

FIFTEEN ROPE FERRY ROAD
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Board of Finance
Budget Hearing Minutes *REVISED*

Wednesday, March 6, 2024
Waterford Town Hall

Present: Chairman Glenn Patterson, Ronald R. Fedor, Robert Tuneski, David Peabody, Joseph Filippetti

Absent: Bill Sheehan, BOF Clerk; Michael Rocchetti

Elected: Robert J. Brule, First Selectman

Staff: Kimberly Allen, Finance Director; Jonathan Mullen, Town of Waterford Planning Director; Mark Wujtewicz, Planner; Maureen Fitzgerald, Environmental Planner; Steve Cardelle, Building Official; Rebecca Hall, Admin Assistant Finance Office/BOF Recording Secretary

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ATTEST: *[Signature]*
TOWN CLERK

1. Establishment of a quorum and call to order:
A quorum was established and a call to order was established at 7:00 pm, March 6, 2024.
2. Public comment: none

An opening statement regarding the budget process was made by Glenn Patterson, Chairman.

Standing Motion: A motion was made by Joseph Filippetti and seconded by Robert Tuneski to have a standing motion by Robert Tuneski and seconded by Ron Fedor to consider each budget as presented.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

3. **Economic Development Commission Budget:**

Planning Director, Jon Mullen, along with Mark Wujtewicz, Planner, began discussion by highlighting accomplishments of this commission to date. He was pleased to report that the commission provided many grants to the community's small businesses over the past year which has positively impacted all of them. This commission also provided funds for the planning & future development of the Crystal Mall and are ready to act when the new owners have determined its use. The focus for FY25 will be more of a beautification of the town.

Ron Fedor began questioning by inquiring what, if any, plans have been made for the Crystal Mall site. The area is dark and becoming increasingly unsafe due to the unkempt property. Mr. Mullen stated that the three (3) new owners of the Crystal Mall are communicating. The site is very complex as it is broken into seven (7) parcels. It requires some patience with the new owners to determine its best use for the town. Mr. Fedor also asked about the 1 Dayton Road buildings (former location for Eastern Mountain Sports, etc.). Director Mullen said he has no updates at this time.

Chairman, Glenn Patterson, asked for clarification on the reduction in Professional Fees in the budget as well as the Dues, Conferences, and Education line. Jon Mullen responded stating the Professional Fees line item has been reduced so the money could be redirected for better use. The Dues, Conferences and Education line reflects a course that is required in order to keep his certification. Last year it was held in NY, this year, the location has not been posted. Mr. Mullen will provide the information once it is available.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Economic Development Commission budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of \$25,267.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

4. Conservation Commission Budget:

Jon Mullen and Maureen Fitzgerald, Environmental Planner, opened the floor for questions for this commission.

Chairman Patterson questioned the water quality monitoring cost. Ms. Fitzgerald shared that the cost of this monitoring has decreased because the town has purchased our own sampling equipment. The commission would like to add additional testing stations due to new construction and development in town. She added that Planning & Zoning has done a great job in assisting in keeping nitrogen levels down.

Ron Fedor asked about the implication of currently unused grease traps at the Crystal Mall. Tenants have moved out but what happens to their waste products left behind? Ms. Fitzgerald said she would check with the Health Department and the new owners to follow up. Mr. Fedor also asked if there is anything we should be looking at as a town that could be impacting the water quality as a whole. Ms. Fitzgerald answered that there is nothing that she can speak of at this time. Ron Fedor continued asking if there is a list of closed businesses in town or businesses on the verge of closing. His concern lies with the event of a business abandoning a building and leaving potentially hazardous waste. Ms. Fitzgerald said there is no list available to them.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Conservation Commission budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of \$18,250.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

5. Planning & Zoning Budget:

Jon Mullen and Mark Wujtewicz began discussion of the budget request by handing out supplemental personnel spreadsheets for the budget books for Planning & Zoning and the Building Department. Director Mullen noted budget highlights from FY24 and noted the next project for completion is the Civic Triangle.

Robert Tuneski asked what the timeline is for full completion of the Civic Triangle Project. Mr. Mullen stated he believes it will be late June or early July 2024. Mr. Tuneski asked if there will be an opening ceremony. 1st Selectman Rob Brule interjected that Recreation and Parks is planning an event. Mr. Tuneski asked what the biggest challenge is that Planning & Zoning faces. Director Mullen said that the Crystal Mall property is their biggest challenge. They are addressing issues in conversations with the new owners and are ready to facilitate staff as soon as decisions are made for any development of the property. The second biggest challenge in town is the old airport property. It is zoned industrial but over the years has become over grown with vegetation impacting potential development of the site. They are being careful in deciding on the developer as to find the perfect fit for the spot and prefer not to make it a residential site.

Glenn Patterson noted that in future budget requests, he would like to see a five (5) year trend report of metrics related to department activity.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Planning & Zoning budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of \$686,543.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

6. Zoning Board of Appeals Budget:

Jon Mullen noted that there is a new Zoning Enforcement Officer this year.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Zoning Board of Appeals budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of \$4,310.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

7. Building Department Budget:

Jon Mullen, Planning Director and Steve Cardelle, Building Official fielded questions from the Board of Finance. Director Mullen opened the discussion by noting there is a new Assistant Building Official (ABO) in the department. He is currently taking classes to prepare for the required test in July. He also stated that there is a need for a second ABO in the department. Ron Fedor asked if part of the hiring agreement for the ABO in training is to remain in the position for a predetermined time seeing the town is covering costs for his preparation and testing. At this time, Mr. Mullen is unsure there was verbiage in his contract about that but will look into paperwork to obtain the answer.

Chairman Patterson noted that a few part time positions will be combined for a full time position and asked Finance Director, Kimberly Allen, if the additional benefit costs have been budgeted. She replied “no” but there is never typically a problem covering the insurance costs of a new employee under our current budget.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Building Department budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of **\$326,532**.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

8. Flood & Erosion Control Budget:

Jon Mullen began by stating that this board has had a lot of membership turnover and has somewhat “lost its focus”. He and Maureen Fitzgerald met with new members recently and the new members expect to refocus the efforts of this board. Planning & Zoning has concerns with areas of the town that Flood & Erosion needs to focus on. The next step for the board would be applying for grants in the near future.

Ron Fedor asked what this board actually does for the town. Mr. Mullen replied that the primary function is to monitor the erosion and sediment control for development projects, they add comments and input to plan review. Ms. Fitzgerald added that they act as a liaison with the public and get a good broad picture of trouble spots. Ron Fedor asked if Flood and Erosion covers streams and their overflow (in particular events like the flooding of the playground field at Great Neck Elementary School). Ms. Fitzgerald said that Planning & Zoning and the Conservation Commission would typically handle issues like that as it is likely caused by groundwater as opposed to flooding of water holes. Flood & Erosion would be more focused on surges and the erosion caused by large storms. Ron Fedor concluded discussion by commending the Planning & Zoning Department for all of their work over the past year.

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to tentatively approve the Flood & Erosion Control budget request for FY24/25 in the total amount of **\$1,109**.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

9. Review of Projected Revenue for FY25 by Kimberly Allen, Finance Director

Director Allen pointed out to the Board of Finance that as it stands now, it is projected that the town will be in a deficit of \$4.1 million. Expenditures are growing faster than revenues. Monies received for COVID and programs through grants due to COVID have ceased and has had an impact on our finances. Staffing has increased and this is large portion of the town's annual budget. Chairman Patterson indicated there will be a more in-depth discussion of this topic at the BOF regular meeting on Wednesday, March 13, 2024.

10. Adjournment:

Motion by Robert Tuneski and **seconded** by Ron Fedor to adjourn the Budget Meeting of the Board of Finance at 8:11 p.m.

Vote: 5-0-0

Motion: Passed

Respectfully submitted

John Sheehan, Clerk



Rebecca L. Hall, Secretary