

**TOWN OF SALEM
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN HALL – CONFERENCE ROOM 1**

**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
Marshall Collins, Clerk
Corinne (Cory) Bourgeois
Deborah Cadwell
Janet Griggs
Matt Rucci
John Bernier, Alternate
Maryann Casciano, Alternate

ABSENT

Kate Belleville, Alternate

ALSO PRESENT

First Selectman Ed Chmielewski
Selectman Kevin Lyden
Finance Specialist Lisa Jablonski

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dickson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS:

Tax Collector Vivian Waters

SEAT ALTERNATE, IF NEEDED: *none*

COMMUNICATIONS: *none*

ALTERATIONS TO THE AGENDA: *none*

AGENDA:

- 1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: APRIL 13, 2023 BOF REGULAR MEETING**
M/S/C: Cadwell/Bourgeois, to approve the April 13, 2023 Board of Finance Regular Meeting Minutes, with the following amendment:
Page 1, Seat Alternate, if needed:
Voice vote, ~~6-0~~ **5-0**, all in favor.

**Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0-1. Voting in Favor: Board Members
Bourgeois, Cadwell, Griggs, Rucci, and Dickson. Voting in Opposition: None.
Voting in Abstention: Board Member Collins.**

2. TREASURER'S REPORTS

A. REVENUE SUMMARY

B. TRIAL BALANCE

C. FUND BALANCE

Treasurer Pam Henry reviewed the *Balance Sheet and Budget vs. Actual* Reports. It was noted that the amount for Department 4-095, Revenue Use of Town Money, is extremely high (3,272.8% over budget) due to the current interest rates. Based on the final audit of the Construction Fund for the last School renovation, approximately \$206,000.00 will be transferred to the town's Unassigned Fund Balance, closing out the account.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS – none

4. FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT

First Selectman Chmielewski commended and thanked the Board, Board of Selectmen, Selectman Lyden, Finance Specialist, and Department Heads for their hard work and efforts on the FY2023/24 Budget. He felt that it was because of their wisdom, frugality, and care with the residents' funds, good customer service, and the townspeople's confidence and satisfaction that the Referendum yields a low voter turnout in comparison to presidential elections. Taking into consideration the Board's comments regarding the low number of residents who attended the Town Meeting, he stated that they made their efforts to advertise the Referendum throughout the town, including posting signage, sending e-blasts, announcements to the town's various boards, commissions, and organizations, and using social media to get the message out to the public.

Tax Collector Vivian Waters reported that, as of today, the Collection Rate is 98.40. She is currently reviewing their open accounts and the various channels they utilize to collect outstanding funds. One collection agency that stands out amongst others offers its services for free to the town and a minimal fee to the taxpayer. She is also working with the current company which provides services for online payments for additional enhancements to help streamline the process, including sending out reminders and setting up regular payments. The enhancements will be offered at no cost to the town.

5. FIRST SELECTMAN TRANSFER REQUESTS

While the Board of Selectmen had originally discussed and voted to approve a request for three (3) Supplemental Appropriations, the receipt of the Resident State Trooper bill, which came in lower than budgeted, will allow them to request line-item transfers. The budgeted amount accommodates the salaries of two (2) Step Nine (highest level) Troopers, both of

whom have moved on. Because the request for supplemental appropriations could negatively affect the town's Moody Rating, the goal is to live within the given budget. As such, a request was made to transfer the funds from Line Item 5-210-216, Security, Resident Troopers, to:

5-126-208, Town Counsel, Town Issues \$ 50,000.00
for ongoing legal issues with the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company

5-126-202, Town Counsel, Labor Relations \$ 10,000.00
for On Call Services contract negotiations

5-630-224, Planning & Zoning Commission, Legal Services \$ 20,000.00
for several public hearings

M/S/C: Collins/Cadwell, to approve the following line-item transfers from Line Item 5-210-216, Security, Resident Troopers, to the following line-items:

5-126-208, Town Counsel, Town Issues \$ 50,000.00

5-126-202, Town Counsel, Labor Relations \$ 10,000.00

5-630-224, Planning & Zoning Commission, Legal Services \$ 20,000.00

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

- 6. TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON A SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION OF UP TO \$80,000.00 FOR LEGAL FEE INCREASES FOR THE 2022-2023 BUDGET**
- a. Supplemental Appropriation, per Section 10.09 of the Salem Town Charter, in the amount of \$50,000.00 for Town Counsel, Account 5-126-208**
 - b. Supplemental Appropriation, per Section 10.09 of the Salem Town Charter, in the amount of \$10,000.00 for Labor Relations, Account 5-126-202**
 - c. Supplemental Appropriation, per Section 10.09 of the Salem Town Charter, in the amount of \$2,000.00 for Planning & Zoning Commission, Legal, Account 5-630-224**

Supplemental Appropriations were approved for line-item transfers; see item 5, First Selectman Transfer Requests.

7. APPOINTMENT OF ANNUAL AUDITOR NOTIFICATION

M/S/C: Collins/Bourgeois, to re-appoint King, King & Associates, P.C., as the Auditor for the Town of Salem. Discussion: Clerk Collins stated that he was less impressed with their performance in comparison to their previous audit and looks forward to seeing an improvement. Chairman Dickson concurred, adding that he felt that their presentation was lacking. Selectman Lyden added that, while they are a good auditing firm, they did not compare to the previous firm and cited that the Auditor also opted not to request an

extension, which would have been helpful and may be requested, even if not necessary. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

8. REFERENDUM – DISCUSSION – SET MIL RATE

Extensive discussion ensued regarding the results of the Referendum, including the low voter turnout. The results were as follows:

Approved:	139
Opposed:	77
Total:	216

The survey heeded the following responses:

	Too Low	Just Right	Too High
General Government Budget	17	136	51
Board of Education Budget	45	59	101
Capital Plan Budget	5	166	33

Board Member Bernier questioned the possibility of determining whether those who opposed the budget felt that the General Government, Board of Education, and/or Capital Plan Budget was too high, too low, and/or just right. Board Member Griggs, who was also interested in knowing those details, volunteered to review the ballots. Clerk Collins felt that, while the voter turnout should have been higher, the Referendum would have yielded the same results. Board Member Bourgeois felt that, though the Public Hearing and Town Meeting yielded a very low turnout, very good questions were asked. To enhance public participation, she suggested the possibility of including a section in *Our Town Salem* similar to that in the Town of Coventry's newsletter before the Budget Public Hearing and Town Meeting to better communicate with and educate the residents and improve their participation. Entitled "Budget in Brief" the section provides a brief overview of the budget, including Capital projects, transfers, debt service, and revenues, and the budget process. Clerk Collins agreed that it would be beneficial to better inform the public and raise their awareness of the budget's possible ramifications which has been running at a deficit. Board Member Bernier felt that all of the information is available to the public and it is their choice to participate in the process. He questioned whether the low turnout was poor. Board Member Griggs suggested the possibility of posting updates on the town website. Board Member Casciano agreed with Clerk Collins that the vote would have yielded the same results and noted that the number of those who felt that the Capital Plan Budget was just right was a solid number. She also felt that the Town Meeting was very well done and went smoothly in comparison to previous Town Meetings and agreed with Board Member Bernier who felt that it was the residents' responsibility to educate themselves. Board Member Griggs felt that the Town Meeting was attended by the usual members of the public and stated her wish that others would attend the meetings and

become involved. Board Member Bourgeois felt that the public should be informed and educated utilizing different avenues and volunteered to draft the article.

First Selectman Chmielewski commended the Board for conducting an “After Action Review”. He felt the budget was fair and looked forward to working together in the future, making enhancements and improvements along the way. He added that, generally, those who are satisfied with the budget do not participate. Clerk Collins suggested adding an item for outreach on their future agendas.

The Board Members reviewed Chairman Dickson’s FY2023/24 Mil Rate Calculation Sheet and Budget Summary, which included the Collection Rate assumptions, Unassigned Fund Balance, Current Year deficits, estimated return/excess revenue, and anticipated grant reimbursements. Based on the numbers indicated on the Budget Summary Sheet, which includes actual numbers, the FY2023/24 Mil Rate Calculation Sheet proposes the allocation of \$96,000.00 from the Unassigned Fund Balance to balance the \$738,921.00 deficit. The Calculation Sheet takes into account the estimated return/excess revenue, anticipated grant reimbursement, and current Grand List, and assumes that both the General Government and Board of Education will not return any unexpended funds to the town. It was explained that money allocated from the Assigned Capital Fund Balance are transferred into the General Fund and any unused funds are returned to the Unassigned Fund Balance or Rainy-Day Fund. The Unassigned Fund Balance would be maintained at 18.0% to 18.5%, which, the Board felt, is adequate for a small town.

**M/S/C: Collins/Cadwell, to set the mil rate at 28.8 for FY2023/24s. Discussion: None.
Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.**

9. LIAISON REPORTS

a. BOE

The Board reviewed Board Member Liaison Griggs’ BOE Summary Report. She confirmed that CIRMA (Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency) will cover any potential legal costs pertaining to the certified/non-certified Union grievances. Clerk Collins stated that any issues that would result in financial implications to the town should be presented by the Board of Education to the Board directly. Board Member Bourgeois concurred and commended Board Member Liaison Griggs for her efforts.

b. EMERGENCY SERVICES

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Emergency Services Study continues to be in process. The School Security Study, which is being conducted free of charge, included a walk-through of the School and will be presented to the relevant parties, including the Board of Finance. The Emergency Services and Emergency Management Team continues to work together. Firefighter/EMT Travis Roberts is currently attending

Fire Marshal Training Sessions and a Regional Fire Marshal Agreement was recently signed. He thanked the Board for their ongoing support.

OLD BUSINESS

Recusal Policy – The Board Members reviewed Clerk Collins’ draft of the proposed Recusal Policy, which includes the town’s Ethics Policy and Judicial Review Standards. He felt that the Board Members act with a quasi-judicial function, making decisions on the town's fiscal matters, and instituting a policy would ensure that they maintain an appearance of impartiality. Board Member Griggs felt that being a small town with difficulties recruiting volunteers to serve their community, such a policy would be unnecessary as there has been no evidence of deliberate impropriety. Board Member Bernier stated that one of the reasons alternate members exist on a Board or Commission is for this very reason. He added that there is no conflict in having a minority opinion that is well shared and having a spouse or family member on a different board/commission and having a different opinion from the majority would not qualify as a conflict. Clerk Collins stated that, for that reason, the policy states that it is recommended, not mandatory. Board Member Rucci felt that the Ethics Policy should be sufficient. Board Members Bernier, Cadwell, and Griggs agreed. Board Member Casciano also agreed and felt that the Board Members are intelligent and would be vocal should they feel that there is a conflict of interest or an appearance of partiality. Board Member Bourgeois agreed with Clerk Collins, stating that, like him, she would recuse herself should one of her family members be serving on a Board or Commission regardless of the existence of a policy. Chairman Dickson concurred, adding that he was unsure of the need for a separate policy. As such, Clerk Collins stated that the issue will arise repeatedly on a case-by-case basis so as not to have an appearance of impropriety.

Executive Session – The Board will add an Executive Session to their next Regular Meeting Agenda for an update on the pending lawsuit between the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company and the Town of Salem.

Emergency Services Study – Clerk Collins requested either the completed Emergency Services Study or a timetable for the completion of the Emergency Services Study at their next Regular Meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Rucci/Cadwell, to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 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**