

TOWN OF STONINGTON
BOARD OF FINANCE MEETING MINUTES
Stonington Police Department Meeting Room
Wednesday, September 06, 2023
7:15 PM

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

Mr. O'Brien called the meeting to order at 7:18 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited

Public Comments:

There were several individuals who spoke in regard to the First Selectman's request for an additional appropriation of \$84,000 to fund the replacement of lead water services on River Road.

Tracy Swain of Pawcatuck, commented that she was opposed to the Town paying for the new water services because it is her opinion that it is the responsibility of the Westerly Water Company (WWC).

Don Fiore, of West Vine Street, Pawcatuck, spoke in favor of the request, citing that WWC, has been an asset to the community, it provides good service at an excellent price, and that it is in the Town's interest to partner with WWC on this project.

Dave Brown of Pawcatuck, raised questions about what exactly the Town's responsibility is relative to this request. He noted that there is an existing agreement between the Town and WWC, dating back to 1986, that he believes lays out the varying responsibilities of each party. He suggested that the BOF not take any action on this request until the BOF and Town counsel has had an opportunity to review this agreement to make sure no terms of the agreement would be violated by approving this request.

Previous Minutes:

08/02/23, 3/28/23 PH, 3/28/23 Special - The Chairman requested a motion to approve the meeting minutes from these three dates. Ms. Young motioned, and Mr. Bentz seconded it. The Chairman asked members for any discussion or corrections pertaining to the minutes. There were a couple of minutes of discussion about possible edits to the minutes as presented, and because member Fauerbach was not present, it was decided to table the minutes until the next BOF meeting. Ms. Young and Mr. Bentz withdrew their motions, and approval of the minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

Additions to the Agenda:

The Chairman requested a motion to add a bid waiver request to the agenda. Ms. Norman motioned, and Ms. Young seconded. The Chairman called for a vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Bid Waiver Requests:

The Chairman called for a motion to approve Lt. Marley's bid waiver request to purchase five police vehicles. Ms. Young motioned, and Ms. Norman seconded. The Chairman called for discussion, and Lt. Marley explained why it would be advantageous to the Town for the Board to grant the waiver. There were questions about whether the vehicles were on the state bid list, three of them were, and two weren't, because the two that weren't, are in great demand. Mr. Johnson inquired as to whether electric or hybrid vehicles had been considered. Lt. Marley said that they did look at that, but it would add about another \$5,000.00 to the cost of each vehicle, and he also communicated that Groton bought an electric vehicle for its fleet in the prior year and has had nothing but problems with it.

The Chairman called for a vote to approve the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

Requests for Additional Appropriations:

The First Selectman addressed the Board briefly to explain the reasoning of her request for the \$84,000.00 additional appropriation to fund the replacement of the 12 lead water services, along River Road, before introducing Max Sposato, Director of Westerly Public Works/Utilities and Sean Lacey, the Westerly Town Manager, to make their case for why Stonington should participate in the watermain project and shoulder the cost of replacing the 12 lead water services effected by the new watermain project. Mr. Sposato, gave a broad overview of the entire watermain project, and expressed his opinion that because of the benefit to the residents of Pawcatuck it is fair that Stonington pay for a portion of the project, and that WWC determined that the \$84,000 to replace the 12 lead water services in question was a fair request. He further explained that WWC is going above and beyond what they are minimally required to do to the tune of \$300,000, and if Stonington doesn't contribute to the project the WWC board may not approve extra improvements. He also noted that as a result of the repaving of the road after the project, the Town will receive a brand-new road worth approximately \$250,000. The BOF members comments were as follows:

Ms. Young – commented that she believes the rate payers, who will benefit from the project should pay for the project, because that particular part of Town enjoys the benefit of a Utility, which other parts of Town do not. She, like Mr. Brown commented earlier, also suggested that the board read the agreement between the Town and WWC, before any action be taken, but on the whole, she was against the Town funding the project.

Mr. Statchen – expressed his support for funding the project, he cited three reasons for his support, the project improves public safety (firefighting), public health (removal of lead services), and the Town would have a brand-new road as well.

Mr. O'Brien – commented that he thought it was a worthwhile project to fund, but was against funding it with an additional appropriation out of fund balance, he expressed his opinion that such appropriations should only be done for emergency or dire situations and he doesn't think this project meets that requirement. He expressed support for funding the project if a different funding mechanism could be determined.

Ms. Chesebrough, asked if we could take the funding from one of the ARPA grant projects that has been delayed. Mr. O'Brien responded that if the funding came out of an ARPA project, it might likely never be restored. Ms. Chesebrough and Mr. O'Brien then discussed the possibility of paying for a portion of the paving related to the watermain project instead of the lead services, and funding it through the DPW paving budget in CIP. Ms. Chesebrough inquired of the DPW Director if he had available funds in his paving CIP budget to fund paving up to \$84,000.00, in indicated that he could do that by adjusting his paving plan.

Mr. O'Brien asked Mr. Lacey if it mattered to Westerly what portion of the project the Town funded, paving vs. water service replacements. Mr. Lacey indicated that it didn't matter to Westerly what specific item Stonington paid for.

Mr. Johnson, asked Mr. Sposato if he knew how many lead water services Aquarion had in Stonington. Mr. Sposato responded that he didn't know.

There was more discussion amongst the board members as to the merits of the request, and the Chairman polled the members, as to whether they were supportive of the First Selectman authorizing the DPW Director to redirect a portion of the CIP paving budget toward the WWC watermain project. All members present were supportive of this approach except for Lynn Young. As to the actual additional appropriation request the Chairman called for a motion to vote on the request, Ms. Young motioned, Mr. Bentz seconded. The Chairman asked for a vote to reject the request for the additional appropriation, Ms. Young, Ms. Norman, Mr. Bentz, and Mr. O'Brien voted not to approve the request, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Statchen voted to approve the request. The request was voted down.

Line-item Transfer Requests:

The Director of Finance presented his request for 22/23 year-end transfers, to transfer funds from line-items and/or departments that had surplus balances to line-items and/or departments that had deficits. The cumulative total of the transfers was \$29,513.00. The Chairman called for a motion to approve the request, Mr. Statchen motioned, Mr. Johnson seconded. The Chairman called for discussion there was none.

The Chairman called for a vote on the motion, the motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence: (none)

Liaison Reports

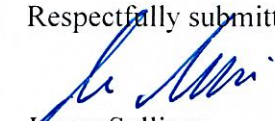
BOE liaison report: Ms. Young commented that the Education department was doing an excellent job managing its budget, but she warned that 23/24 is going to be a difficult year for the school system financially.

Retirement committee liaison report: Mr. O'Brien noted that the retirement committee met last month and reviewed the status of the Town's defined benefit plan, and commented that the fund was in excellent shape.

There were no other liaison reports.

The Chairman called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Young motioned, and Mr. Bentz seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



James Sullivan
Director of Finance