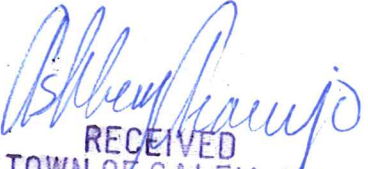


**TOWN OF SALEM
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN HALL – CONFERENCE ROOM 1**


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The Minutes submitted below have been filed in accordance with
section 7-342 of the CT General Statutes. They are subject to final approval
with or without amendments by a vote of the Board of Finance (BOF).
Approval and any such amendments will be detailed in subsequent BOF minutes.

PRESENT

William “Skip” Dickson, Chairman
Corinne (Cory) Bourgeois, Clerk
Kate Belleville
John Bernier
Deborah Cadwell (7:54 p.m.)
Janet Griggs
Maryann Casciano, Alternate
James Moran, Alternate (*seated*)
Matt Rucci, Alternate

ABSENT

none

ALSO PRESENT

First Selectman Ed Chmielewski
Selectman Ron LaBonte
Finance Specialist Lisa Jablonski

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dickson called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS: *none*

SEAT ALTERNATE, IF NEEDED:

M/S/C: Griggs/Belleville, to seat Alternate Board Member Moran for Board Member
Cadwell. **Discussion:** None. **Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.**

COMMUNICATIONS:

- a. Copy of a letter from Board of Education (BOE) Chairman Sean Reith regarding the reduction of the BOE Proposed FY2024/25 Budget due to reductions in the Medical Insurance and Service Contracts line items.

AGENDA:

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: MARCH 7, 2024 BOF REGULAR MEETING

M/S/C: Griggs/Bernier, to approve the March 7, 2024, Board of Finance Regular Meeting Minutes, with the following amendments:

Page 5, item 3(B), Enrollment Numbers, third line:

~~There are approximately 70 Pre-K to Grade 8 and 100 High School SPED Students.~~

Page 9, item 3(B), fourth line:

~~...felt that the proposed budget was not fiduciary fiscally responsible, ...~~

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Dee Doolittle, 300 East Haddam Road, spoke on behalf of the Library Board of Directors. She thanked the Board for all of their hard work and efforts. She requested that the Board support the Board of Selectmen's FY2024/25 proposed budget salary increases for the Library Director and staff. She recited a letter, dated February 20, 2024, signed by the members of the Library Board of Directors. The increases are requested to bring the Director's salary, which is 15.5% less than her colleagues in similar towns, closer to the regional average. The increases for the staff include the state-mandated minimum wage requirement, increases for long-time valuable staff members, and fair and equitable increases. The negative consequences of denying their request, she stated, may lead to the cutting of programs and operation hours.

Friends of the Library President Carl Nawrocki, 9 Music Vale Road, echoed Ms. Doolittle's comments. Having served on two (2) Library Director Hiring Committees, he stated the difficulty in attracting qualified individuals due to the salary, which is not comparable with other similar-sized towns. Having the Library without a Director who provides direction to the staff places the Library in a precarious situation. He also recommended that the Town conduct a periodic Comparability Study of the salaries for the entire Town staff, which would help stabilize the increases.

3. TREASURER'S REPORTS

A. REVENUE SUMMARY

B. TRIAL BALANCE

C. FUND BALANCE

D. OTHER

Treasurer Pam Henry was not present. The Board was requested to forward any questions they have regarding the Reports to Treasurer Henry.

4. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** – To provide an update and discuss legal strategies regarding the current lawsuit brought against the Town of Salem by the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company, Inc., “The Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company, Inc. vs. Town of Salem” pursuant to C.G.S. Section 1-200(6)(B) New London Judicial District Docket Number KNL-CV-20-6046141-S

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to enter into Executive Session to provide an update and discuss legal strategies regarding the current lawsuit brought against the Town of Salem by the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company, Inc., “The Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company, Inc. vs. Town of Salem” pursuant to C.G.S. Section 1-200(6)(B) New London Judicial District Docket Number KNL-CV-20-6046141-S. Discussions to include the Board of Finance, First Selectman Ed Chmielewski, Emergency Services Liaison Selectman Ron LaBonte, Finance Specialist/Human Resources Lisa Jablonski, and Town Attorney Brian Estep. Invited parties exited Town Council Chambers for Executive Session at 7:20 p.m. Chairman Dickson resumed the meeting at 7:54 p.m. No motions were made and no votes were taken during Executive Session.

5. **ACT ON SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION, per Section 10.09 of the Salem Town Charter, in the amount of \$34,000.00 for Legal Fees, Town Issues, Account 5-126-208**
First Selectman Chmielewski requested a Supplemental Appropriation for legal fees pertaining to the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company litigation, among others.

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve a Supplemental Appropriation, Section 10.09 of the Salem Town Charter, in the amount of \$34,000.00 for Legal Fees, Town Issues, Account No. 5-126-208. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

6. **FIRST SELECTMAN’S REPORT**

First Selectman Chmielewski provided a brief PowerPoint presentation, commending the Town’s various departments, highlighting their accomplishments, and stating the importance of valuing and retaining the staff. The population trends in the town have resulted in an increased number of EMS (Emergency Medical Services) Calls for Service as the volunteer pool continues to decline. Improvements have been made in various Town departments to help better serve the residents and the Town continues to engage in shared services with the BOE, resulting in significant cost savings. Due to limited staffing, the School has outsourced its cleaning services and reduced the amount of time the custodians can provide cleaning services for the Town buildings, resulting in less than satisfactory results.

7. ACT ON PROPOSED APPROPRIATIONS FOR FY2024/25

A. #100 SELECTMAN'S DEPARTMENT

The First Selectman presented the budget for Department #100, Selectman, with an increase of \$340.00 or 4.22% due to an increase in fees for the SCCOG and mileage.

M/S/R: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$8,400.00 for Department #100, Selectman, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: Line Item 5-100-4012, Charter Revision Commission, will be added to the Department's budget and the estimated amount will be confirmed. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

B. #126 TOWN COUNSEL

The First Selectman presented the budget for Department #126, Town Counsel, with an increase of \$23,000.00 or 27.38% due to contract negotiations and pending and future legal litigations. The amount was estimated with the guidance of the Town Attorneys.

M/S/C: Bernier/Moran, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$107,000.00 for Department #126, Town Counsel, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

C. #134 TOWN OFFICE BUILDING

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #134, Town Office Operation, with an increase of \$53,624.00 or 46.32%. The Town is currently engaged in an Agreement with the BOE for cleaning services in exchange for snow plowing. Due to the staffing shortage, the custodian(s) are unable to dedicate the necessary time to properly clean the town buildings. As such, he is planning to engage the services of a cleaning company. Three (3) estimates have been acquired. Finance Specialist/Human Resources Jablonski provided a brief history of the issues, highlighting the cleanliness of the bathrooms.

Line Item 5-134-299, Computer (Chairman Dickson) – The line item includes a significant increase due to the possibility of engaging the services of a new payroll company, the need to update the current accounting system, and added costs for cybersecurity and firewalls. A cost estimate from Frontier to upgrade their internet services is expected. Discussion ensued regarding moving the payroll and QuickBooks system to the Capital budget. The Board Members agreed to reduce the line item by \$10,000.00.

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$159,400.00 for Department #134, Town Office Operation, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's

March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

D. #135 MUNICIPAL BUILDING MAINTENANCE

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #135, Municipal Building Maintenance, with an increase of \$10,370.00 or 14.95%. The Town buildings include the Town Hall, Public Works, Library, Center School, Historical Society, Old Library, Zemko complex, and the Salem Volunteer Fire Company (SVFCO). The building maintenance costs for SVFCO are not included in this line item.

Line Item 5-135-609, Grounds/Building Maintenance (Board Member Rucci) – The line item on the Budget vs. Actuals Report includes the STEAP (Small Towns Economic Assistance Program) Grant Funds and is not included in this budget.

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$79,734.00 for Department #135, Municipal Building Maintenance, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

E. #138 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #138, Employee Benefits, with an increase of \$44,097.00 or 8.51%. The increase includes the addition of Emergency Services stipends and health insurance increases. The FICA and Medicare amounts are dependent on the salaries and will be revisited after Department #105, Salaries, is finalized. Board Member Griggs wished to ensure that the line items are accurate estimates, noting that line-item transfers are often made from this department.

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$79,734.00 for Department #135, Municipal Building Maintenance, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

F. #140 UTILITIES

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #140, Utilities, with an increase of \$7,580.00 or 4.19% due to the increased use and costs of utilities. Emergency Services Liaison Selectman LaBonte reminded the Board that the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company (GLVFCO) building is not owned by the Town and requested that the Board provide the Board of Selectmen with latitude on some of the funds allocated to the Fire Company without the finalization of an Audit, noting that the funding for GLVFCO utilities totals \$30,400.00. Chairman Dickson stated that the Board has historically funded the Fire Company's utilities and will continue to do so and

any decisions and/or agreements made by the Board of Selectmen will be applied accordingly.

M/S/C: Bernier/Belleville, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$188,699.00 for Department #140, Utilities, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

G. #152 TOWN SERVICES

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #152, Town Services, with an increase of \$33,852.00 or 26.77%. The increase includes funding for the Gardner Lake Authority (GLA) and Planning Services. He is actively working with the Authority, the Towns of Bozrah and Montville, and state legislators to deal with the ongoing seasonal issues at the Lake. The GLA is responsible for maintaining the water quality, annual dam drawdowns, boat patrols, and providing safety on the water. The funding for the GLA is divided between the towns of Bozrah (10%), Montville (30%), and Salem (60%) and is paid in the spring. The Town Planner is contracted through the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Government (SCCOG) and is now being served by the Director of Municipal Services, increasing the cost of the line item due to her experience. Additional information will be provided.

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$160,325.00 for Department #152, Town Services, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

H. #157 REGIONAL SERVICES

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #157, Regional Services, with an increase of \$992.00 or 7.19%. Increases include additional funding for the Women's Center and Regional Probate.

M/S/C: Bernier/Moran, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$14,788.00 for Department #157, Regional Services, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

I. #310 PUBLIC WORKS

Foreman Tony Gallicchio presented the budget request for Department #310, Public Works, which includes an increase of \$42,350.00 or 14.81%. The increases include:

Line Item 5-310-026, Mech/Equip/Tools – \$2,800 or 28% increase

The line item primarily includes an increase in the price of the additives for the fuel pump. Additional tools are being purchased as more work is being completed in-house. The fuel pump, which is malfunctioning, may also need replacement.

Line Item 5-310-441, Snow Removal Expense – \$40,000.00 or 57.97% increase

This year, alone, approximately \$100,000.00 was expended for salt as a result of the rain/ice storms. The remaining salt from the previous year is carried over to the following year. The vendor is on the State Bid.

Line Item 5-310-633, Field Maintenance – \$1,250.00 or 5.81% increase

The line item includes an increase in the price of fertilizer; alternative vendors are being sought.

Line Item 5-310-923, Uniforms/Meals/Supplies – \$300.00 or 3.92% increase

The line item includes the uniforms and training necessary for a newly hired employee(s).

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$328,270.00 for Department #310, Public Works, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

J. #410 TRANSFER STATION

Foreman Gallicchio presented the budget request for Department #410, Transfer Station, which includes an increase of \$23,200.00 or 11.48% due to an increased cost for trash bags, tipping fees, and water testing costs. Regional efforts are being made through the SCCOG to decrease the cost of the tipping fees.

Trash Bags (Board Member Casciano) – Because the revenue earned from the sale of the trash bags is no longer offsetting the expenses in full, an alternative vendor is being sought. A brief discussion ensued regarding the possibility of investigating the cost savings for instituting transfer station passes vs. trash bags.

Line Item 5-410-936, Toxic Waste (Board Member Casciano) – The line item includes the cost for the disposal of refrigerators, air-conditioners, batteries, oil, etc. Board Member Casciano recommended educating the public to not mix their used oil with other products, allowing the Town to receive revenue from its disposal.

M/S/C: Bernier/Moran, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$225,323.00 for Department #410, Transfer Station, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

K. #105 SALARIES

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the budget for Department #105, Salaries, with an increase of \$240,897.00 or 15.12%. He noted that his original proposal to the Board of Selectmen was to maintain a flat budget for Line Item 5-105-100, First Selectman. Selectman LaBonte stated that the Board of Selectmen voted to increase the line item, based on the salaries for the position in similar-sized towns, the need to attract

candidates, and its lack of an increase for several years. The First Selectman requested the Board consider reducing the increase and allocate those savings to the proposed salaries for the Acting Selectman and other staff members. He continued to review the increases for the staff, some of which are due to additional hours rather than rate increases.

Board Member Bernier stated that, in reviewing the Town Charter, each of the positions should have a Statement of Duties and Responsibilities, including the minimum qualifications, from which a salary range is determined. He agreed with Mr. Nawrocki's comment regarding conducting a Salary Study and suggested the possibility of the Board of Selectmen to annually address the salaries of elected officials. The salaries, he felt, should be more structured and based on the position, rather than the individual. Chairman Dickson added that, like the BOE's efforts to reduce the salary line item by hiring less experienced individuals to replace their experienced retirees, the Town's staffing might also be reduced in the same manner.

Emergency Services Liaison Selectman LaBonte spoke concerning Line Items 5-105-120, Fire Marshals, and 5-105-121, EMT/Maintenance, stating that the increases for the Fire Marshals and EMT/Maintenance align with the MRI (Municipal Resources, Inc.) Public Safety Study and includes the addition of an Emergency Services Director who will act as the Fire Marshal and Firefighter/EMS Supervisor. In addition, the two (2) Firefighter/EMT positions will be increased by one (1) additional full-time Firefighter/EMT and, with the part-time Firefighters/EMTs, will be providing emergency services to the Town 12 (twelve) hours/day, seven (7) days/week. The members will also provide ambulance coverage during the weekdays and the capacity for ambulance coverage during the weekends. As such, the Firefighters/EMTs' hours will be increased from 50 to 84 hours/week and will provide coverage for approximately 60% of the Calls for Service. Furthermore, numerous line items will be moved from the Ambulance and Fire Companies' budgets to the Emergency Services budget so that the volunteers will no longer handle the Town's funds.

Board Member Rucci requested supporting documentation, including the direct correlation between the MRI Study and the increases. Chairman Dickson stated the possibility of adding questions to the referendum. Board Member Griggs recommended including a supporting page with explanations for some of the items, similar to the BOE budget presentation.

The item was tabled.

L. #925 CAPITAL RESERVE

M/S/C: Bernier/Belleville, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$2.00 for Department #925, Capital Reserve, subject to review and/or

revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

M. #926 OPEN SPACE LAND

M/S/C: Bernier/Griggs, to approve the appropriation of funds in the amount of \$2.00 for Department #926, Open Space Land Acquisition Fund, subject to review and/or revision and pending approval at the Board of Finance's March 21, 2024 Regular Meeting. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

8. INLAND WETLANDS BUDGET ISSUES

Inland Wetlands & Conservation Commission Chairperson Diba Khan-Bureau thanked the Board for their attention. She stated that the Commission is made up of a group of volunteers, of varying backgrounds, who work well together regardless of their political affiliations. There have been two (2) instances over the last few years in which the Commission has issued a Cease & Desist Order to the Town for violations. She reported that legal fees that were related to the Town and neither requested nor approved by the Commission were allocated to the Commission's budget. As a result, the Department is over budget and the budget has been frozen. She provided supporting documentation, including e-mail correspondence between herself and the Finance Department. She stated that the Commission has voted not to allocate funds for those services that were neither requested nor approved. She expressed her wish to resolve the issue in a positive manner.

Board Member Griggs recalled a similar instance, during which it was found that the First Selectman does not have the authority to allocate funds for services that were not requested or approved by the Department. She recommended a Purchase Order System be instituted. Chairman Dickson concurred that the Commission should approve their incurred expenses. Other expenses should be reviewed, as necessary. Finance Specialist Jablonski stated that Purchase Orders are not created for legal expenses due to the difficulty in estimating the final amount of the services rendered. She explained that the four (4) invoices received from the Town Attorney were addressed to the Inland Wetlands Commission and the amounts were recorded into the system accordingly; the invoices have not yet been paid. Chairman Dickson stated that the funding for services that are requested by the Town should be expended from the Town's budget. First Selectman Chmielewski felt that the item was an administrative issue and expressed his willingness to resolve the issue.

9. LIAISON REPORTS

a. BOE

BOE Liaison Board Member Griggs reported that the East Lyme Reconciliation amount returned with a negative amount this year due to overall declining enrollment. She explained that the amount is determined when the Audit is finalized. As such, the

Reconciliation is from two (2) years prior. The unencumbered amount has increased due to the SPED (Special Education) Excess Cost. A list of the BOE line-item transfers was included in her Summary Report, dated March 5, 2024.

b. EMERGENCY SERVICES

Emergency Services Liaisons Selectmen LaBonte reported that the boot for the Gear Washer, which is housed in the SVFVCO, has been replaced and is in working condition. Because the Washer is 23 years of age, the Fire Company is seeking grant funding for the purchase of a new Gear Washer. He also informed the Board that the boat will be moved to the SVFCO and the career Firefighters/EMTs will be engaging in additional training.

OLD BUSINESS:

Annual Report Dedications: Chairman Dickson reported that the dedications for Bobbie and George Ziegra were submitted. The dedication for Eric Belt will be submitted for next year's Annual Report. Board Member Griggs recommended sending a draft of the dedication(s) to the family members.

ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Belleville/Bourgeois, to adjourn the meeting at 10:58 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Salem

**A VIDEO RECORD OF THE MEETING CAN BE FOUND ON THE TOWN'S
WEBSITE UNDER BOARDS & COMMISSIONS – BOARD OF FINANCE –
MEETING VIDEOS**