

MINUTES
BOARD OF FINANCE – REGULAR MEETING
January 11, 2022
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In Person:

Board of Finance Attendance: John Grabowski, John Ford, Sharon Huxley, and Lars Demander all attended in person. Catherine Erickson was present via phone.

Absent: Kathleen Barone

Also in attendance: First Selectman Paula Cofrancesco and Town Counsel Vincent Marino

Visitors: Rit Huxley and Don Shea

CALL TO ORDER

The Board Chairman John Grabowski called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board reviewed the minutes of the December 14, 2021, Regular Board of Finance Meeting, and there being no corrections or comments, Member Ford moved to accept the December 14, 2021, Regular Meeting minutes and Member Huxley seconded. **Voting for: Ford, Huxley, Demander, and Erickson. Abstain: Grabowski. Unanimous Approval.**

2. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT.

Member Huxley updated the Board regarding the Amity Budget Meeting she attended on January 10, 2022. Member Huxley informed the Board that presently, the Amity Budget will increase 5.44% overall, and this increase will impact Bethany, Orange, and Woodbridge. It was noted that the Amity Superintendent will attend the February 7, 2022, Bethany Board of Finance meeting to present the Amity budget for FY22/23. Chairman Grabowski noted that a Town mailer may need to be sent out to Bethany residents to ensure the public is aware of the increase.

MOTION:

Member Huxley also made the Board aware that \$12,000 in funds earmarked for the Fire Department had not been yet released and made a motion to approve that \$12,000 in budgeted funds be released to the Bethany Fire Department. Member Demander seconded. **Voting for: Ford, Huxley, Demander, Erickson, and Grabowski. Unanimous Approval.**

3. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION – FIRST SELECTMAN’S REPORT

First Selectman Cofrancesco updated the Board of the following items:

- a. *Search for Finance Director Position-Update* First Selectman Cofrancesco updated the Board on the current steps underway to locate a replacement for the position of Finance Director. First Selectman Cofrancesco informed the Board that the position has been posted on numerous Job posting sites and with a number of recruitment firms. She plans to meet with representatives from Creative Finance Staffing this week as well. At this time, there has been limited interest in the

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position and First Selectman Cofrancesco reminded the Board that based on feedback she has received, the salary and the vacation package associated with the position remain an obstacle.

- b. Union Contract Negotiations: First Selectman Cofrancesco informed the Board that she received notice from the State that Union Contract Negotiations will be starting in the near future.
- c. Audit Recommendations and Process Updates: First Selectman Cofrancesco informed the Board that she will be meeting with the Auditor and Accountant on Friday, January 14, 2022. She anticipates that another extension will be required but noted that staff continues to make some progress despite the lack of a Finance Director.
- d. Town Hall Staffing: First Selectman Cofrancesco informed the Board that she received notice that Toni Marek, Assistant Assessor Clerk will be retiring effective January 11, 2022. First Selectman Cofrancesco explained the significant impact this vacancy will have on daily Town Hall business. She requested the Board authorize combining the part-time position (2 days a week) of Assistant Assessor Clerk and part-time (3 days a week) Assistant Town Clerk position into a full-time position to be filled by Stephine Howard, the individual currently working as the Assistant Town Clerk. This would give Ms. Howard full-time employee status, but both roles would maintain separate job responsibilities and be funded from concurrent budgets. The Board then discussed the particulars of the individual job roles and ramifications for long-term and short-term budgeting associated with the decision.

MOTION:

Member Huxley moved to authorize the combining of the part-time Assistant Town Clerk position and part-time Assistant Assessor Clerk position to create a full-time position to be filled by Stephine Howard. Member Ford seconded.

DISCUSSION:

Member Erickson asked that any decision be tabled until the February meeting, citing a need for more a comprehensive list of job descriptions and understanding of the H.R. responsibilities incumbent to the Board of Finance members. Board Chairman Grabowski addressed Member Erickson's concerns and asked that Town Counsel, Vincent Marino research and report back on the specific H.R. responsibilities associated with the Board of Finance. Member Huxley clarified that the focus should be on whether job descriptions reflect the work that is currently being performed. Additionally, Member Erickson raised the question of enforcement regarding any caveats or stipulations the Board may assign to any pay increases or changes they authorize. Board Chairman Grabowski asked the Board if the motion should be tabled and Member Huxley, Demander, and Ford said no, therefor a vote was taken.

Voting for the Board to authorize the combining of the part-time Assistant Town Clerk position and part-time Assistant Assessor Clerk position to create a full-time position to be filled by Stephine Howard, was Ford, Huxley, Demander, and Grabowski. Voting against: Erickson. Passes.

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4. DISCUSSION & POSSIBLE ACTION- FINANCE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

No Finance Director’s Report at this time, however the Board and First Selectman Cofrancesco discussed the upcoming Budget meeting on January 21, 2022. Board Chairman Grabowski asked how the department heads will be circulating and organizing their information for the forthcoming presentation. First Selectman Cofrancesco informed the Board that previous Finance Director Ellis circulated a template to all the departments before he left. First Selectman Cofrancesco then asked the Board where the meeting should be held, and all present agreed the Gym provided enough space for current social distancing guidelines. The Board discussed the option of a hybrid Zoom / in- person meeting with Lina Frazer to organize the meeting link and invites.

5. ADDRESS CONTROL ISSUES

Audit Recommendations and Process Updates: First Selectman Cofrancesco provided an abbreviated update and informed the Board that she plans to meet with the Auditor and Accountant on Friday, January 14, 2022. Member Huxley asked that an update from that meeting be provided at the January 21, 2022, budget meeting.

6. OPEN DISCUSSION

Member Demander opened a discussion regarding the specifics of the Finance Director position, including current salary, flexible options, possible increases, and current comparable pay rates. First Selectman Cofrancesco confirmed the current budgeted salary at \$80,000 a year with a week vacation after the first year. The Board revisited options to amend the vacation probation period as a priority and to be handled by the First Selectman. First Selectman Cofrancesco reiterated the number agencies where the position is currently listed and that based feedback from hiring recruiters, the current salary will be an obstacle in attracting candidates with crucial municipal experience. Town Counsel, Vincent Marino noted that based on a CCM survey, the average salary for Finance Director’s in Connecticut is \$130,000. The Board discussed the possibility for increasing the current salary to a more competitive rate, and Board Chairman Grabowski suggested adding the language “salary negotiable” to the postings. Member Huxley suggested the Board authorize the First Selectman be empowered to hire a candidate at market value. It was the consensus of the Board to authorize the First Selectman to negotiate up to \$110,000 for the salary of Finance Director.

7. ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further business, Member Huxley moved to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 8:24 p.m. and was seconded by Member Ford. **Voting for: Ford, Huxley, Demander, Erickson, and Graboski. Unanimous Approval.**

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Callery
Town Minutes Clerk