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## TOWN OF STONINGTON

### BOARD OF FINANCE MEETING – HUMAN SERVICES & OUTSIDE AGENCIES CIP

Board of Education District Office Conference Room

Thursday, March 3rd, 2022

7:00 PM

A meeting of the Board of Finance was held on this date at the Stonington District Office Meeting Room. Members present were Chairman Tim O'Brien, Michael Fauerbach, Deborah Norman, Lynn Young, David Motherway, Bob Statchen and Chris Johnson.

Chairman O'Brien called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

#### Budget Presentations

Human Services: The Director of Human Services Leanne Theodore began with an overview of the department's last fiscal year. Leanne spoke about Stonington unemployment rates, which is at its lowest rate since the beginning of 2020. However, most people approaching Human Services are gainfully employed. Ms. Theodore presented an unduplicated count of persons served by HS, assisting 2,553 people (of 2,000 households), and these figures are typical compared to previous years. Leanne disclosed there are many new individuals requesting a wide variety of assistance, though. Ms. Theodore discussed another metric – identifiable services by division – which shows 10,953 Social Service requests from 2020/2021, which was at a rate of 5,900 two years ago. These service requests provide things such as rental assistance, medical needs, and emergency relocation, which has kept Human Services extremely busy.

Leanne explained that statistics from the previous year were skewed due to Covid-19, but there were still 1,911 registrants for recreational programs. These programs include outdoor programs, such as hiking and disc golf at Spellman Park and the Nature Center. Ms. Theodore also touched on the upcoming tennis project, noting a tremendous outpouring from the community.

Leanne explained at 2021's end, HS had an additional \$30,000 to expend (with additional appropriation as needed from the Board), but this was unnecessary with help from Community Partner Agencies such as the Neighborhood Center, the Warm Center, TVCCA, etc. The largest Social Service need was community rent and mortgage, with over \$16,000 spent in 2020/2021, and nearly as much spent in the 2022 fiscal year alone. Fortunately, an ARPA grant has helped offset these costs. A recent trend has seen a considerable amount of people at risk of losing their housing (with many folks being evicted due to a surge in home sales/rentals), and the fair market rate of rentals increasing to at least \$1,000 per month. Ms. Theodore explained homelessness is also on the rise, with pockets of homeless people showing up predominantly in the downtown Mystic area. HS quickly pulled together an outreach coalition, partnered with the Police Department, First Responders and other organizations to assist with the issue.

The Senior Services branch of HS has spent considerable time helping seniors navigate the confusing landscape associated with Medicare junk mail, insurance offers, etc. Medicare contacts have risen 48% from the prior fiscal year, totaling 853 contacts necessitating 111 counseling sessions – an equivalent of 5 work weeks. Leanne explained Social Services remains totally unbiased and is simply there to educate about choices available to seniors.

The Chairman requested a breakdown of rent vs. mortgage assistance costs, and Leanne posited that roughly 75% is from rentals and 25% is from mortgage. However, with the recent cost of rents nearly matching mortgage rates, they've been encouraging renters to consider first-time home ownership options.

Ms. Theodore addressed Youth and Family Services, with a good deal of resources spent on certifications, a therapy dog program, and after-school activities. The department has also expanded notable prevention counseling and PSAs (relating to vaping, prescription drug disposal and drug treatment programs). 51 residents sought counseling services last year, with Youth and Family Services returning to in-person services, after hiring a part-time staff counselor. Furthermore, there is a new community garden program available at Town Hall (with all but two plots spoken for) which helps to keep local food pantries full. Ms. Theodore addressed a partnership with Operation Fresh Start, another basic need outreach program, who has helped donate food, community outreach and \$5,000 towards the kid's Summer Camp.

Leanne discussed the latest Community Outreach Report, and introduced the new Outreach Specialist, Deanna Rushlow. Ms. Theodore continued, noting the department has received over 205 referrals since July 2021, and cited cooperation from the Police Department, First Responders, the school, etc. Leanne described Community Outreach as an amazing success, while providing several examples of Deanna's effectivity. Ms. Theodore cited several challenges Deanna has overseen – assisting with 61 mental health referrals, 56 domestic dispute referrals, 20 unique homeless cases, 27 self-referring individuals and 18 elder-specific issues. An overview was given explaining the referral process, where Leanne provided additional examples and details. Mr. O'Brien applauded the Human Services programs as being especially helpful, and scary at the same time – stating the Board doesn't have unlimited funds to dedicate to these cases but wished they did.

Mr. Fauerbach asked about the noticeable Youth and Family Services uptick of last year, and if the HSD was expecting this trend to continue. Leanne explained that this is tough to gauge with the precedence of the pandemic, but with Covid-19 dissipating, their ability to help and offer in-person actions are improving. Furthermore, there were things like Summer Camp traditionally available to families put on hold, which also skewed the metrics. Michael had a follow-up question stating ARPA funds were used to create the Stonington Housing Fund and was checking on its progress. Leanne disclosed that HS is almost ready to roll out the program, and they're working with a representative from the Housing Coalition, with a targeted client base already in mind. There was additional positive feedback and discussion between Leanne and the Board.

Moving on to the Human Services operating budget, Leanne noted only a few notable changes. Ms. Theodore recommended a \$5,000 increase to the Human Services Specialist line item, suggesting that her department required a Deputy Director. Leanne explained the topic of a Deputy Director had come up previously, but the position wasn't fulfilled – and this \$5,000 request would allow the account to be gradually built up. Ms. Theodore cited several examples of how the Specialist would help to free up the ongoing work and caseloads.

The next request Leanne proposed was the Community Outreach Specialist (\$20,100), noting she was aware this was a big ask, but came to this figure referencing baseline Case Manager salaries. Ms. Theodore continued, citing the challenges her department faces being pulled in so many directions. Over the last few years, the HSD has had to evolve very quickly, again referring to Deanna's impact and abilities. To summarize, this role will help alleviate the current workload while enticing certain candidates like Deanna to continue their efforts.

Leanne spoke about the Consumable Supplies line item, another large expense. Leanne added \$500 to this request, which covers everything from paper and pens, but also health-related supplies, such as disinfectant and face masks. Ms. Theodore stated it had also been a while since she proposed an increase to this item.

Mr. O'Brien addressed the Director of Finance, indicating he found a miscalculation regarding the percentage increase on several line items. Mr. Sullivan took note of what needed reviewing.

Mr. Fauerbach spoke up, explaining that the BOF isn't overly concerned with a few hundred dollars here and there, if the Board is in agreement, so Leanne may skip these smaller line items.

Leanne also mentioned the Utilities account had a \$1,000 increase (totaling \$5,500), but this is only to help offset costs in energy fluctuations. If this account were to go over the \$1,000 threshold, there's funding in the Special Activities account that could help cover it.

Leanne introduced the George Crouse Tennis Court Renovation Project, presenting three potential plans – Plan A, B or C. Plan A is the most comprehensive option – including a major renovation and full light plan – at a cost of nearly \$975,703 – requiring \$336,439 more than what is currently budgeted. One individual on the Recreation Commission voted for Plan A, with the rest of the Commission voting for Plan B – a partial renovation, with half of the lights – at a cost of \$846,442 and requiring \$207,179 in additional funds. Plan C – a major renovation without any new lights – was the least expensive option, at an estimated cost of \$735,516 and needing \$96,252 in funds. Ms. Theodore, and Rich Ward, the Recreation Administrator, stated two of the courts will soon be unplayable, detailing the challenges that cracks in the court present. Ms. Theodore stated her approach to repairs have shifted – rather than repair cracks (historically a \$70,000 repair over the last 10 years), she's recommending a major overhaul, including footings, lights and other improvements. Mr. Statchen asked if it's possible to have lights added using Plan C, and Rich noted that conduit will be laid with plan C, with the possibility to add lights in the future. Leanne noted enrollment in the Town tennis programs has skyrocketed recently and opting for lights would allow people to play tennis year-round. There were additional questions regarding the estimates and renovation options from the Board, including the idea of two new pickleball courts. Michael asked how much could be saved if they excluded the pickleball

courts, with Rich stating that after some design considerations, it would be a vast improvement to the current configuration while maintaining the same square footage. There was discussion among the Board about the importance of the lights compared to the pickleball addition. Rich also stated the importance of pickleball based on a popular community response. Lynn asked how long it would be before the courts required post-renovation maintenance, and it was explained they'll need resurfacing after five years of regular use – but the full renovation also includes a 25-year warranty. Leanne elaborated, stating while the courts are a free public service, they provide a good deal of money in the form of tennis programs. Ms. Young requested clarification if the proposed costs were quotes or estimates, to which Mr. Ward noted these are conservative numbers, taking inflation, budget costs and contingency costs into consideration. Mr. Fauerbach noticed the project paperwork suggested “Coming Fall of 2022,” and asked if this was a realistic timeline. Leanne and Rich noted it's a 2-month project, and they hope to begin work shortly after Summer Camp ends. Ms. Young asked if a 5% inflation contingency was reasonable, and Rich detailed a few reasons why the HSD thought it was. The Chairman called for further questions, to which Mr. Statchen asked why the courts weren't part of the CIP budget, with Leanne noting the estimates for this project had only recently come in.

Outside Agencies: Mike Mercado, the Assistant Chief and Treasurer of Westerly Ambulance took a moment to commend Ms. Theodore and Human Services for their tremendous efforts. Mike presented his budget request for \$75,000, a \$32,500 increase to the Board. Mr. Mercado outlined some figures: with the Corp still undergoing its current Covid-19 recovery phase, and since 2020/2021 the Corp has used over \$262,000 worth of savings just to get by. Consisting of 21 full-time staff members, 19 part-time staff members and seven volunteers, the current EMS payroll budget is \$1.2M, with a \$2.7M total budget – while estimating a \$300,000 shortfall for 2022. Mr. Mercado has asked the Town of Westerly for an additional \$85,000 but is unsure what they will be able to provide. Mike described the challenges of finding a lack of qualified staff, and having to borrow from other sister ambulance services, likening the crisis to what many trades are experiencing. Mike outlined the Corp's coverage, including Spruce Meadows, Brookside Village and Edith K. Richmond housing communities, and detailed 27% of patients relying on Medicaid – paying between \$270-400 per call. Ms. Young observed the call volume was down but asked for confirmation the collection rate may be running at a loss due to a recent call volume increase. Mr. Mercado was unsure about these metrics, but explained he would provide them to the Board soon. There was additional discussion between Mr. Mercado and the Board pertaining to Covid Relief Funds, ARPA funds, and other methods of funding. Ms. Lynn asked why call volume was down specifically during the pandemic, to which Mr. Mercado explained that despite the low call volume during the pandemic, Westerly Ambulance was required to maintain staff levels to provide services as needed. Lynn asked if they serviced the Pawcatuck area, and Mr. Mercado confirmed they do, going as far out as the Wequetequock Fire Department.

Mr. Statchen asked Mike if the Paycheck Protection Program loan (provided to Westerly Ambulance) would be forgivable, and Mr. Mercado confirmed it was. Ms. Young asked if the

Corp had an endowment, with Mike stating they do not, but continue to rely on a small savings the elder members had previously funded some time ago. Mr. Fauerbach asked if the baseline funds included ARPA funding, and Ms. Chesebrough clarified the current year does not include ARPA funding. Mr. Fauerbach recalled that the base rate provided last year to Mystic River and Westerly Ambulance was \$50,000 respectively, and Stonington Ambulance was given \$70,000 – but requested confirmation of these figures before deliberations. The Chairman called for additional questions, and Lynn requested a list of Westerly Ambulance’s collection rates.

Office Manager and Staff Supervisor Marie Wilson presented with newly appointed Treasurer John Wilson, speaking on behalf of Mystic River Ambulance. Marie **considered** the current budget, providing an overview of the services they provide. Over the **last** year, Marie emphasized the pandemic was an awful experience – noting an **initial decline** in calls at first, before quickly being inundated with calls. Many calls came from **Masonicare**, Stoneridge, and the Hartford Healthcare complex, requiring a demanding response to calls **focused** on the retirement communities. Ms. Young requested clarification as to why ambulances are needed at Hartford Healthcare (a medical office center), and Ms. Wilson described patients with difficulty breathing, or having urgent issues during routine appointments, **and** so on. Marie outlined the challenges preparing for the Mystic Irish Parade (the first **one** in several years), and the upcoming Half Marathon, which demands a large amount of **staffing** to assist with the crowds in attendance. Due to their workforce being **so depleted**, MRA **continues** to struggle, citing the loss of a 24-year staffer and a shortage of volunteers. **There** are five full-time staffers, with a mix of volunteers and per-diems staffing the ambulances **Sunday through** Friday, with volunteers covering the weekend. Ms. Wilson detailed **the** challenges of bringing on new hires, with new EMTs starting at \$20 per hour (**with** benefits) – a recent increase in wages. Marie recently posted job openings – out of only 10 applicants, only two showed up, and neither of them were qualified. Lynn asked **if** these hiring issues were common pre-Covid, and Marie stated absolutely not – that Covid-19 risk **scares** applicants, and the pay and benefits aren’t as competitive as other similar **municipal** positions. Furthermore, volunteer and paid staff are both needing to **work other** jobs to **get by**, and EMT work can be grueling. Ms. Wilson noted there’s been a **pause** on ambulance replacement, in addition to needing to renovate the department driveway. Ms. Young asked if Groton was being asked for the same amount of funds (\$45,000 – a \$6,500 proposed increase), and Marie stated they are. Lynn asked what the collection rates are, and what **percent** of those **are** Medicaid-related, to which John explained the State maximum authorized rate is \$781 per call, with the Medicare rate at \$410, and Medicaid rate was \$270 – approximately a **third** of the maximum rate – with similar rates on the Groton side of town. Ms. Young asked if **most** people pay their bills, and Marie indicated they do, and work with patients to ensure they can pay if they are unable to cover their bill with health insurance – even if it’s as little as \$5 per payment.

Nishant Sahoo, the Vice President of Stonington Ambulance presented, indicating more than a third of their call volume is mutual aid to Mystic River Ambulance and Westerly Ambulance overall. Mr. Sahoo explained Stonington Ambulance doesn’t have any full-time staff, but work off an incentive program – part of their large budget request last year. This additional funding from last year allowed them to bring in new members and reengage several existing ones, with

2023 being the Corp's centennial year. Nishant indicated last year's funds are still currently in use but will continue to request \$70,000 to keep them funded. There are two items of note the department is contending with: billing, and membership challenges. Mr. Sahoo stated that call volume is increasing, with reimbursement rates under pressure. In 2019, reimbursement rates were at 50%, in 2020, reimbursement dropped to 43%, and 2021 reimbursement rates are even less – out of 27,000 self-paying patients billed, only 1,000 have repaid – less than 3% overall. The second challenge is a membership issue; with Stonington Ambulance being a volunteer department, they incentivize hiring the best they can, but are contending with similar agencies paying \$24 per hour. Nishant described recent hiring promotions, attempting to incentivize joining the department in lieu of these shortcomings. The projected deficit for their 2022/2023 fiscal year is over \$50,000. Ms. Young asked how the deficits are being covered, and Mr. Sahoo stated they are covered with savings, significant donations from last year, and while reimbursement rates are currently low, they are hoping for improvements after hiring a new collections agency. Call volume is another expense – right now volunteers are staffing these positions – but this currently isn't sustainable. Mr. O'Brien called for additional questions, and there were none.

The Chairman announced a presentation from the Ocean Community Chamber Foundation (requesting \$2,000), but there was no representative to present on their behalf.

Moving on to the Dennison Pequotsepos Nature Center, and Executive Director Davnet Conway, spoke on the budget proposal of \$7,500. Ms. Conway provided an overview of the Nature Center's purpose – to provide wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, working with Animal Control and the public. Ms. Conway noted increases in the bird captivity program (currently rehabbing over 100 birds), and naturally, an increase in food expenses. However, Davnet explained they're unsure why there's been such a significant uptick in wildlife rehab, but suggested it may stem from a 200% increase of outdoor/hiking activity during last year. Ms. Conway detailed an additional request of funds to support the Giving Garden at Coogan Farm, explaining the Giving Garden is a regenerative farm used as an educational tool and model, to grow food which is ultimately distributed to local food banks. During the onset of Covid-19, the Garden was only able to produce a smaller amount – about 4,500 pounds of food. As of 2021, the Garden has brought their food production in-line with previous year levels of 15,000 pounds, with the help of 4,000 hours of volunteer time. Ms. Conway explained that this year, they are setting a goal to grow over 20,000 pounds of food, with more locals relying on the food pantry than in past years. The Chairman addressed some confusion, noticing the Nature Center narrative noted a 50% increase [in funding], with the line item reflecting a 0% change. Leanne clarified the Nature Center 2022 funding would remain the same as last year. Ms. Young asked if the Nature Center solicits funds from other towns, and Davnet stated they do not at this time, but receive funds in the form of grants and donations. Lynn asked where the Giving Garden grown food is distributed, with Ms. Conway stated it serves New London Country, with the mobile food pantry visiting Stonington once per month. Mr. O'Brien called for additional questions; there were none.

The Chairman announced the Stonington Cemetery presentation, but there was no representative to present on their behalf. Ms. Fauerbach asked why there was a \$2,000 increase to their budget (totaling \$5,000), and Leanne explained the costs of maintenance and groundskeeping had gone

up, and she will provide these statistics to the Board. Ms. Young noticed an inconsistency, asking why this particular cemetery wasn't maintained by the Town, and Ms. Theodore speculated Stonington Cemetery is a private non-profit, under its own designated ward.

Spike Lobdell, the Founder and CEO of New England Science and Sailing Foundation presented his budget request of \$31,000 to construct a handicap access elevator for one of their buildings. Mr. Lobdell noted this \$31,000 would pay for equipment and installation costs, while an additional \$20,000 raised from private donations will remove the cement deck to be able to fit the elevator in the building. Spike provided a brief overview of NESS, a Stonington-based program which provides STEM science, technology, engineering and math skills with an emphasis on sailing, marine science and other platforms. With an emphasis on educating inner-city youth, NESS teaches over 9,000 students annually (pre-Covid) and is the only non-school in the country to be accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, partnered with 80-90 regional schools. The wheelchair access elevator would help to provide inclusiveness, with an emphasis on coastal accessibility and boat access for students. The Chairman called for questions and reminded the Board this item is under CIP budget requests. There was discussion with the Board regarding the breakdown of elevator costs, with Michael asking why NESS approached the Board with this request, which hadn't happened in previous years. Spike explained NESS was approached with this idea, because of the work they do in Stonington, and hadn't sought funding from Stonington before, deeming it appropriate being the "new kid on the block." Ms. Chesebrough observed that in the past, the Town had improved inclusivity by funding similar ADA projects. Lynn observed that NESS seems to be effective at fundraising, with Mr. Lobdell detailing the \$3.2M NESS budget, with over 70% of it coming from fundraising. There was additional discussion among Board Members and Mr. Lobdell over grants, ARPA funding and additional fundraising options. Mr. O'Brien called for further questions, and there were none.

The Chairman announced a presentation from the Sexual Assault Crisis Center, with a \$1,000 request, but there was no representative in attendance.

Moving on to Safe Futures, Inc., CEO Katherine Verano distributed a detailed leaflet to Board Members, while explaining the purpose of the initiative – to provide free and confidential services to sexual assault, abuse, stalking and trafficking victims. Ms. Verano continued, noting they don't have an increase to their typical ask (of \$5,000), however last year there had been a 39% increase of clients making up 9,707 victims, and there are no signs of things slowing down. Throughout the pandemic, there had been a large increase in psychical abuse and strangulation, and Safe Futures had an 839% increase in shelter costs, namely in the form of hotels. Despite these challenges, Katherine explained they maintained the same staffing ratios. Ms. Verano referenced the infographic, calling attention to the 9,707 victims figure, with several repeat victims requiring assistance as often as 30 to 50 times. Mr. Fauerbach commended the program and expressed his gratitude, before asking how Safe Futures copes with the incredible costs of sheltering victims. Ms. Verano explained they apply for funding through OPM and other programs but expressed the challenges they face in hotel costs – going from \$13,000 (once their shelter is full) to \$130,000 within a year. Furthermore, these costs don't cover food,

transportation, laundry services and so on. Michael asked if they receive additional Covid-19 or State/Federal funding, to which Katherine explained they do receive funds from the State/Federal coalition, but Safe Futures remains underfunded. The Chairman called for additional questions; there were none.

Anna Perch, the Development Manager for the New London Homeless Hospitality Center (requesting \$5,000, an increase of \$2,300) presented her narrative: NLHHC is one of the largest shelters for men and women in Southeastern CT, providing affordable housing throughout New London. This year, NLHHC purchased a large building in downtown New London, while offering housing counseling for tenants and landlords through use of UniteCT funds. Ms. Perch explained NLHHC has partnered with HUD, for the sake of foreclosure prevention. Ms. Young asked if the 36-bed shelter is full, to which Anna confirmed it's **full in Winter**, with a 10-15 person waiting list – in addition to a warming center they offer. Mr. Statchen inquired about Covid and ARPA funding eligibility, to which Ms. Perch stated they are **eligible**, and expressed she was hopeful they may get additional ARPA funding **through** the City of New London as well. Bob voiced his gratitude for NLHHC's services, and Anna invited the Board to tour the downtown facilities in the future.

On behalf of the Stonington Prevention Council, Youth and **Family** Services Kristen King presented, thanking the Board for their **ongoing** funding of \$1,000 in addition to grant funding they may be eligible for. Ms. King explained **SPC's** role, stating **they're** responsible for the Mental Health Matters Road signs and PSAs, while **advocating** for free counseling available from Stonington Human Services.

Director of Nutrition Services **Eugene Theroux** spoke on his role at Thames Valley Council for Community Action – **presenting** a \$10,000 **budget**, a \$2,000 increase from last year. Mr. Theroux detailed TVCCA's café program in Stonington and an ongoing partnership with Meals on Wheels, largely **benefitting** the **Stonington** senior community. Eugene explained most seniors stay at home [as opposed to **dining out**], so TVCCA and MOW delivers warm, pre-made dinners to help prevent the **spread** of Covid-19 while reducing social isolation. Mr. Theroux outlined several **benefits** MOW **participants** receive, but noted the program is partially funded by the State and **recipient** donations. However, an average voluntary contribution cover just .38¢ at the cost of \$3 **per** meal, with additional costs paid to TVCCA staff preparing and delivering the meal. Last year **over** 18 **volunteers** delivered meals to 98 home-bound seniors to distribute 16,212 meals – a cost of **over** \$99,000. Mr. Statchen asked how seniors get in touch with MOW, and Leanne explained **Human** Services heavily pushes seniors to contact TVCCA. Bob inquired how often the meals are **provided**, and Eugene said five days a week. Lynn asked about any increases in food costs, to which Mr. Theroux explained food costs have increased by 9%, with food/supply scarcity becoming an issue along with fuel costs. Mr. Fauerbach asked if at some point, the Board purchased a van for MOW, and Leanne thought she recalled that a van was purchased, along with an increase to TVCCA from \$1,000 annually. The Chairman called for additional questions; there were none.

The Chairman announced Community Vocational Services (Olean Center) with a \$4,000 budget, but there was no representative available.

Moving on, the PACE RI – Adult Day Center of Westerly was addressed but not in attendance. Leanne referenced an email where PACE RI declined their current \$10,000 allotment, due to a Covid-19 related decrease in attendance.

Proceeding to Westerly Area Rest and Meals (a \$6,000 budget item), Leanne verbalized that the WARM Executive Director, Russ Partridge was unable to attend. Ms. Theodore expressed they were gracious for the funding.

Tricia Cunningham, the Executive Director for Always Home, was requesting \$6,000 on behalf of the organization. Ms. Cunningham spoke about a need to navigate the ARPA funds, and her gratitude that Human Services and the BOF was able to administer. Tricia presented, expressing their goal is to help struggling families and individuals with rental support, with the help of UniteCT. Ms. Cunningham continued, noting they are currently unable to take applicants for new rentals, however pending applications will undergo review. Tricia expressed concern over future challenges and while Always Home would typically cover a month's rent, recent cost-of-living increase funds aren't being stretched as far. Mr. Statchen asked about the effects of eviction moratoriums being lifted, and Tricia described rental properties being sold to corporations, leaving rental properties out of reach for low-income single parents.

Stonington Como Center (requesting an \$85,000 budget) was brought up, and Leanne stated Executive Director Beth-Ann Stewart expressed her gratitude, despite being unable to attend. Mr. Fauerbach asked if Como was moving forward with their HVAC installation, and Ms. Theodore suggested Como is working with engineers to come to a resolution after an increase in the repair estimate.

Susan Sedensky, the Executive Director of the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, was in attendance to discuss the program's underlying goal of keeping at-risk individuals and families fed. Five years ago, about 700 Stonington residents came to the food pantry once a month. Currently, 918 Stonington residents come every week for food. Ms. Sedensky elaborated, discussing various sources of food they are able to acquire, with an amount of food that is paid for directly. Furthermore, PNC provides food for the Meals on Wheels program five nights a week, in addition to a senior medical transportation program – despite the recent transportation and fuel cost increases. Susan stated that along with food assistance, PNC helped enroll 165 residents with heating assistance (at a cost of over \$11,000) as well as provides gift cards to at-risk families during the Holidays. Susan continued, citing additional examples which outlined expenses and challenges the program faces. In summary, Susan is requesting a \$6,000 increase to last year's budget, at a total cost of \$212,000. Ms. Young calculated approximately 5% (out of 918) Stonington residents require food assistance, and Susan confirmed this was the case. As a point of reference, Lynn asked how many Westerly residents required food assistance, and Ms. Sedensky stated 468 residents used the services today. Lynn observed that Westerly provided PNC with \$11,025 of funds, then asked the amount of their request, and Susan explained it was \$20,000, and same request she makes every year. Mr. Fauerbach asked if the PNC operates at a loss, to which Susan replied they do not; their net income operating budget was \$200,000 (including 2022 and last year), with an annual appeal at \$100,000 last year. Susan also explained the thrift store made over \$60,000 last year and is requesting a CIP grant of \$19,000 to have the

PNC building maintained. There was a bit of confusion as this CIP request wasn't accounted for, and Mr. Sullivan explained he'd investigate this further. Mr. O'Brien called for further questions, there were none.

On behalf of Public Health and Nursing, Gail Haesche, the interim Director of Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern CT, presented along with Karen DeSantis, who be taking over the VNA Director position, with a \$20,000 budget request. Ms. Haesche stated VNA's objective to offer subsidized and free care to patients within their homes in Stonington and surrounding areas. Gail continued, outlining the program also provides foot clinics at the Naugatuck Neighborhood Center, where they assist seniors who are unable to afford a podiatrist. Gail outlined challenges during the pandemic, citing PPE expenses and the nursing shortage, with the VNA program still accommodating new referrals. Mr. Statchen thanked the representatives for their service before asking how the work was administered looking at the program's distribution, to which Gail explained they provide home care, school nursing and focus on wellness care. Mr. O'Brien called for further questions, and there were none.

Moving on, Hannah Veale, the Deputy Executive Director of Westerly Pops spoke on behalf of The Chorus of Westerly, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization comprised of chorus members from Westerly and Stonington. The Chorus of Westerly submitted a \$9,000 request, with a \$6,000 increase from last year. Ms. Veale outlined plans for the Summer Pops concert, which costs \$90,000 to produce despite being a bare bones operation. Ms. Veale noted last year they received \$3,000, and this year they are requesting \$4,000 for the show to cover security costs, lumber (to construct stages) and other items. Mr. O'Brien questioned this figure, noticing the line was for a \$6,000 increase, to which Hannah explained the organization has grown significantly and they now provide services for youth, and perform at senior centers. Ms. Veale continued, detailing a big push to getting back to musicianship after a long Covid-19 break – in short, \$4,000 is for Pops, and \$5,000 for supplementary after-school programming. Mr. Fauerbach asked what the intended ask will be from Westerly, to which Hannah replied a flat \$10,000. Lynn asked why more is being asked from Stonington [compared to last year], and Ms. Veale explained the actual program will be taking place in Stonington, where they will ask municipalities and Stonington Schools for additional help locating funding options. There was discussion pertaining to the educational components proposed to the Board. The Chairman called for follow-up questions, there were none.

Chelsea Mitchell, the Library Director, presented on behalf of the Stonington Historical Society. Ms. Mitchell detailed a \$1,500 request to work on an Oral History Database, noting the last oral history effort took place in the 1990s. Since then, SHS has lost many community members, and thus the ability to record historical events. Ms. Mitchell explained this time, they're taking a proactive approach, which requires configuring the database, setting up interviews with residents, and cataloging items. Another funding increase will be put towards researching genealogy projects, a free library resource primarily for Stonington residents who have an interest in local history. There was additional detail provided to the Board regarding the scope of these two projects. Lynn asked Chelsea if the Historical Society has an endowment, and Chelsea stated they do. The Chairman called for additional questions, there were none.

In a unique move, the Mystic Noank Library (\$111,500), the Stonington Free Library (\$212,000) and Westerly Library (\$118,000) representatives all presented together. The representatives distributed a pamphlet to the Board and detailed what an important service the Board provides while encouraging all three libraries to work in concert. Micayla Hall, the Stonington Free Library Director outlined an increase in municipal funding, a Capital Campaign and the Paycheck Protection Program allowed them to increase their hours of operation by 10 hours a week (totaling 53 hours). Micayla continued, detailing a number of extensive benefits and projects that came from the use of these funds. Ms. Young asked how much PPP funding Stonington Library received, and Micayla explained they received two rounds of \$69,700. Lynn asked what they will do without access to future PPP loans, and Ms. Hall touched on the Capital Campaign used to raise said \$1.8M, with \$1M going towards the building and the rest going towards an endowment.

Ms. Young asked if the Westerly and Mystic Noank Libraries also benefited from PPP loans. The Executive Director of the Mystic Noank Library Christine Bradley, and Executive Director of Westerly Library Brigitte Hopkins both stated they received the first round of PPP loans. Both Directors echoed the importance of the Wi-Fi improvements, along with Westerly Library's access to a fast fiber internet connection, which only costs about \$600 every four months. Furthermore, Westerly Public Library eliminated fines to help lower barriers, and additional library benefits were outlined. Michael asked if they've been granted their ARPA funds, and both Directors indicated they had not received them yet. Michael estimated there was roughly \$40,000 available to them.

There was a final CIP request from Mystic Noank Library – a \$10,534 Air Purification System for the lower levels, where much of the staff need to work. Mr. Fauerbach asked if ARPA funds could be used for this item, and Ms. Bradley indicated that ARPA funds were used for library improvements, with the air quality issue coming up afterward. Ms. Young inquired if Groton had been asked to fund this request, to which Christine stated there is another pending demolition-related project they'll be requesting Groton's assistance with instead. Mr. O'Brien asked if the \$10,534 is the full amount for the Air Purification System, to which Ms. Bradley explained it should be. Ms. Norman asked if this was a solid quote, to which Christine stated it was.

Ms. Chesebrough followed up with the TVCCA question Michael had about the van request – in the end, the BOF provided \$2,000-3,000 more in TVCCA operating budget, but ultimately did not finance the van.

Tim asked about an unfamiliar CIP item – the Stonington Borough - Wadawanuck Square Comfort Station, at a cost of \$50,000. Ms. Chesebrough explained that due to issues with their ARPA funding, this CIP request should be struck from the list, and adjusted to \$0.

In one final note, Mr. Sullivan located the missing PNC Building Maintenance CIP item from Ms. Sedensky and stated he would factor \$19,850 under the Outside Agency CIP request budget.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 9:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Justin Eckert

Board of Finance Recording Secretary