

Town of East Hampton
Town Council Regular Meeting
Tuesday, May 26, 2020
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

MINUTES

Present: Chairman Pete Brown (arrived at 6:40pm), Vice Chairman Dean Markham, Council Members Tim Feegel, Derek Johnson, Barbara Moore, Mark Philhower, and Kevin Reich and Town Manager David Cox.

Call to Order

Vice Chairman Markham called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Adoption of Agenda:

A motion was made by Ms. Moore, seconded by Mr. Johnson, to amend the agenda to add an item under #8 – Statement on the Budget, followed by Public Remarks and then Discussion & Deliberation (no possible action). Voted (6-0)

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Philhower, seconded by Mr. Reich, to approve the minutes of the Town Council Regular Meeting of May 12, 2020 as written. Voted (6-0)

Public Remarks

None

Presentations

None

Bids & Contracts

None

Resolution/ Ordinances/ Policies/ Proclamation

None

Continued Business

2020-2021 Town & Board of Education Budgets

Statement on the Budget

Vice Chairman Dean Markham read the following statement prepared by the Democratic members of the Town Council.

*Democratic Town Council Members
Statement on 2020-21 Budget
May 26, 2020*

The Governor's Executive Order extended by 30 days the municipal budget process and suspended our Charter provision for a budget referendum. Typically, this Council would

have acted on the Board of Finance recommended budget in early May sending it to Town Meeting and Budget Referendum.

Under that same Executive Order, it is the Town Council who has now been given the exclusive responsibility to adopt the budget and set the Mil Rate. Under our revised calendar, we intend to present our final fiscal year 2020-21 budget for vote on June 9th.

The Council Leadership and members also recognized a need for as much discussion, review, analysis and transparency of this process in these trying times, using technology and virtual participation to include as many as possible from our community.

To facilitate our greater understanding of the recommended Board of Finance budget, we conducted a first - a Council budget workshop last Thursday. Besides the 16 panelists including Council members, Town Manager, Finance Director, Chairman of both Boards of Education and Finance, the Superintendent and his support staff, 47 of our citizens listened in while we heard presentations and responses to questions presented to guide our discussions. Their responses were most illuminating and set the tone for what we intend to present in our final budget. Most significant is the expectation of General Government 2020 surplus of approximately \$649,000 – half coming from cost and expense savings and half from increases in revenue. Also, surplus from Board of Education spending is projected at over \$200,000. Obviously, many of us expected this surplus as our school buildings have been shuttered for a third of the school year.

This positive information now enables us to re-evaluate many aspects of our overall budget and financial planning.

The information obtained at last week's workshop and yet to be determined, along with the revised budget calendar, will afford us additional time to fully analyze all our financial information and make strategic decisions that will have a positive impact on this current year as well as the 2021 and 2022 fiscal budgets. We will make our town stronger as we emerge from the coronavirus emergency.

As we stated on May 10th, we will not present a full draft nor adopt the annual budget this evening. As a highlight of what we intend to do, it is the Democratic Leadership plan to;

- 1. Selectively pay one-time capital expenses or retire debt obligations early, before June 30th, in co-operation with the Board of Finance;*
- 2. Fund a new teaching position to mitigate the significantly larger classroom size that follows the current 4th grade at Center School. This has been the major outcry from the public and we are addressing this need.*
- 3. Adding back the police officer, which our Town Manager had reluctantly cut from his initial proposal, when this Council requested, he re-evaluate budgets in March. I would note for all listening that our police force was reduced by two officers 10 years ago. This will restore our force. It is also worthy to note that a portion of the expense will be achieved by overtime reductions.*
- 4. We will restore and make whole technology and especially the student Chromebooks cut by the prior Council in its last two budgets.*

5. *This and more will be accomplished, all within the provisions of our Charter which does not allow the Council to increase the Board of Finance budget total Expenditures.*
6. *Strategic use of Fund Balance, maintaining our healthy 12% balance of annual expenditures, and positioning East Hampton to retain its AAA Bond Rating. This, under the current economic situation will enable East Hampton to have a significantly lower cost on bonds for the new Town Hall when they are underwritten in the late summer. And finally,*
7. *we expect at worst, a very minimal, and at best, NO increase in our Mil Rate.*

We do have much more work to do in the next two weeks but wanted you to know what our thinking is and what we believe can be accomplished.

Public Remarks

Jim Radavich, 15 Jacobson Farm Road, commented on the number of unemployed individuals in East Hampton and asked what happens if the Town falls short in collecting tax revenue what happens to the budget.

Amy Ordonez, 116 Main Street and member of the Board of Education and Chairperson of the Library Advisory Board, commented that she is thankful for the addition of the 5th grade teacher but would like the Board of Education's original budget be reinstated. She would also like to see a Youth Services and Reference Librarian added to Town staff. She noted the full-time staff members for surrounding town libraries.

Andrew Dickenson, 11 Taylor Drive, would like cuts to the Board of Education budget be restored.

Patience Coleman, 52 Schoolhouse Lane, commented she fully supports smaller classes and is happy about the additions mentioned in Mr. Markham's statement and would like the Board of Education budget restored to its original amount.

Robert Raines, 60 Spice Hill Drive, commented he would like the original Board of Education budget restored.

Megan Gagne, 25 South Main Street, would like to show her support for the original Board of Education budget.

Tania Sones, 17 Curry Lane, would like the Board of Education budget restored, not just the addition of a 5th grade teacher.

Joanna Mercaldi, 1 Aldens Crossing, asked the Town Council to support the original Board of Education budget.

Mary Ann Dostaler, 56 William Drive, appreciates the statement by Dean Markham and the prudent use of fund balance to be able to restore the budgets as they need to be while keeping the mil rate near zero.

Jerry Kelly, 50 Haddam Neck Road, commented his support for the original Board of Education budget.

Christine Coyne, 11 Eastham Bridge Road, supports the original Board of Education budget and asks that the Town Council keep in mind what the majority of residents want for the budget as there is no public vote.

Barbara Sandquist, 10 Saffron Lane, supports restoring the original Board of Education budget.

Ryan Bothamly, 141 Main Street, asked the Town Council to support the Board of Education budget.

Denise Sawyers, 77 Barton Hill Road, supports the Board of Education budget.

Thomas Macey, 6 Tallwood Drive, commented that he would like to see the current employees taken care of before hiring additional employees and doesn't want to see fund balance used for operational expenses. Mr. Markham noted that there is no intent to use the general fund for operating expenses.

Rich Fielding, 30 South Main Street, thanked the Town Council for their creative thinking around the previous cuts to the budget. He is also glad to see a police officer added back to the budget.

Sarah Perez, 110 Comstock Trail, is in full support of the original Board of Education budget and supports bringing in another police officer.

Brendan Hines, 9 Tarragon Drive, supports the plan described tonight and would like the original Board of Education budget restored and supports both sides of the budget.

Annette Kowalczyk, 7 Maple Street, asked for the Board of Education budget to be restored.

Discussion & Deliberation on 2020-2021 Budgets

Council members discussed the proposed budget changes. It was noted again that the surplus and General fund amounts will be used only on one-time expenses not general operating expenses. Discussions with the unions regarding wages have been positive.

New Business

Easement for Aeration Equipment

An easement was prepared for the second location for aeration equipment at 60 Spellman Point Road. There were questions as to whether property owner was requesting some type of tax break for allowing the easement on his property.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Ms. Moore, to approve the easement for aeration equipment at 60 Spellman Point road. Voted (7-0)

Town Manager Report

Mr. Cox provided an overview of the Town Manager Report. The decorative clock was installed at the new Town Hall. Plans to open to the public are still in discussions with Chatham Health District and plans for plexiglass and other safety measures are being reviewed. The closing occurred for the old Town Hall building. The Town has until the end of June for the final clean out.

Appointments

None

Tax Refunds

A motion was made by Mr. Philhower, seconded by Mr. Markham, to approve tax refunds in the amount of \$482.46. Voted (7-0)

Public Remarks

None

Communications, Correspondence & Announcement**April Board & Commission Summary**

The April Board and Commission Summary was provided to Council members.

Mr. Cox reported that the solar installation on Skinner Street was approved by the Siting Council.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. Markham, seconded by Mr. Reich, to adjourn the meeting at 7:43pm. Voted 7-0)

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Sirois
Recording Clerk