so for 24/25 that went down a bit. The printing and binding went up a bit. That is out of our control. It is all the bills, supplemental bills, and postage. It used to be out of general services. Jim stated with Munis, you need to designate a department. Rich asked about the collection rate. Shayna stated for the 22 Grand list we are at 96.31. For the 21 Grand List we are at 98.9. Shayna stated if there was a piece of Real Estate was with an Attorney in the past and they were unable to collect on it or they collected a portion, and we took the account back, they would still charge us. Jim stated we have done a much better job at getting a lot of the older debt collected.

h. Civil Service & Personnel (115)

Andrea Liquori presented and stated it is the same budget I put forward for 25 years except, for other contractual services, I asked for \$9000.00 which is an increase and the Mayor went along with, and that account pays for everything, all the testing, copier, printer, proctors, panel interviews, it pays for everything extra. In the past I was able to charge for the application for the police department, and it would cover a lot of the cost. Once we went through Covid, people started complaining they could not pay the fee and the Mayor said to stop collecting it. That account went from \$6,500.00 yearly to \$4,500.00 because we were taking in a couple thousand. And I lost that. The biggest pool of applicants was the Police Dept. I think last year I spent about \$8,000.00. I am testing more often because we are getting so few applicants, in all areas, police, fire and we are finding it difficult. I need that to be increased because I am always running short. Rich asked what is the passing score for clerical. Andrea stated in the rules it states at least a 60. When the justice dept. came in they recommended the police dept. be a passing score of 70. We were using a 70 overall, but every time we test I have been trying to recommend to lower it back to 60 so we have a bigger pool. Chris asked about the police department, is there a regional test. Andrea stated yes, but they are finding the same thing, but you still have to pay them and you are in the pool with more people and it is competitive. Chris asked about BOE if there are positions there that are civil service. Andrea stated yes.

i. Informational Technology (339)

Jim presented. Al asked when would they be seeing all new account numbers (regarding the new MUNIS system). Jim stated we have a whole new set of accounts and the departments are set up in the new system. The reports are not running 100%% right now. There are a different set of numbers. MUNIS you cannot individually label an account. The object has its own definition. In the past if their wording was a little different from one department to the next it was the same thing, it might be named slightly different now. They all do have new account numbers that are longer. It starts with organization, then fund numbers, then object numbers, project numbers. We are working on it and will take some time to refine it. Then I could run a report for specific projects. Al asked if we are doubling the people in IT. Jim said we are still budgeting for 2 people in IT. In the past we had one that was budgeted under ARPA. We were putting in MUNIS and a lot of their time was used up by MUNIS. The question has been asked in the past if we need two people and Jim stated he did not know then and still does not know. Right now, we only have one person and I do not see a dramatic change from having two people to one person. Ideally would it be nice, yes. Jim stated most big municipalities have an IT department with 4 or 5 people and you are looking at a supervisor that is making \$150k a year. I am not sure that that is more than we need. We are happy with where we are right now. We want to leave the funds in there in case we need to bring in outside people. Once MUNIS is all the way running, we can see if we really need another person. Chris asked if are currently looking to hire for the vacancy? Jim said we are not. The person here now is capable of doing what the person who is no longer here was doing. If I was to say we need someone, we would be

looking at a much higher salary to get a person that could do everything. Chris asked if it was a Union position. Jim said yes. Tina added there are a lot of projects in the air right now. Things are starting to fall into place. Jim said in other contractual services, we did not know exactly how many contracts we needed, for example, office 365 we obtained, our payroll is dos based, now we can transfer it. Beth asked for the other contractual, they requested \$100k. Jim stated he cut it because I am figuring best case scenario there will still be a gap between having one person and two people, I do not see it where I am or the Town will be looking for another person immediately. We will re address as we go through. The other thing is that we still have money in the ARPA until 12/31/24 and charge money back to that ARPA account. We are changing a lot in a short period of time. We are hoping to get payroll in for January of 2025.

j. Finance; (104)

Jim Keeley presented and stated the wages is our biggest category. We are still way ahead with the way we re-organized the department. The stipend line item is increasing but we are well below with not having that extra person. I feel that all the staff in finance are under paid because they are all really very good. We would have a heck of a time finding people to do what they are doing. We are fortunate. Al stated that data processing and service software went up and that must be the new system. Jim stated that is our old system and they keep jacking the prices up. Al asked how much longer will they be running in parallel. Jim said hopefully January. Rich stated he was appreciative the way he handled Munis. Auditing and accounting services goes up every other year. The pension stuff. Every year they put in new requirements. Every off year it is an in-depth review and costs more money and every other year they update. We are on the year of and in-depth review.

k. Revenue/Debt Service (771)

Jim Keeley presented stated it is the cost of debt service for the coming year. On the plus side after this year depending on whether we do not bond anything further it will start coming down. We reached our peak and our rating has improved. Us being on the water is something that contributes to our bond rating. They are always worried about catastrophes. The percentage we need to have in there is always changing as well. It was 5% now it is 8%. Jim handed the revenue report. This proposes a mill rate increase of 2.05. Going from 31.20 to 33.25. By state statute cars stay at 32.45. We will get reimbursed by the state, but we do not get reimbursed the first year. The estimated revenues for vehicles are calculated by the 32.45. We have done well with delinquents and interest penalties on liens. We are almost at the million mark and we budgeted for the million. At some point people drop off and the list gets smaller. Education (inaudible), state driven, we got half of it so far and that is a grant. Water authority, they pay a separate tax bill, I do not have those numbers now. Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control, it used to be part of the town and this is just an agreement we have with them and does not change much. Pequot funds come from governor's budget; disability reimbursement this comes in late. State property is a grant number. Telecommunication property

tax, I am waiting on paper work for that. Veteran's Exemption same thing. DCF this is a grant. Interest income has been up and hopefully it sustains. I have cash accounts, but every month I put them into an investment account, trying to get the most money we can. Zoning Board of Appeals that number is down, but it might be that they are back dated on their system. Zoning fees, I increased that, it has been up. Police Gun Permits, we have seen a slight decrease this year. Town Clerk fees are still good. I am expecting to go over the 580 mark. Landfill fees are brought down as it has been slow. I expect it to pick up and hope to get that number back up. Spring is the heaviest time. Building department permits are still doing well and our new building official is doing a great job. Recreation fees and athletic complex fees are down from what I projected but we still have things to come in and still reach our 340 from last year and get higher next year. Beth asked if this is people paying to take the classes. Jim stated yes. They hire an instructor and they get 2/3 and we get 1/3. Complex fees are just the ice rink. Employee Cost sharing, that goes up every year. Police Special Assignments. I brought it up slightly from last year from where it was budgeted because it is still less than what it has been in the past. Worker's compensation reimbursement we are doing well and if you remember w/c expenses went down. Misc. I kept it at 60k. Right now, we have the North Branford Animal Control money in there. Jim stated we should talk about it if they extend us for a longer period, then maybe we put it in the budget. Beth asked about the police course where they share (inaudible) do we pay for our own police. Jim stated if we are offering a help on a call we still pay for our own officers. If it is special assignments, then we get paid from those towns. You see less of our officers being somewhere else than their police officers being here because of MERS guidelines. They are in the process of changing somethings with MERS. One thing they are changing is the floor. Right now, they have a floor of 2.5%. If I was to retire today, I would get 2.5% increase, next year would be a minimum of 2.5% and it could be higher but cannot be lower. One of things they are changing is after July of next year, you have to be retired for a year before you get an increase. It will help us. Jim stated our mill rate is slightly over 2 million. Our grand list did decrease slightly. That and the cost of everything is the reason. I still expect a positive in the fund balance. Chris asked for an ARPA update. Chris asked about the gazebo. Jim stated they still have not found anyone yet and is still on that list. The pickle ball court they are bidding on and in ARPA. I still have some open monies for IT.

l. Town Council (101)

Jim Keeley presented stating this is basically the same

m. Board of Finance (102)

Jim Keeley presented stated it is basically the same.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:40

**Board of Finance Clerk
Susan Mauro**