

AMENDED DRAFT

MONROE BOARD OF FINANCE Monroe, Connecticut

Budget Workshop March 5, 2012

Present: Chairman Mark Reed
Vice-Chairman Michael Manjos
Board Member Chris Baudouin
Board Member John Ostaszewski
Board Member Ted Quinlan

Absent: Board Member Scott Ownes
First Selectman Steve Vavrek

Also present: Finance Director Carl Tomchik
Heidi Meade

CALL TO ORDER-*Chairman Reed* called the workshop to order at 7:35 p.m.

The first topic to be discussed was Debt Service and how it relates to the policy. *Chairman Reed* said that the discussion on Chalk Hill will be postponed until First *Selectman Vavrek* returns from the Town Council meeting.

Chairman Reed said that the undesignated fund revenue was \$160,000 and it was something that the town was still low on in regards to metrics. He suggested to make it zero; the board agreed. The NGL is presently at 3.277 which means that the debt level is 1.5 which is the policy limit. There was a continued discussion on the debt service. *Vice-Chairman Manjos* said that if the roads were not done for \$600,000, the Masuk account with the negative balance could be removed; he stated that this and the other accounts such as the library and open space acquisitions should be cleaned up. The board discussed the various accounts and their amounts. *Board Member Quinlan* asked if they could proceed by agreeing on the policy and not try to fit the policy to this year. He added that he felt the policy should include a detailed plan for everything that is proposed to be spent. *Chairman Reed* agreed that they would define the policy and move forward. It was noted that there would be an annual review of the policy as well as a review anytime significant new debt is taken on. *Chairman Reed* said that they still needed information on the roof and the plans for the roads; the Public Works Director will be at Wednesday's budget workshop to address the board's questions. *Chairman Reed* reiterated that they have asked for and they need to see what roadwork has been done and what work remains to be done.

EMS was also discussed; *Chairman Reed* said that neither the First Selectman nor Town Council put it in the budget. He said that one option is to take the \$360,000 from undesignated funds which the board agreed was not viable or it could be put back into the

budget as an operating expense. *Vice-Chairman Manjos* said that he still feels they have not gotten all the information they need to make an informed decision. *Board Member Quinlan* said that if the level of volunteers drop, the town may have to go to a paid service as it is a mandated service the town has to provide. Both *Chairman Reed* and *Mr. Tomchik* noted there is a lot of turn over. *Stephen Schapiro* added that when *Mr. Condon* made a presentation to Town Council, he was not sure if the \$360,000 was adequate. *Ms. Meade* added that *Mr. Condon* would be present at Wednesday's budget workshop. In addition, it was noted that representatives from Hooker & Holcomb would also be in attendance to provide information on pensions. *Board Member Boudouin* said that he is having an issue as it is not the board's responsibility to say whether the town should have EMS service.

Chairman Reed reviewed the actions the board took on the debt service; they would get further details on the roads and town hall renovations at Wednesday's workshop. He advised *First Selectman Vavrek* that the board was unanimous in not wanting to touch the undesignated fund and that the revenue of \$160,000 that was previously coming out of undesignated funds will be zeroed out. *Chairman Reed* asked *First Selectman Vavrek* why EMS was not in the budget, he said that it seemed like there was a policy matter. *First Selectman Vavrek* said that there are still a lot of questions as to the numbers the EMS Commission have presented. He added there have been multiple meetings with EMS; *Board Chairman Reed* asked if it was a matter of the numbers not adding up or if it was a case that the commission did not know what they needed to do. It was noted that the *Mr. Condon* could not definitively say that the \$360,000 was the total cost at the various presentations he has given. *Board Member Boudouin* said that this concern was that the EMS presentation to the board was done over a year ago and they still are waiting for the all the details.

Chalk Hill was the next topic of discussion. *First Selectman Vavrek* said that he has vendors who will be sending in proposals and he would like to defer the discussion until Wednesday. He said that there are several potential revenue sources including an outside sporting group, the YMCA and Bridgeport Hospital teaching services. He continued he was confident that there are viable options to keep the facility open and generating revenue for the community. *First Selectman Vavrek* added that the new Parks and Recreation Director, *Francis Cooper*, has experience in turning buildings like this around. *Chairman Reed* asked if the board voted to mothball the building and in July, they had people interested in it, would there be a downside. *Chairman Reed* also asked what the costs were to keep the facility open and *First Selectman Vavrek* said that he would request from the board that even if they choose to mothball the building, that they keep the building open through Labor Day as there are ongoing programs such as Summer Fun Days. The cost to keep it open is approximately \$40,000 a month though it was noted it would be less during the summer months as heating wouldn't be necessary. *Chairman Reed* reiterated that it is risky if they decide to keep it open and the revenue doesn't materialize but if the board decides to mothball the building and then revenue is located, there is no downside. *Mr. Tomchik* said that the building would need to be checked on a regular basis if it was mothballed.

Board Member Quinlan said there were just too many variables and no specific plans; he added he was wrestling with how to evaluate the potential for Chalk Hill to generate

revenue because there was not a lot of information received and it was unlikely that they would receive it by Wednesday. *Rick Zini* said that there are a lot of issues with the building and that it is not suitable for use as a school and to re-open it as a school will cost in excess of \$15,000,000. The cost to mothball it is approximately \$150,000 a year. *Chairman Reed* stated that there is no downside to the option of mothballing the building; *Debbie Dutches* noted there are 2 immediate concerns: the boilers which are the original and the windows which are single pane without seals; “no matter what you do, those are concerns.” The board members agreed to mothball Chalk Hill at this time.

Chairman Reed provided the board members with an itemized list of the Town Council’s annotated list though they reviewed the line items first. *Chairman Reed* noted that the First Selectman’s attorney costs were significantly higher than what was budgeted. The figure is currently \$250,000 and it was noted that many of the cases were Planning and Zoning cases that went back as many as 8 years and were dormant in Superior or Supreme Court appeals. *Chairman Reed* asked if the board felt that the \$130,000 was too conservative; both *Board Member Quinlan* and *Vice-Chairman Manjos* stated that it was. *Board Member Boudouin* asked if the town attorney had an input in the budget, the response was that he did not. *Chairman Reed* asked *Mr. Tomchik* if he would ask *Mr. Fracassini* for a projection on a realistic amount; he added that he felt without further information, they should increase it to \$200,000-\$250,000 minimum but they wanted some feedback.

Board Member Quinlan asked if there was a headcount available of the number of employees at Town Hall and if so, would it be available for the next meeting. He said that last year’s payroll increased 2.9% and this year’s figure shows an increase of 3% and he wanted to know if there was additional staff or additional hours. *Board Member Quinlan* said that he wanted to see all of the payroll across the board. *Chairman Reed* suggested that he email the department heads and ask for last year’s headcount and this year’s proposed headcount. *Mr. Tomchik* said that they had the headcount information.

Chairman Reed requested \$500.00 for new recording equipment for the Board of Finance; the board members agreed. There were no cuts to the Registrar of Voters. *Chairman Reed* said that Town Council took out a small amount from Town Clerk. Town Council decreased the office expenses under Tax Collector; the board members requested further information on this line item.

Board Member Quinlan asked about the increase in Planning and Zoning. *Mr. Zini* said they have new regulations for new procedures for zoning regulation revisions, POCD revisions and preliminary concept studies. *Mr. Zini* continued that he did not understand why the Town Council made the cuts. He added that they are revising the town regulations which requires a two part consulting process, one with a zoning consultant who helps the commission write the regulations and those regulations have to go to a legal review before they can be presented to the public for adoption. *Mr. Zini* explained that the \$80,000 sewer study is actually a usage study which determines what the town’s output could be if we wanted to join another town or build our own plant. He continued that they can not finish the regulations until they have a better idea of what the sewers would be for commercial development. *Board Member Quinlan* continued that there are no sewers; *Mr. Zini* said there is no sewer plan so they can’t get the sewers which

“cripples the regulations” because there is no plan for infrastructure. *Mr. Zini* added that the data they have on the town’s current infrastructure is at least 20 years old. He continued that when the commission speaks with other planning agencies, they are told there is no usage plan. *Mr. Zini* continued that the usage plan should have been done 10 years ago, “we are so far behind the curve of what we need that we can’t get caught up.” The board members restored the funds cut by Town Council.

The next department to be discussed was the Senior Citizen. *First Selectman Vavrek* said that while the board was reviewing the Senior Citizen items, he said that the individuals working at the Food Pantry and social services work many more hours than they are being paid for and he is requesting an increase in their hours and a slight increase in their pay rate.

First Selectman Vavrek said that he requested a part-time Economic Development Director because he knew that he would not get a full-time position. He said that there have been many EDC and Chamber of Commerce events in the past year and they need to move forward. *First Selectman Vavrek* continued that hiring an Economic Development Director would be a good first step in showing that growth is important to the town. *Ms. Dutches* said that there are a lot of dedicated people who are interested in moving the town forward but many have done it on volunteer hours. *Vice-Chairman Manjos* added that if a developer is interested in coming into town, they would speak with the First Selectman rather than a part-time staff member *Board Member Quinlan* said that he would like to see plans with a job description including the objectives and measurements. *Mr. Schapiro* said that he thought it should be a full-time position or not at all. The board members agreed that the position should be cut from the budget.

The Town Council took out funds for a full-time position in the Engineering Department. *Mr. Zini* explained that the Land Use Department has their own inspector and they have a part-time engineering technician. Public Works has requested that the town engineer give up the land use inspector and the Town Engineer suggested that the Land Use Department give their full-time inspector to Public Works to give them the additional person they needed. He said that Town Council dropped the position because it appeared that the Land Use Department was asking for a new position; he stressed they are just rearranging their staff. It was decided that the board would revisit this issue on Wednesday after they have seen a headcount of personnel.

Under Human Resources, *Ms. Dutches* said the council voted not to approve the adjusted salary ranges and they had questions on the step increase for the Human Resources director and on the amount of money that was put aside for the purpose of grant writing. It was noted that there were salary ranges that did not have anything to do with steps and that the council may not have had the most current figures. There would be a further discussion on Human Resources at Wednesday’s meeting.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion: (C. Baudouin)

Motion to Adjourn at 10:45 p.m.

Second: (M. Manjos)

Discussion: None.

Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Behringer
Board of Finance Clerk