

**TOWN OF SALEM
BOARD OF FINANCE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2020 – 7:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN OFFICE BUILDING, VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM**

Per State of Connecticut, Governor Lamont Executive Order Number 7B, the Town of Salem Board of Finance meeting on April 16, 2020 will be following the suspension of in-person open meeting requirements.

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://zoom.us/j/97783191570?pwd=N2M3ck9abzd5aVQxQ1FkRjlyekdrQT09>

Password: 117310

or via telephone at:

(312) 626 6799, (646) 558 8656, (346) 248 7799, (669) 900 9128, (253) 215 8782, or (301)715 8592

Webinar ID: 977 8319 1570

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PRESENT

William “Skip” Dickson, Chairman
Marshall Collins, Clerk
Corinne (Cory) Bourgeois
Deborah Cadwell
Janet Griggs
Hernan Salas (7:43 p.m.)
John Bernier, Alternate
Maryann Casciano, Alternate

ABSENT

Dean Wojcik, Alternate

ALSO PRESENT

First Selectman Kevin Lyden

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Dickson called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS: *none*

SEAT ALTERNATE IF NEEDED: *See below, following Item 2*

COMMUNICATIONS:

The following items were e-mailed to the Board Members:

- a. A copy of an article regarding the budget cuts made by the Town of Waterford in response to COVID-19 (sent April 13)
- b. Information gathered from *The New Britain Herald*, *Hartford Courant*, and *Norwich Bulletin* regarding the drawbacks (sent April 11)
- c. A link to an article published in *The New London Day* regarding the cuts made by East Lyme’s Board of Education prior to sending their proposed budget to the Board of Finance (sent April 10)

- d. Salem School gym floor
- e. BOE proposed cuts to meet the Board of Finance's proposed cut to their proposed budget request

PUBLIC COMMENT: *none*

Place Public Comments in the dropbox located by the entrance to Town Hall or e-mail Public Comments to financepubliccomment@saalemct.gov before 7:10 p.m., Thursday, April 16, 2020.

ALTERATIONS TO THE AGENDA: *none*

AGENDA:

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: MARCH 12, 2020 REGULAR MEETING:

M/S/C: Griggs/Collins, to approve the Board of Finance March 12, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes, with the following amendment:

Page 1, Attendance:

ABSENT: ~~Mike Jensen, Alternate~~

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: MARCH 19, 2020 REGULAR MEETING:

M/S/C: Griggs/Collins, to approve the Board of Finance March 12, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes, with the following amendment:

Page 1, Attendance:

ABSENT: ~~Mike Jensen, Alternate~~

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

SEATING OF ALTERNATE

M/S/C: Collins/Bourgeois, to seat Alternate Board Member Casciano for Full Board Member Salas. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

2. SELECTMAN'S REPORT

First Selectman Lyden reported that COVID-19-related issues are changing daily, if not hourly. He commended the townspeople and local businesses, who are practicing proper social distancing and taking or instituting other precautions, as appropriate. The basketball hoops, located behind Salem School and at the Lou Ulffers Recreational Complex on Round Hill Road, have been de-installed and the playgrounds have been closed off. The lights at the Complex have also been turned off. The Town's trails continue to be open. The campgrounds remain closed. He expects the impact of the pandemic on our Town and the members of our community to continue well into the next fiscal year.

An increased number of calls for assistance have been received. Having declared the pandemic as a FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) event, the Town expects to be reimbursed for up to 75% of qualified purchases. The town has purchased \$1,000.00 worth of gift certificates to *Salem Prime Cuts* and *Dollar General* each, and the Salem Volunteer Fire Company has donated \$500.00 worth of gift certificates to *Two Brothers Restaurant* to help those in need.

Several generous donations have been received for the Town's Benevolent, a.k.a. Needy, Fund for which they are very fortunate and appreciative. Donations to the Benevolent Fund may be made out to the Town of Salem and either mailed to Salem Town Hall or placed in the white dropbox located in front of Town Hall.

With regards to the Town Hall staff, Finance Specialist Lisa Jablonski has been working from home for the past four weeks, her husband having tested positive for the Coronavirus. She, herself, has tested negative but has also been ill. Meliza Jimenez who works in both the Finance and Assessor's office is currently working in the Finance office only for the time being. The Tax Collector, Assessor, Town Clerk, and Building Departments are continuing to conduct their work at the Town Hall. The First Selectman's Administrative Assistant Meredith Eisenberg is currently working from home. One Town Hall employee and some Library staff have been either laid off or had their hours shortened. More layoffs or reductions in hours might be investigated depending upon the length of the situation. The Public Works Department is now separated and its employees are reporting to either Center School or the Public Works garage. The Transfer Station remains open. No final decisions have been made regarding Amnesty Day and the Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony.

He has engaged in numerous telephone conversations with the Governor, Lt. Governor, and SECCOG (Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments). All municipalities are cutting their respective proposed budgets with the goal of presenting a zero increase. Per one of the Executive Orders, the Board of Selectmen recently approved to adopt a Low-Interest Rate Program, reducing the State's required interest rate from 18% to 3% per annum for qualifying individuals. The Town's revenue projections will be based upon that of FY2008/09, the year of the previous recession. Fortunately, thanks to the Board of Finance, the staff, and all members of Town Government, the Town has a healthy Unassigned Fund Balance to help us financially survive the pandemic.

Three (3) COVID-19 cases in the Town of Salem have been confirmed, one (1) case is awaiting address verification. It is assumed that there are more cases of COVID-19 as other household members may have been infected, but remain untested. Universal precautions are being used and the State Police, QV Dispatchers, and the Gardner Lake Ambulance Service are notified regarding any potential COVID-19-positive individuals. The Uncas Health District notifies QV Dispatchers, Resident State Troopers and Troop K Lt. Mark Petruzzi, and the First Selectman regarding those individuals who are not transported via ambulance. Masks are recommended for those who travel outside.

3. POTENTIAL BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS AS WE DEAL WITH COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AS BOARD OF FINANCE WILL NEED TO PROPOSE A DRAFT BUDGET FOR RESIDENTS BY MAY 20, 2020

Chairman Dickson stated that the following error was made on their calculations during the last meeting in that the BOE Sound System Gymnasium in the amount of \$17,292.00 was not moved

from the FY2020/21 Capital Plan Budget and a revised budget proposal was e-mailed to the members.

M/S/C: Griggs/Collins, to revise and approve the amount of \$1,747,642.00 for the allocation of the Town's Capital Plan budget for FY2020/21. Discussion: Board Member Griggs expressed her appreciation to Chairman Dickson and the Recording Secretary to determine the correct numbers. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor.

Per the Governor's Executive Order 7I, the Board discussed the revised budget process due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the proposed schedule. There will be no Public Hearing, Town Meeting, or Budget Referendum this year. The FY2020/21 Budget will be decided upon by the Board of Finance following a directive from the Board of Selectmen. A tentative date of on or around May 20, 2020 has been proposed by the First Selectman for the release of the draft budget. The draft budget will be posted on the Town's website and physical copies will be available outside of Town Hall. Public Comments will be encouraged and may be sent via e-mail or placed in the white dropbox located in front of Town Hall. Clerk Collins reported that municipal aid by the State will be cut due to shortages resulting from expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Board agreed on the following schedule:

Thursday, May 14, 2020 Regular Meeting	Finalize the draft (proposed) budget
Thursday, May 21, 2020 Special Meeting	Adopt FY2020/21 Budget & set mil rate

Board Member Griggs proposed, and the Board Members agreed to, the possibility of sending any ideas they might have regarding the budget to the Chairman such that they might be researched as possible viable options prior to their Regular Meeting.

Per Board Member Bernier's request for the estimated changes in revenue expectations, First Selectman Lyden agreed to provide those projections prior to their Regular Meeting.

In terms of the budget, such Capital Items as the School roof and the Library heating system will not be included in this year's Capital Plan. The Board may opt to provide partial funding for the heating system. Per the Governor's Executive Order, the bus contracts, the staff, and Special Education Outplacements will continue to be paid. It is unknown as to the cost savings due to the school closures, but there will be some savings due to lack of fuel usage for the buses and electricity. In addition, the municipalities ECS (Educational Cost Sharing) Grant will be honored. Another aspect is unemployment. As employees are laid off the unemployment must be paid by the Town; it is unknown as to whether these payments would be reimbursed. The General Government will have some cost savings due to meeting cancellations.

Board Member Casciano questioned whether the Board Members were aware of a proposal by the Head of the Teachers Union to start the next school year earlier in August to make up for lost teaching time and whether the revaluations would still be scheduled to take place since the process includes entry into residents' homes. First Selectman Lyden stated that the revaluation is

mandated to be conducted every ten years, but they are reviewing other options. There has been no Executive Order issued to delay revaluations.

While the BOE's budget discussions were e-mailed to the Board Members, Clerk Collins questioned whether the BOE will be sending the Board of Finance their amended budget and questioned whether his questions regarding the raises, \$20,000.00 to resurface the gym floors, the bid, if any for the project, and the potential savings gained from the adjusted number of students who would be attending East Lyme High School would be answered. He fears that it will take over a year to financially recover from the pandemic and felt that the BOE should be able to justify their request for a 7.2% increase, given the situation. Similarly, Board Member Bernier questioned whether the BOE has made any additional adjustments based upon the current climate. In response, First Selectman Lyden stated that he has spoken with the BOE Chairman and some of the Board Members and were made aware that future cuts will need to be made. He believed that the Unassigned Fund Balance will be expended. He stated that he has narrowed down the Town Hall staff over the last 10-1/2 years and the BOE should, similarly, review their staffing and employee benefits, and do the same. The Town has a good school and will always have a good school, but new ways to save funds and institute efficiencies are necessary. First Selectman Lyden reiterated that the Board of Finance must deliberate and approve and adopt a budget that is fair and affordable for all of the residents as well as what is fair for the School. Contrary to their jurisdiction over the General Government budget where they may cut specific line items, the Board must gather the information they have received from the BOE and determine and provide them with a number based upon that information.

April 27 is the deadline for the teachers to accept the Teachers Retirement Incentive. Currently, one teacher has accepted the Incentive and one has expressed interest.

Chairman Dickson will also touch base with BOE Chairman Sean Reith regarding any anticipated cuts based upon the new environment with which we have been presented.

In response to Board Member Casciano, First Selectman Lyden stated that he plans to review the entire budget, include the proposed salary increases. Clerk Collins stated that while the collective bargaining process for the public sector unions may not be changed, non-collective bargaining increases have no restrictions and may be cut.

OLD BUSINESS: *none*

ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Casciano/Salas, to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 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