

TOWN OF STONINGTON
BOARD OF FINANCE
Stonington Police Department Meeting Room
Wednesday, September 1, 2021
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 Chairman Tim O'Brien, Glenn Frishman, Lynn Young, Michael Fauerbach, David Motherway Jr. and Bob Statchen. Deb Norman was absent.

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

Public Comments: None

Previous Minutes: Mr. Frishman motioned to approve the August 4th draft minutes; Ms. Young seconded. All members were in favor. Motion carried.

New Business

Discussion Items:

Chief of Police Darren Stewart addressed the Board to discuss the possible acquisition of a microwave link for the radio system. The Chief noted that the radio project has evolved over the last couple years with the State system and had intended on this being a CIP item down the line. Informing the Board that the department currently operates on a fiber optic system, the Chief reported that six times in the past couple years the system has gone down during storms. This required immediate attention and setting up a temporary system until the fiber could be put back up online. While the SPD operates on a fiber optic spoke, most police departments and agencies use microwave technology and bounce radio signals off antennas.

The State of Connecticut reached out to the Department, asking if there was any chance to utilize a microwave link so the Department doesn't lose communication. The Chief noted that Stonington is vital for a number of agencies and not just communication directly with the State. Microwave transmission has become the preference of choice to communicate with the State. Future microwave transmissions would bounce microwaves from the antenna at the Department to the North Stonington site were it would go to the State core.

The State provided a proposal and the Chief noted he is still negotiating the specifics but stated he does feel the bottom line may be a bit less than requested. With the availability of the ARPA funds the Chief said that has prompted discussion to move the Department forward to a microwave connection.

Captain Olson added that they can also put the 911 dispatch center on the microwave link and this upgrade would be a permanent fix to a weakness in the system.

Mr. Statchen inquired if any other coastal towns had a microwave link and the Chief noted that Old Lyme and Waterford do and Captain Olson noted that Norwich

has a microwave link.

Mr. Statchen asked how much the State could contribute to the cost. Chief Stewart said he was still in negotiations and at a very minimum would like to see the State cover any expenses associated with the North Stonington antenna which is leased and not owned. The Chief noted he would still need to have discussions with a company and not just the State to get final figures on cost. Mr. Statchen said it would be helpful to know the cost sharing between the State and Norwich.

Chairman O'Brien inquired how often the microwave system goes down. Captain Olson stated that based on conversations with the main engineer of the State system, this will fix issues and weaknesses in the current system and the microwave links almost never go down. It would be the main connection to most State towers and the fiber would be the backup.

Chairman O'Brien asked how much altitude is there currently between the tops of trees and the microwave antenna in North Stonington. Captain Olson said this was asked during the meeting with the State and that there is a clear line of sight and future tree growth would barely affect it.

Ms. Young asked the Chief about the fiber optics technology and when first proposed how was it not foreseen that should a car take out a pole or storm damage takes out lines it would be an issue for the Town. The Chief said the system was new and they had not worked with that type of technology yet. Microwave was available but extremely more expensive and the fiber was brought in because of the 911 system and the Town did not have to pay for that.

Chief Stewart said he can ask one of the State engineers that work on these systems to come down to one of the meetings and explain a little bit about their end. Discussion to continue.

WPCA-CIP Project - Summary of Transfers - Chairman O'Brien acknowledged he had sent a copy of the summary of transfers to the Board members.

Line-Item Transfers:

Mr. Frishman motioned to table a request from Police Department for line-item transfer of \$132,211.15 from WPCA CIP 4022020-88325 to purchase microwave link system for radio system from G4S Secure Integration LLC. Mr. Motherway seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Bid Waiver Request:

Mr. Fauerbach motioned to table at request from Police Department for bid waiver to purchase microwave link system for radio system from G4S Secure Integration LLC for \$132,211.15. Mr. Frishman seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Director of Public Works requests bid waiver to purchase road salt from Morton Salt Inc. for \$77.33 per ton. Mr. Statchen motioned to approve the request, Mr. Motherway seconded. Director Sullivan mentioned that several years ago the price per ton was closer to \$87 per ton and the price has been going down each year plateauing at the \$77 per ton mark. All members were in favor of the request. Motion carried.

Director of Public Works requests bid waiver to purchase loader from the W.I. Clark Company, off the State Bid List, for \$236,190.74. Mr. Statchen motioned to approve the request, Mr. Frishman seconded. Director Sullivan noted that the purchase had been contemplated during the budget process and was discussed at length and the ask is below the budgeted amount. All members were in favor of the request. Motion carried.

Additional appropriations from fund balance

A review of year to date additional appropriations from fund balance for fiscal year 21/22 show none to date

Presentations:

First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough presented to the Board of Finance the Board of Selectmen ARPA funding requests. Also in attendance were Selectwomen June Strunk and Deborah Downie. Chairman O'Brien stated the Board would hear up to a three minute comment from presenters in attendance on each funding request which would be followed by questions from the Board of Finance members.

Selectman Chesebrough thanked the presenters for their time and commitment and confirmed the September 15th Public Hearing where presenters would have the opportunity to deliberate their request with the Board of Finance if they so wish. Tonight's meeting was a hearing commentary and there would be no deliberations from the Board.

Town Hall and Human Services HVAC \$1,540,000 Budget Line #2 & #3

The Selectman noted this cost includes all engineering and construction costs to address all items in the mechanical evaluation for each building. Human Services is \$340,000 and the Town Hall is \$1,200,000. Both projects are considered a need and both were priority CIP items last year, removed with the idea the ARPA funds would be used to cover the expenses.

Mr. Fauerbach inquired if these figures would cover the entire HVAC system requirements in both buildings. Selectman Chesebrough stated it did, with DPW Director Barbara McKrell rerunning the numbers since last budget, and both Director McKrell and the Town Engineer were confident in the proposed cost.

DPW Salt Dome \$600,000

Selectman Chesebrough noted that this request, if not funded, will be 100% in the CIP next year, as it is a critical need. The dome, constructed in 1990 is experiencing structural deterioration of the concrete walls. This creates a significant hazard to equipment. The request is not on the approved list of expenditures but can come out of the 1.9 million the Town can use towards General Government due to the budget cuts the Town made two years ago.

SMS HVAC \$1,400,000

Stonington Schools Director of Operations & Facilities, Peter Anderson, addressed the Board on the priority need of a full HVAC/Air Quality system for the Middle School. Director Anderson stated they have 1.4 million dedicated out of their ARPA funding to fund this project and are asking the Town to share in the expense to cover the estimated \$2.8 million cost. It was noted the school district did receive just under \$4 million in CARES and ESSER funding prior to the ARPA funds. Director Anderson and other representatives from the school district will meet with the Selectman and BOF Chairman to review the funding the school district has received prior to the scheduled public hearing on September 15th.

Mr. Statchen inquired why the BOS adjustment removed the \$1.4 million from the funding request spreadsheet, Selectman Chesebrough stated the decision to remove it was not based on the worthiness of the project but the timing of the information provided to the Selectmen to make a decision. Mr. Statchen stated he would be uncomfortable spending \$1.2 million on the Town Hall HVAC if they were not also taking care of the students in the school.

Water Line Loop \$900,000

Ms. Young asked how the \$2.8 million cost estimate was determined. Selectman Chesebrough stated that back in 2019 the then Stonington Board of Selectmen worked with Westerly Water and their engineer to come up with cost estimates and five different options. Currently, volunteer Chuck Sheehan, previously the CEO of Hartford Water Authority, reran those numbers and essentially came out with almost the same numbers as the first study. The Selectman said they are confident in the estimate going forward and additionally, the Town has been selected for \$1.9 million in funding for this project through Federal Earmarks.

Mr. Fauerbach asked the First Selectman if she could elaborate on the statement of potential private funding available. The Selectman stated developers of a proposed development on Mary Hall Road seemed open to having dialogue since they were looking into providing water to the development.

Inclusion Foundation (Old Mystic Site) \$138,000

The former District Office, the site has been stuck as there is no sewer, and unlikely to have sewer options in the future due to the sewer challenges in Mystic. The (Inclusion) Sylvestre Family Foundation has offered to partner with the Town to help take the first phase of this work forward. In exchange for the funding the foundation would manage the project, saving Town staff time.

Mr. Frishman inquired if the funding requested would cover the expense of an engineering survey to determine the use and practicality of developing the site. Mr. Alan Sylvestre addressed the Board, saying that he thought there was possibility for some sort of housing that could help with the town's mission and make the housing Authority's mission. There may also be the opportunity for a type of community center that could serve the community. Mr. Sylvestre noted there were some ideas for the property, but certainly not for his foundation to decide.

Child & Family Stonington Office \$200,000

The First Selectman stated that these funds would be used to build out of the chorus room in the district office of the middle school in order to create a child and families Stonington office that would serve children and families that are in need of counseling services. Mr. Pete Anderson noted that the school system would provide the real estate, the networking, custodial cleaning and everything necessary while the Town would be responsible for the building out of that area into four separate offices.

Mr. Motherway raised the question if there was any consideration to have a contingency line item for increased scope of a project to ensure that they are successful. Chairman O'Brien interjected that perhaps in the Board of Finance's best interest to look at 10% less than the total expended funds.

Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce \$100,000

The funds would be used to offer a one-time allocation to help small businesses and non-profits in the community. Ms. Lisa Konicki spoke to the Board summarizing the grants and loans the chamber has offered to small local businesses to help them be sustainable during COVID.

Ms. Young asked if the PPE I & II didn't cover many of those expenses the businesses incurred. Ms. Konicki stated it did not cover anything relative to façade improvement, doors, windows, awnings, paint, exterior paint etc. The PPE mostly went to employment, employee expenses and some of the supplies. What it didn't cover were items like dining igloos, heat lamps and items like that.

Ms. Konicki said the Board would be able to tweak and shape the program, however, Chairman O'Brien said he would be in favor of shaping the program but would leave the distribution of funding to others as it could be seen as a conflict of interest for the Board to determine the funding recipients.

Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition \$100,000

First Selectman Chesebrough acknowledged that the arts and culture sector is struggling to survive and the workforce significantly diminished due to COVID. The funding would be used to directly invest into arts and culture in Stonington by market promotions support for public art and/or music and direct one time grants.

Mystic Chamber of Commerce

\$33,000

Mr. Bruce Flax, executive director of the chamber thanked the Board for taking the time to listen to the requests of the people in town. Mr. Flax stated that many businesses were hard hit by COVID and they for one had ended up moving the visitor center near the Seaport into a second-floor facility in Mystic, which does not receive as many visitors. To overcome that, the chamber is seeking to invest in a mobile truck to promote the region from the Thames River to the Pawcatuck River. The truck would be used in Mystic but also brought to other location and events in New London, New Haven, Rhode Island and more. Mr. Flax stated the chamber is requesting \$15,000 each from Stonington and Groton along with matching program funds from the Eastern Regional Tourism district and sponsorship of the vehicle to pay for the vehicle. The Chamber would not seek final distribution of the funds until the program and the funding sources were confirmed. Additionally, the Chamber is seeking \$5,000 to fund the creation and upkeep of online QR code maps that would promote Stonington. Finally, the Chamber is asking for \$8,000 to pay an outstanding 2019 Arts Festival bill for Stonington police services that has not been paid.

Mental Health 911/211 Campaign \$22,480

The First Selectman addressed the Board noting that \$10,000 of the ask would fund the 911/211 Which/When campaign and related marketing on the importance of addressing mental health needs. A grant from a local foundation, with the commitment from the Town would match the funds. Results would be evaluated to gauge how effective the campaign is and share this information with other Towns around the State. The remaining \$12,480 would fund a part-time counselor at Human Services who would work 8 hours per week for 12 months at \$30 per hour. Sessions usually max out at 12 sessions and there is currently a wait list determining this is a high priority need.

Ms. Young asked how this wouldn't become a recurring expense. The First Selectman said that Human Service Director Leanne Theodore and her team, at the end of the year, would evaluate the program and determine if the wait list diminished. If it does, perhaps the spike was more COVID based, but if the demand for service remains the same, the First Selectman said the Board could expect Director Theodore to come before them next year for a more permanent solution.

Childcare Subsidies

The First Selectman stated the line item was removed based on feedback and consultations with Human Services Director Theodore and the Board of Selectmen.

Libraries - COVID Expenses \$30,000

The First Selectman noted that the \$30,000 was a combined ask for all three libraries.

Ms. Chris Bradley, Director of the Mystic-Noank library spoke to the Board noting the tough time for libraries and the lack of fundraising events due to COVID. The library saw an increase in new online and outdoor programming requests also due to COVID. Ms. Bradley requested \$25,000 for the library, money already spent 2021 on COVID related expenses. Last year the library spent \$13,545 on specific COVID expenses. Ms. Bradley expressed appreciation of the support the Town provides to the library for their operating expenses.

Ms. Young inquired if Groton had been asked to donate, and Ms. Bradley stated Groton's time frame for requests was a bit later but she anticipated asking Groton to contribute towards additional items not covered by this request.

Mr. Pete Robinson, Treasurer, Westerly Public Library spoke briefly to the Board thanking them for their support and any funding they may be able to receive to offset the expenses brought on by COVID.

Ms. Micayla Hall, Library Director, Stonington Free Library, addressed the board Requesting \$15,000 in funding. These funds would cover direct COVID related costs, such as increased cleaning protocols, supplying PPE, and services that have become more critical during the pandemic such as public us technology, laptops, wireless access points and digital library offerings.

The Board members did note that the requests from the libraries were greater than the spreadsheet noted and the First Selectman said she would add a footnote for deliberations.

Chairman O'Brien remarked that the library representatives in attendance have heard each other's presentations and they should get together with the First Selectman to further fine tune the requests to abide by the funding model that has been established for funds dispersed to the three libraries.

New Heights Program Van \$41,000

Vista Life Innovations is a fully accredited nationally recognized post secondary program offering an array of services for individuals with disabilities and their families. There is an identified need in SE CT for vocational and life skills training for individuals with disabilities. The request for ARPA funds will purchase a van for student transport. The van will operate 5 days per week and is scheduled to launch in the Fall of 2021. The Sylvestre Foundation will contribute \$10,000 towards the total vehicle cost of \$55,000.

COMO HVAC \$80,000

Ms. Priscilla Rouquayrol, Education Director at the community center addressed the Board requesting a total ask of \$186,500 for an HVAC system for the auditorium and gym. The COMO would pay an additional \$14,500 for engineering and design work. The work would address the COMO's aging system.

The COMO implemented a full day distance learning program last year to help support families in the community with the school's hybrid learning model. Monday thru Friday there are children on site and the gym and auditorium have been

turned into classrooms to accommodate these children. Currently there is no heat or air conditioning other than one radiator and a ceiling fan in these areas.

It is the intention of the community center to raise the funding needed before taking the anticipated funding from the Town.

Always Home Stonington Assistance Fund \$10,000

Ms. Patricia Cunningham, Executive Director of Always Home, spoke to the Board summarizing the request for funding to assist Stonington families in their needs. Always Home offers rental support and case management to provide families the bare minimum to be stable. Transportation issues, childcare, employment opportunities and training opportunities are provided as part of the case management services. Always home works in partnership with Stonington Human Services and many referrals come from the Human Services department. Ms. Cunningham noted the needs of families have risen due to the cost of living and housing costs and expressed her appreciation for the Town's support. Ms. Cunningham also noted that they have asked the city of New London and the Town of Groton for funding as well.

PNC - Gazebo \$10,000

The PNC is requesting funding for a vinyl gazebo at the PNC Senior Center. This structure would provide persons over age 55 with the chance to meet outdoors for activities that would include lunches, book club, writing class, arts & crafts, veteran's coffee hour and senior club. COVID restrictions have been placed on many indoor activities. By providing a covered, outdoor space, seniors would have the opportunity to meet outside.

Edythe K Richmond PPE \$10,138

Finance Director Jim Sullivan told the Board that the Stonington Housing Authority, owns and manages the Edythe K Richmond homes, a complex that houses elderly and disabled residents. The authority was created by the Board of Selectman many years ago and is a Town Board Commission. The authority had applied to FEMA for reimbursement of PPE expenses due to COVID, but were rejected as they are not a municipality or government services function. It is their hope that the Town would consider them for ARPA funding.

Ambulances \$19,000

First Selectman Chesebrough reminded the Board that this funding was for Mystic River and Westerly Ambulance only. During the last budget the funding was not provided to them, relying on the receipt of the ARPA funding. The funding would cover COVID related expenses. Stonington Ambulance had such an increase that funding was provided in the last budget. Selectman Chesebrough provided the Board with the breakdown of the funding for each organization, \$11,500 for Mystic and \$7,500 for Westerly.

Police Dispatch \$65,000

Lt. Bryan Schneider addressed the Board, noting that currently there is only one dispatcher during 3rd shift. The department hopes to hire an individual on a one-year contract and then track the impact the position had in terms of activation and response as well as feedback from the dispatchers who currently work the shift alone and the officer's who step in when needed. If it is determined this is a good use of funds it could turn into a long-term request.

Cyber Security \$110,000

First Selectman Chesebrough addressed the Board, noting \$79,000 of this request has already been spent on new cyber security items required for insurance reasons. This ask covers 3 years of the cost of this change. The second half of the request is for \$31,000 for new wireless access points. The current access points at the PD and Hwy Garage are past end of life. This would be a capital expense to design, purchase and deploy new wireless access point system at the existing locations and add new ones to the Town Hall and Human Services.

LLHD \$52,309

First Selectman Chesebrough stated the request was straightforward and Steven Mansfield, Director of Health, would be happy to provide any breakdown on the funds he's asking for. The request represents 1% of the total allocation of funds.

SECOG \$

First Selectman Chesebrough stated that she will have more information before the public hearing.

Drainage & Paving \$525,000

First Selectman Chesebrough stated that the ARPA allows storm water management expenses therefore they have put forward two important drainage projects that are also long-time CIP requests - the Town Hall drainage and parking lot estimated at \$375,000 and the final stages of work at the Fourth District Voting Hall estimated at \$150,000. Reporting that it is no longer an ask but a need to replace the storm water drainage at the Town Hall, the Selectman noted that both projects will help protect the local waterways and required progress towards the State MS4 permit.

Sewer I&I Phase II \$150,000

First Selectman Chesebrough the full cost is \$300,000 but the WPCA has the funding to cover the remainder of the project cost. She also stated that there were reimbursable grants for 55% of the cost.

Stonington Housing Fund

\$500,000

First Selectman Chesebrough noted that the ask is a top priority. Thanking Sue Cullen for her time and effort on the program, the Selectman noted that Ms. Cullen directly worked on this program in Groton for a number of years and it was very successful. The program would address a number of needs for Stonington residents. Oftentimes people living on a fixed income or those with medical or other life setbacks cannot maintain their home. This program enables them to obtain no interest loans to residents to make home improvements such as new windows, exterior painting or a new roof. The Selectman welcomed more dialog or questions from the Board members. Regarding the administration of the fund, the Selectman stated Human Services already has a part in this that they currently do and without extra resources could update the forms to a first inception point. One firm identified, Echo, based out of New London, has spoken to the Selectman pro bono and given advise on implementing the program. Echo could administer the program and take the liability and managing of the funds and projects for about 10%.

Stonington Transportation Fund

\$50,000

First Selectman Chesebrough stated that the transportation fund is a similar type of programming to help residents pay with fixing up a car so they can get to work or get transportation. The PNC, Human Services and Always Home brought up one of the key barriers to employment and to prevent homelessness is transportation to and from a job.

Correspondence: Chairman O'Brien acknowledged the email from the Tax Collector that was forwarded to Board members.

Liaison Reports:

Chairman O'Brien recommended to waive the liaison reports due to reports of tornado activity in the area.

With no further business, Mr. Frishman motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:05 p.m. Ms. Young seconded. All members were in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,



Jill A Senior
Board of Finance Recording Secretary