

Town of East Hampton
Town Council Regular Meeting
Tuesday, May 25, 2021
Town Hall Council Chambers and Zoom

MINUTES

Present: Chairman Pete Brown, 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

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Council Chambers and via Zoom.

Adoption of Agenda:

A motion was made by Mr. Philhower, seconded by Mr. Feegel, to add an item to New Business regarding HB6107 related to Zoning Regulations. Voted (7-0)

A motion was made by Ms. Moore, seconded by Mr. Markham, to adopt the agenda as amended. Voted (7-0)

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Reich, seconded by Ms. Moore, to approve the minutes of the Town Council Public Hearing and Regular Meeting of May 11, 2021 as written. Voted (7-0)

Public Remarks

None

Presentations

None

Bids & Contracts

Consideration & Possible Action on Northeast Aquatic Research (NEAR) Agreement

Parks & Recreation Director Jeremy Hall provided an overview of the NEAR agreement. Following a Request for Qualification process, only NEAR provided a response. The agreement will be for three years and the project scope is included with the agreement. It was noted that NEAR is paid monthly.

A motion was made by Mr. Reich, seconded by Mr. Johnson, to approve the 3-year agreement with NEAR including the project scope. Voted (7-0)

Resolution/ Ordinances/ Policies/ Proclamation

Proclamation for EMS Week

Town Council members signed a proclamation for Emergency Medical Services Week.

Fair Housing Resolution

The Fair Housing Resolution is a yearly resolution updating the Town's commitment to upholding and enforcing fair housing for all within the community.

A motion was made by Mr. Reich, seconded by Mr. Johnson, to adopt the Fair Housing Resolution as presented. Voted (7-0)

Consideration & Possible Action on Senior Center Handbook/Policy

Senior Center Director Jo Ann Ewing provided an overview of the new Senior Center Handbook. The handbook will be included with the minutes filed in the Town Clerk's Office.

A motion was made by Mr. Reich, seconded by Ms. Moore, to approve the East Hampton Senior Center Handbook as presented. Voted (7-0)

Continued Business

Consideration & Possible Action on 2021-2022 Budget and Capital Plan

A motion was made by Mr. Markham, seconded by Mr. Johnson, to adopt and to send to Town Meeting in accordance with Charter Section 4.1. the Town of East Hampton fiscal 2021-2022 Town Government Budget in the amount of \$16,574,484 and the Board of Education Budget in the amount of \$33,085,395, for action at the Annual Budget Meeting to be held on June 1, 2021 at 6:00 PM at Town Hall. The Town Government Budget is comprised of Town Operations Budget in the amount of \$12,070,647, Debt Service in the amount of \$3,648,612 and Transfers and Capital Budget in the amount of \$855,225. Voted (7-0)

Mr. Markham provided the following comments in support of the Fiscal 2022 Budget

I support this budget and urge my Council Colleagues to join with me to send this to Town Meeting and Referendum on June 8th. This is a solid, fiscally sound, well thought out Budget prepared by our Town Manager David Cox and Superintendent of Schools Paul Smith and our Board of Education based on the course for East Hampton's future charted a year ago by this Town Council.

The Board of Finance carefully performed their review, and with minor modification, including use of anticipated current year surplus to further enhance technology needs within our schools, unanimously approved the Budget.

In the words of our Town Manager in his budget document presented on March 15th, "Bold steps were taken in preparation and adoption of the previous fiscal year budget at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to address expenses, minimize the tax levy and to freeze the Mill Rate for East Hampton taxpayers while still moving the community forward."

A few of those bold steps, at a point in time that seemed dismal at best, were to fund 4 teachers, fill a long vacant adult and youth Librarian position, bring our police department back to the number of officers 10 years ago and fully fund Chromebooks for our students. All of those moves paid dividends and moved our Town forward. Just this past week, as an example, our Library received State Recognition and an award for the creative and community inclusive "Candy Land" event enjoyed by 3,200 towns people – a quarter of our population. Circulation and use of Library Resources have increased during the pandemic. And most important, where would our students be had we not funded essential teaching staff and provided Chromebooks - the tools of virtual learning! East Hampton schools were among the State leaders, not missing a step implementing virtual learning

just days after classrooms were shut down a year ago.

The budget before you has no new staff or teaching positions. It maintains the progress and course laid out for our future in an East Hampton that is in transition as our citizens demand more and better services and yes are willing to pay for them. Even though we have a bifurcated budget referendum voting on the questions of Town General Government and Education, we are one town. East Hampton is a community with an exemplary educational system whose per-pupil costs are substantially below our peer communities, but the success of our students exceeds those same school systems. Our educational system provides tremendous value for the dollar spent. East Hampton has a fine public works department that maintains our roads and highways. Our Council, in concert with our Lake Commission, continues the Lake Pocotopaug aeration program that saw immediate success last summer, and we work diligently and creatively to fulfill many aspects of the 9-Elements lake restoration plan, including mitigating water flow and construction of rain gardens, and recently approving purchase of Christopher Pond. Our Fire Department has new and upgraded vehicles that enhance protection of our property and families. Our Police Officers, our first responders, are well trained and sensitive to our citizen's needs. Our procedures and officer training are leaders in the State and our officers relish the opportunity to wear body cameras, which are being funded in this budget. Our Parks and Rec Department are developing a Master Plan for the ever-expanding recreational needs of our community. The long-discussed development of a water system using the town owned Oakum Dock wells, may finally become a reality. These programs and so much more make East Hampton a wonderful place to live.

This Budget reflects a 4.47% increase. It maintains a fiscally sound fund balance near 11% and our AAA Bond Rating. The anticipated interest rate on our capital purchases is 1.87%.

As you know, the Council does not set the Mill Rate. That is the responsibility of the Board of Finance after Budget approval at referendum. The anticipated Mill Rate increase would be 1.48 mills, reduced from the 1.59 increase in the initial budget proposal. Through hard work and your Finance Board and Council, and. When the zero mill increase for fiscal 2021 is taken into account, this averages out to .74 mills over these two years. The previous four-year average increase was 1.34 mills, nearly double what we present today.

This budget proposal is fiscally responsible, always considering our taxpayers, yet meets the needs our citizens in this 21st Century in a dynamic, growing community – one that you can raising your children and me my grandchildren.

Mr. Reich commented that he appreciates all the work Vice Chairman Markham has done over the last 3 months on the budget. He also appreciates the cooperation shown between the members of the Board of Education, Board of Finance and Town Council. He encourages everyone to vote.

A motion was made by Mr. Markham, seconded by Ms. Moore, to adopt the 2021-2022 Capital Plan totaling \$2,080,725, of which \$660,000 is to be financed, \$50,000 is to be paid through a Police Camera Grant, \$83,000 to come from Residual Project Balances, \$75,000 from State LOCIP Grant, \$400,00 from fiscal year 2021 Surplus and \$812,725 from Tax Levy in the General Government Budget. Voted (7-0)

New Business

Discussion of House Bill 6107 Regarding Zoning Regulations

Mr. Philhower asked that the Council consider sending a letter to the legislators asking them not to vote in favor of this bill. It could affect the Town's zoning regulations. Mr. Cox will provide all Council members with the full text of the bill to review. Mr. Cox will also get information from the RiverCOG on this bill. This item will be put on the next meeting agenda.

Town Manager Report

Mr. Cox provided an overview of the Town Manager's Report, which will be included with the minutes filed in the Town Clerk's Office.

Appointments

A motion was made by Ms. Moore, seconded by Mr. Philhower to appoint the following:

- Mindy Maynard to Arts & Culture Commission
- Victor Rodriguez to Conservation-Lake Commission
- Russell Kaplan to Clean Energy Task Force

Voted (7-0)

Tax Refunds

A motion was made by Mr. Philhower, seconded by Mr. Markham, to approve tax refunds in the amount of \$2,822.36. Voted (7-0)

Public Remarks

None

Communications, Correspondence & Announcement

On Memorial Day the VFW will hold a ceremony at the monument on the High School lawn at 10:00am.

Council members are invited to attend the celebration for the Top 10 Scholars on Monday, June 7th at 5:00pm in the Town Council Chambers/Community Room.

The Middlesex Hospital Vocal Chords will be performing at the Bushnell on September 11th. Council members are invited to attend. More information will be sent to the members.

Executive Session

Attorney Client Privilege Communication – Pending Claims Against the Town

1. Assessment/Taxation Lawsuits
2. Housing Matter

A motion was made by Mr. Reich, seconded by Mr. Markham, to enter Executive Session at 7:28pm to discuss the items above, with Mr. Cox, Attorney Richard Carella and Finance Director Jeff Jylkka invited into the session. Voted (7-0)

Executive Session ended at 8:00pm

Possible Action on Executive Session Items

A motion was made by Mr. Markham, seconded by Mr. Reich, to authorize the Town Attorney to finalize the settlement with respect to the solar tax appeals. Voted (7-0)

A motion was made by Mr. Markham, seconded by Mr. Reich, to authority the Town Attorney to settle the VanCedarfield v. Town of East Hampton case. Voted (6-1) Mr. Johnson against.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Ms. Moore, seconded by Mr. Reich, to adjourn the meeting at 8:05pm. Voted (7-0)

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Sirois
Recording Clerk