

**TOWN OF SALEM
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 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
Corinne (Cory) Bourgeois, Clerk
Deborah Cadwell
Janet Griggs
Matt Rucci
Kate Belleville, Alternate
Maryann Casciano, Alternate (*seated*)
James Moran, Alternate

ABSENT

John Bernier

ALSO PRESENT

First Selectman Ed Chmielewski
Finance Specialist Lisa Jablonski

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dickson called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS: *none*

SEAT ALTERNATE, IF NEEDED:

**M/S/C: Cadwell/Bourgeois, to seat Alternate Board Member Casciano for Full Board
Member Bernier. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.**

COMMUNICATIONS: *none*

AGENDA:

1. Approval of Minutes: September 14, 2023 BOF Regular Meeting

**M/S/C: Cadwell/Casciano, to approve the September 14, 2023 Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes, with the following amendment:**

Page 2, item 4, line 5:

The school also welcomed ~~approximately 30~~ new teachers *and staff*.

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

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, with no unusual occurrences. In response to a question regarding computers that was raised the previous month, Finance Specialist Jablonski reported that two (2) large expenses, including the annual purchasing fee of shared software between three (3) of the town departments and several services for cyber-services, were expended early in the fiscal year. The expenses for line items 5-222-013, GLVFCO Fire Fighting Equipment, which is 280.6% expended, and 5-222-217, GLVFC professional fees, which is 130.3% expended, were noted; it is unknown as to whether the Fire Company is anticipating any additional expenses.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS – *none*

**4. MRI PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION
DISCUSSION**

First Selectman Chmielewski thanked Clerk Bourgeois for her involvement with the Analysis as the Liaison to Emergency Services and for enhancing their partnership. With the exception of criticism regarding the time that it has taken to release the study to the public, all of the feedback that has been received to date has been positive. The document provides the town with a good foundation with which to move forward. In accordance with best practices, many of the recommendations are already in effect, including the hiring of a fire supervisor and enhancing and expanding the volunteers' incentive program to include other volunteer emergency services personnel. The recommendations will be reviewed by the Boards of Finance and Selectmen Liaisons and at the Fire Chief Roundtable meetings, and acted upon, as necessary. The study, the video of the meeting, and the PowerPoint presentation are available on the Town website. Physical copies are also available at Town Hall.

Establishment of Committee (Board Member Griggs) – The members of the Fire Chief Roundtable, which includes the Fire Marshal, Fire Supervisors, and Fire Chiefs, will review and consider the recommendations together with the members of the Boards of Selectmen and Finance and Firefighters/EMTs as well as the public.

Status & benchmarking (Board Member Griggs) – The Committee will work hand in hand with both Selectman Liaison Ron LaBonte and Board of Finance Liaison Clerk Bourgeois, who may report back to the Boards regarding the status of the recommendations.

Grant Writers (Board Member Casciano) – Both the Town and the Fire Companies regularly seek out and submit grants. The Town is always open to obtaining the help of any resident(s) who specialize in grant writing.

Fire Companies' Comments (Board Member Cadwell) – Both Fire Chiefs have provided positive comments regarding the Study and have expressed their willingness and commitment to continue working together and move forward with the recommendations, as necessary. As previously stated, some of the recommendations are already in progress.

Extensive discussion ensued amongst the Board Members regarding the Study and accompanying presentation. The Board agreed that a very informative and professional presentation was provided. Board Member Belleville felt that the study was well-received and the residents were agreeable to moving forward with the Report's primary recommendations. Chairman Dickson felt that a measured approach that would spread out some of the costs over a period of successive years may be required for some of the recommendations, including the hiring of additional personnel. Salem Volunteer Fire Company's proposal to refurbish, rather than purchase, a new tanker truck will help to relieve some of the pressure in their upcoming budget. The public will need to be informed of the additional expenses that might be included in the next fiscal year's budget as a result of the Report. While the Report appeared to be well-received by the residents who attended the meeting, Board Member Griggs noted that the attendees consisted primarily of those individuals who regularly attend meetings and/or are actively involved. Board Member Casciano felt that, based on the Study, it appears that the Department(s) is not functioning at its full capacity. As such, she would be very disappointed and disheartened should no improvements be made. Board Member Rucci concurred and suggested that a list of the recommendations with their budgetary impact be created, allowing them to lay out a plan to present to the public. Board Member Bourgeois also suggested including a timeline and a business case, i.e., what it looks like, how it will be implemented, and its cost. Board Member Rucci agreed, adding the importance of not only being aware of a recommendation's budgetary effect for the current year, but also the successive years. Board Member Cadwell concurred that it was a very good presentation and, based on her discussions with some of the members from the Salem Volunteer Fire Company, felt that a compromise may be reached for some of the minor items.

Ambulance (Board Member Belleville) – While the primary fire apparatus and equipment is owned by the Town, the ambulance is owned by the Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company. The proceeds received for their services are deposited into an account that is primarily used to save funds for the purchase of a new ambulance. The account is also used to purchase necessary medical equipment and supplies. The status of the purchase of a new ambulance is unknown at this time. Horace Lindo, who was present, stated that a new ambulance is purchased every ten (10) years. Their current ambulance is in very good

condition and dependable and they are confident that the vehicle is extremely reliable. They are currently looking into the specs for a new ambulance. The waiting period for a new ambulance is approximately two (2) years. While appreciative of Mr. Lindo's active involvement with the Fire Company and input, First Selectman Chmielewski stated that, per the MRI Study, it is the opinion of the Board of Selectmen that a new ambulance should be purchased to replace the current ambulance, which is over ten (10) years of age. It was noted that the maintenance line item for the ambulance was 200% over budget last fiscal year. These costs will only increase as the vehicle continues to age. While the Town does not own the ambulance, the Town provides funding for the insurance, maintenance, gas, tires, etc., and staffs the ambulance during the weekdays.

Availability of Ambulance Funds (Board Member Cadwell) – Because an audit is yet to be conducted of the GLVFCO's books, the status of the GLVFCO's funds is unknown at this time. First Selectman Chmielewski noted that the Board of Selectmen has been requesting that an audit be conducted for the past four (4) years to no avail. They are continuing to investigate ways in which the Town could work with the Fire Company.

5. FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the negotiation team, which includes Selectmen Liaisons Butcher and LaBonte and key members of the GLVFCO, is currently discussing an On Call Nominal Fee Payment Structure for the (Ambulance) Volunteers. The existing agreement is no longer in effect. The team has failed to meet for several meetings due to cancellations by the GLVFCO. An Audit will be required prior to the finalization of the Agreement. As previously noted, the Selectmen also discussed expanding the incentives to include volunteer Firefighters, EMTs, and Fire Police.

The Board of Selectmen has been discussing the formation of a Charter Revision Committee and is engaging the guidance of the Town Attorney and East Lyme First Selectman and former Salem Resident State Trooper Kevin Seery, who is currently working on a Charter Revision for the Town of East Lyme.

He has forwarded the Board of Finance's questions regarding the Board of Education's request for a Non-Lapsing Account to the Selectmen. He looks forward to providing the Board of Finance with the Selectmen's input before their next meeting.

The Town was recently awarded a \$198,560.00 STEAP (Small Towns Economic Assistance Program) Grant to refurbish the Town Hall. He reported that over the past two (2) years he has served as the First Selectman, the Town has received over \$1 million in grant funding. He is actively continuing to seek and apply for grants. He has also reached out to a grant writing service and has received additional resources from the MRI (Municipal Resources, Inc.) Team.

The Disc Golf Course was recently re-opened thanks to the help of Selectman Liaison T.J. Butcher, Recreation Commission, Emergency Management, Emergency Services, Public Works, Resident State Troopers, Public Safety, and numerous volunteers. He announced that 50 (fifty) appointments to Boards and Commissions had been made during his short tenure as First Selectman. The appointments include members from all parties. In addition, the voter turnout for the FY2023/24 Budget increased by 25% from the previous year; he looks forward to a further increased turnout for the next budget referendum. A Safety Drill was recently conducted at Salem School and future drills are planned. The Resident State Troopers provided the students with a presentation on radar.

In response to Board Member Casciano who questioned the status of Finance Specialist Jablonski's retirement, Finance Specialist Jablonski stated that she plans to, at least, semi-retire in less than one year. Her hours will be limited by the amount she will be allowed to earn, per Social Security. She added that the audit is progressing and may take additional time due to the need for a Federal Audit as a result of the Town's and BOE's receipt of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Funds. The School is also awaiting the receipt of the East Lyme Reconciliation.

6. LIAISON REPORTS

A. EMERGENCY SERVICES – *See item 4 above*

B. BOE (BOARD OF EDUCATION)

BOE Liaison Griggs provided a summary of her submitted report. The Superintendent is working on a zero-based budget approach for the FY2024/25 proposed budget and has sent correspondence to the Town's legislators regarding their priorities. The skylight near the School Library/Media Center has been replaced and, with the exception of the HVAC System, the Roof Replacement/HVAC Project is complete. They are exploring the possibility of utilizing the remaining funds of the Roof Replacement Project for the replacement of the roof drains. The Firewall and Server Replacement portion of the Network Upgrades has been awarded. The unencumbered funds are on track at 29.45% of their overall budget. The funds for the administrators' potential increases, which have been set aside, will not be provided until after their evaluations at the end of the school year. Higher-level teachers were hired to help raise the students' scores for math and science. A cleaning company has been hired to help subsidize their current staffing.

Health, Math, Science Salaries (Clerk Bourgeois) – The salaries for health, math, and science were increased by \$25,967.00.

School Staff Turnover (Board Member Casciano) – The turnover of teachers, includes those who retired and moved out of town or state.

Custodial Staffing (Board Member Cadwell) – The School currently employs one (1) Lead Custodian and two (2) part-time temporary Custodians. An MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Union was drafted to accommodate the hiring of an outside company. It is unknown as to whether the item went out to bid prior to the hiring of the company.

7. CAPITAL PLAN DISCUSSION

A. DESIGN A LETTER TO ALL DEPARTMENTS TO REVIEW THEIR CAPITAL ITEM REQUESTS AND ADVISE DEPARTMENTS THAT CAPITAL REQUESTS ALONG WITH DOCUMENTATION SHOULD BE PREPARED BEFORE THE DECEMBER BOARD OF FINANCE MEETING

The Board Members reviewed and approved the proposed letter regarding the Capital Item Requests. The deadline date will be bold and italicized.

B. OTHER DISCUSSION ITEMS REGARDING THE CAPITAL PLAN

As previously noted, the Tanker Truck, which will be refurbished, will be removed from the Capital Plan.

OLD BUSINESS – *none*

ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Casciano/Rucci, to adjourn the meeting at 8:32 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.