

**TOWN OF STONINGTON**  
**SPECIAL BOARD OF FINANCE MEETING**  
**Stonington Town Hall Conference Room**  
**Virtual Meeting**  
**Thursday, April 9, 2020**  
**4:00 PM**

A special meeting of the Board of Finance was held on this date in the Stonington Town Hall Conference Room. Due to Covid-19 concerns, the meeting was streamed live on the Town of Stonington's Facebook page. A dial in number was provided for audible access to the meeting for those without internet access.

Chairman Tim O'Brien called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm.

With all Board of Finance members connecting remotely, Chairman O'Brien performed a roll call of the Board of Finance members.

Mr. Glenn Frishman - connected remotely  
Mr. Mike Fauerbach - connected remotely  
Ms. Lynn Young - connected remotely  
Ms. Deb Norman - connected remotely  
Mr. Bob Statchen - connected remotely  
Mr. Dave Motherway - connected remotely

Also connecting remotely, Mr. James Sullivan, Director of Finance.

First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough was in attendance.

Chairman O'Brien read the following statement:

This is a completely unprecedented time for Stonington and the US as a whole. We're all trying to be responsible and maintain proper social distancing to keep the number of COVID-19 cases in Stonington, Connecticut to a minimum, this is at a huge impact on many households and businesses. These impacts and changes create a huge uncertainty, and we will try to develop a fiscally prudent budget for the coming year. While none of us know when life may return to normal, we are all working to protect and support all of Stonington residents as best we can.

Reading about how \$349 billion dollars recently released for the Payroll Protection Program is being consumed faster than the government anticipated and how the government is trying to work out adding another \$250 billion dollars for this program is unsettling. That's a very harsh indicator of how small businesses in the US are struggling. This also reflects what we hear and see locally as townspeople have struggling businesses and jobs and bills that still must be paid.

The Connecticut Department of Labor is currently running a five week backlog to process all of the unemployment claims, casinos are closed for the first time ever, and just yesterday Mystic Seaport announced that they're delaying construction a year due to the economy and market uncertainty. This is a backdrop we have while developing this budget.

I do think that the town is working hard to be fiscally responsible to the taxpayers. The budget as presented requires hard cuts to be made across the board, and ones which reflect the uncertain economy that we are facing. Under the leadership of the First Selectwoman, Danielle Cheesebrough, the town is suggesting even more cuts to the proposed budget to try and help residents get through these evolving times. The Board of Education has agreed to zero percent increase in operational budget year over year. This continues to be one of the most difficult budgeting processes to manage as there is so much that isn't known going forward. We need to consider that any funding the town gets from the State may not come due to the State's fiscal reality. And if that happens, the burden on the town's taxpayers will be considerable.

I am happy that everyone in town government is mindful of the economic uncertainties and is trying to do their part. At the end of the day, it is the taxpayers who fund all this and who are facing that same uncertainty personally. These are challenging times, no doubt we look forward to the future when we're able to safely return to our traditional routines. We're all in this together and we will persevere.

This meeting is the public hearing and is the opportunity for the public to have their voices heard in support or opposition to the proposed budget. To the situation this year, it's virtual. We have asked that people either submit written comments or requests for time to speak. After the deadline passed for submissions or requests, we've received 15 letters and no requests to speak verbally. I will start identifying who wrote the letter, their address, and then read the letters as received. Letters will be entered into the record as received and copies have already been given to all of the board of finance members for their reading.

Chairman O'Brien moved on to the correspondence that was received. The first set of letters that were received were related to Human Services and Outside Agencies.

Mark Bancroft, 81 Mary Hill Road, Pawcatuck, CT wrote on behalf of the Stanton Davis Homestead Museum requesting the \$5,000, and recommended by the First Selectman to be reinstated as the money is critical for a dollar to dollar matching grant and to the continued improvements being made at the museum.

David Snedeker, no address given, wrote in support of funding for the three libraries under the Department of Human Services Outside Agencies.

Roberta Donahue, 11 Washington Street, Mystic writes in support of funding for the three libraries for the proposed FY20/21 budget.

Bruce Carpenter, 108 Cove Road, Stonington writes urging the Board of Finance to support the three libraries as they provide essential health education information, recreational materials, and programs for Stonington citizens of all ages, at no cost to the user.

Phillip Kemper, 186 Jerry Brown Road, Mystic writes concerning funding for the libraries, in particular the Mystic-Noank library, where even in this age of internet the library has a host of patrons, and now with COVID-19 concerns, the library has become even more vital virtually for people who are shut-in.

Peggy Brissette, 192 Farmholme Road, Stonington writes in support of funding for the three libraries. Though currently closed as buildings they are all open as a virtual space to reach as many people as possible, providing links to reputable sources of information, ebooks, audio books, video streaming and tech tutorials.

Belinda DeKay, Executive Director and Micayla Hall, Assistant Director of the Stonington Free Library write to thank the Board of Finance and Selectmen for the funding particularly now when the effects of COVID-19 create an enormous financial burden for nonprofits, businesses and municipalities. Libraries have never been more vitally important than at this moment by offering safe online perspective and provide access to reliable information on health, safety, public services, educational resources and so much more. Once the immediate effects of COVID-19 pass, reliance on the programs and services will increase in the months ahead and they aim to be available to provide the community with resources they will need to get back on our feet.

Sally Salancy, President, Friends of Mystic-Noank Library writes the library offers free access to a large collection of books, magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, puzzles and online programs for adults and children. When the library is closed, patrons with internet access can check out books in the overdrive collection and enjoy films in canopy. For all that Mystic-Noank Library offers, especially in these difficult times it needs an increase for its funding.

Sara Lathrop, 7 Osprey Lane, Mystic writes in support of funding the Mystic-Noank Library. The Library's operating budget for FY2021 is projected at \$790,000. Stonington's portion would be 15% of the total. We are also requesting \$152,000 from Groton. The combined requests are 1/3 of the funds required to maintain the Library. Although closed to the public during the COVID-19 quarantine, the librarians are still at work providing services to the community through innovative programs. The brand new Library YouTube Channel offers tech tutorials, children's storytimes, crafting projects and more. Canopy, a free video streaming service, digital audiobooks online and remote tech support are some of the ways the Library is reaching out to support the community and support of the Library's vital services is crucial.

Marilyn Creighton, 14 Denison Ave, Mystic writes there is an urgent need for an air conditioned animal control vehicle and to remind there remains \$17,000 in the LS Zimbardo fund for the animals managed by the Police Dept. The use of these funds plus potential trade value could reduce the cost of a new vehicle by more than 40%. I am looking into other avenues to further decrease the cost to the town for a new vehicle and please let me know if this idea can be presented at an upcoming Police Commissioners meeting. Thank you and the entire Police Dept for your great service to the Town of Stonington.

A letter strongly urging the Stonington Finance Committee to restore funding to repair the North Stonington road bridge was submitted by

Marcel Dufresne

Beth Dufresne

Trish LaPointe

Joel Bergeron

Leslie Dwyer

Michael Spellmon

Joan Cohen

The residents write that they have delivered to Stonington 160 signatures from residents of Old Mystic, more than half from the Stonington side, urging officials from both towns to finally get this project done. By now interested parties are very familiar with the various concerns caused by the bridge closing, especially public safety issues. We are well aware of the financial uncertainties facing both towns this year. And while we would prefer that the funds be restored this year, we are especially concerned that Stonington has included \$15,000 in a budget to "close" the bridge. Unclear of what closing this bridge means, the group urged the town not to take steps that would preclude the bridge from being repaired and reopened in the future when finances are more stable and the two towns can work together.

Mr. Ken Richards, Old Mystic Fire District Chief, writes to the members of the Board of Finance, first and foremost thank you for supporting the funding of the North Stonington road bridge over the last nine years. Understanding the projects facing the town with limited budget, Mr. Richards expressed his frustration regarding how the entire project has been handled. As Fire Chief, Mr. Richards first responsibility is always the safety of the community and the members of the Old Mystic Fire District. The delay in replacing the bridge over the past 10 years has put both the community and the members of the fire district at risk for saving an amount that is less than 1% of the overall budget in both towns. Mr. Richards wrote he was gravely concerned about anyone experiencing a major life changing incident because the bridge is out of service and the urgency of once again restoring funding to replace the bridge in this year's budget.

Michelle and Ken Peters, 1170 River Road, Mystic wrote asking the Town of Stonington to fund the repair of the North Stonington Road Bridge in the town's FY20/21 budget. Legal counsel for the Old Mystic Fire District has written a letter to the Town Manager of Groton, other Town of Groton officials and Stonington First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough stating quote "the continued delay and replacement of the bridge perpetuates a potentially life threatening hazard to the citizens of the Town of Groton". The authors felt that this letter provides notice that the loss of life or a home due to the lack of response time by the Old Mystic Fire Department as a result of the North Stonington Road bridge not being operable puts both Town's of Stonington and Groton in a tenuous position legally. They ask that the funds to repair North Stonington Road bridge be in this year's Stonington budget to protect citizens in their homes.

Mr. Rick Newton, Climate Change Task Force Chair, wrote, thanking the board for their service to the community. Acknowledging that this budget cycle is especially difficult with the unknowns due to the current pandemic, Mr. Newton writes he does not expect the Board of Finance to be restoring additional funding to the 2021 budget so he wanted to share his comments more for a general nature for future budget cycles, writing that Stonington needs to think far beyond a typical five-year time horizon with regards to climate change. Southeastern CT and Southern RI have already exceeded the 2 degree temperature change needed to keep sea level rise in check and every month the statistics are worse. Roads and bridges are going to need to be raised significantly, town infrastructure is going to have to be waterproofed, raised or relocated and residents are going to have to relocate. Studies have shown that for every \$1 spent now on coastal resilience, \$6 in future expenditures will be avoided.

This concluded the letters received as public comment. Chairman O'Brien noted as in past years, it is a public comment and not meant as a dialogue with the public. The letters will be entered for the record.

Being that there is no other feedback that was received from online or from the letters, Chairman O'Brien adjourned the public hearing at 4:34pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill A Senior  
Recording Secretary Board of Finance