

ORANGE, CONN
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Patricia Romano
T. CLERK

Board of Finance Regular Meeting

Zoom Meeting
Monday, February 22, 2021 6:00 p.m.

(Unapproved)

Attendance

Board Members Present: Chairman Kevin Houlihan, Vice Chairman James Leahy, Kevin Moffett, Patricia Romano, P. J. Shanley, and Joseph Nuzzo

Staff: John Cifarelli, Finance Director; Deborah Satonick, Recording Secretary

Guests: Chief Robert Gagne and Chief Max Martins, Orange Police Department; Robert Brinton, Orange Public Works; Dan Lynch, Orange Parks and Recreation Department; Annmarie Sliby, Orange Economic Development Corporation

1. Call to Order & Introductions

- Chairman Houlihan called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and made the introductions of everyone in attendance. He reviewed Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7B regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting will be remote and will be broadcast live on OGAT and Frontier and streamed on YouTube.

2. Public Dialogue

- Chairman Houlihan indicated that Dr. Anna Mahon, Principal of Amity Regional High School, wrote a letter to the Orange Board of Finance. This letter will be addressed later in the meeting under "Amity Update."

NEW BUSINESS – Budget Presentations

3. Orange Police Services – Chief Robert Gagne

- Chief Gagne thanked everyone involved in the preparation of their proposed 2021-2022 budget. He spoke on all four sections of their budget – Police General Services, Uniformed Patrol, Investigative Services, and Communication and Dispatch, highlighting the requested increases to the budget.

- Due to the new Police Accountability Bill passed this previous June, additional drug and psychological screening of the police is mandated. An increase of \$9700 is requested to comply with this bill and cover these mandated screenings. There is a \$5k increase in computer maintenance as the Police Department needs a new server. Radio repair increased by \$5k as new portable batteries are needed. AED batteries also need to be replaced this year and the increase is \$4500. Travel and training increased by \$5k as virtual training has added costs. Building maintenance has increased by \$3k to reflect their actual expenditures. Their roof is 47 years old and has needed ongoing maintenance repairs. The quote for a new roof is \$325k. Machinery and equipment was not funded last year so it needs to be funded at \$25k. Investigative interrogations must be recorded and they need a new system to comply with the current law. Their current system is over 10 years old. Chief Gagne is also requesting two marked vehicles equipped with emergency equipment and cameras.
- No extra police officers are requested this year. The bulk of increases for next year is due to contractual items such as salaries. Without salaries and vehicles, the proposed budget drops from 4.84% to 0.44%. Chief Gagne advised that in the future they will require an additional IT person, although it has not been requested in next year's budget. Chief Gagne supplied a Monthly Mileage Report on Police Vehicles for the Board members to review.
- Chief Gagne mentioned that the Orange Police Department has Tier 1 accreditation. He also spoke on the challenges for the Police Department in the COVID environment, reporting that there is a mutual respect between the police and the residents. He added that the applicant pool for police officers is shrinking due to a variety of reasons and this is a future concern.
- Chief Gagne spoke on the crime statistics and medical emergencies within the town. He also reported that there are 46 police, with 4 out on extended leave, 2 in virtual training, and one position that is currently vacant. He took all questions from the Board members.

4. Public Works – Robert Brinton

- Mr. Brinton presented the 2021-2022 budget for the Public Works Department, highlighting the proposed increases. In Public Works Administration, Consulting Services has a \$20K increase. Emergency Tree Removal also has been increased. Mr. Cifarelli explained the procedure for tree removal as Mr. Foyer marks the trees to be cut down that are in the right of way. Streets and Bridges line item has also been increased. This money is used for paving and the installation of guard rails. Mr. Cifarelli advised that Town Aide Road at \$275k is used for sand and salt. Sand and Salt line item is increased to \$120k so that the Town Aide Road can be used for future paving. Mr. Brinton reviewed the increases in Brush Removal and Refuse.
- Mr. Brinton advised that the line item Machinery and Parts has an increase of \$10k as the Highway Department is now maintaining the Fire engines. Ms. Romano pointed to a \$22k increase in salaries. Mr. Cifarelli explained that the town approved the hiring of another individual in the department and it is now reflected in the proposed budget. He also mentioned that custodial services have increased to due added cleaning needs because of COVID. The overall budget reflects a 4 ½% increase.

5. Parks & Recreation – Dan Lynch

- Mr. Lynch presented the proposed 2021-2022 budget. There is an increase in Administration for Computer Maintenance to allow for online payments and registrations. Residents will no longer be required to come into the department to register for programs. This requested increase was generated by Mr. Mongillo. Maintenance also has an increase due to required additional cleaning for the porta johns on town property. The pool also has some increases. Mr. Cifarelli explained that the \$7k increase in pool staff salaries is due to the fact that last year the pool was partially closed and staffing was reduced. This increase is also attributed to an increase in the minimum wage, as all employees' wages are impacted and increased. Mr. Lynch thanked his entire staff for doing an excellent job during COVID.
- Mr. Lynch advised that United Illuminating will install all new LED lighting at the Old Tavern Road Sports Complex. This will bring better lighting and reduced electrical costs. Mr. Cifarelli explained that the cost is \$250k and United Illuminating is using a \$200 grant. The town will be responsible to pay \$50k over three years and fundraising will be done to reduce this cost. The projected savings will be \$17k per year due to LED lighting. There will also be a rental increase to outside organizations using our fields.
- Mr. Lynch reported that there is no budget increase in programs and the Fitness Room remains open with limited hours. Residents are pleased that the pool and Fitness Room are open. Mr. Leahy commended Mr. Lynch for attempting to keep to a tight budget with minimal increases.

6. Orange Economic Development Corp. – Annemarie Sliby

- Ms. Sliby explained the need for a \$10k increase to the EDC donation line account. This request is due to the cancelation of major fundraisers due to COVID-19. The Business Expo, the summer edition to Orange Life Magazine, and other fundraisers were canceled, resulting in \$29k of lost revenue. In addition, local businesses have suffered a loss in this environment and they have reduced their marketing, making it more difficult to get sponsors. Ms. Sliby noted that they have reduced their expenses by using a less expensive printing company, reduced the page count and binding for their magazine, in addition to reducing their copier expense.
- Ms. Sliby is planning on having an outdoor Artisan and Vendor Fair this year but without sponsors she will be unable to host this event. She explained that she runs the Farmer's Market and it continued during COVID with the new CDC guidelines. Participation was good. Farmers pay \$50 to participate and outside vendors pay \$100 for the whole season. Ms. Sliby also did a one-time holiday event and it was very well received. Ms. Romano asked if the farmers could donate any left overs from the Farmer's Market to the town food pantry
- Ms. Sliby gave an economic update on businesses moving to Orange, business relocations, and business closings. She has a complete presentation that she will send to the Board of Finance members after the meeting. Mr. Cifarelli explained that Ms. Sliby works closely with the First Selectman and follows up on leads that are generated.

(The Board members requested a five minute break)

7. Budget Discussion- Next Steps BOE Meeting

- The Board members agreed to a Zoom meeting on Monday, March 8, 2021 to hear the Orange Board of Education present their proposed 2021-2022 budget. Mr. Cifarelli will contact Dr. Scarpetti to confirm the time. After further discussion, it was agreed to begin the meeting at 6:00 p.m. to allow sufficient time to discuss other budget issues.

8. Set Date for Budget Hearing

- The Budget Hearing date was set for April 21, 2021 and a Special Meeting will be held in March for the Town audit. Mr. Cifarelli spoke with Mr. Branchesi and the Grand List is under 1%.

Ms. Romano made a motion to approved April 21, 2021 for the Budget Hearing date, seconded by Mr. Moffett. All were in favor and the motion PASSED.

9. Amity Update

- Chairman Houlihan read the letter from Dr. Mahon in its entirety into the record. It was noted by both Mr. Shanley and Mr. Leahy that Amity refuses to honor requests from the Board of Finance to read their information into the records at their own meetings. Nonetheless, it was agreed to read the letter on behalf of the OGAT audience. Each Board member commented on this letter expressing their thoughts. Overall, the Board members stressed that they value education and justified their budget recommendations in light of the large Amity surplus over the last fifteen years. Chairman Houlihan also clarified that the Board did not vote to approve the purchase of Racebrook Country Club. Dr. Mahon has given misinformation that is factually incorrect. Rather, they approved of the funding for the property should residents vote to approve of the purchase.
- In further response to Dr. Mahon's letter, the Board members pointed out that they never instructed Amity to reduce the number of teachers. Nor did the Board members imply that Amity is fiscally irresponsible. Rather, they have pointed out numerous times that Amity is overbudgeting based on enormous end of year surpluses. Overall, it was the general consensus that this letter was misleading and disingenuous.

10. Vice Chairman's Report

- Mr. Leahy wrote a letter to the editor of the Orange Town News regarding the Amity budget. He spoke on this article, noting that Amity's overbudgeting, as demonstrated with larges surpluses for the past fifteen years, raises taxes for residents. Mr. Leahy made several points in this letter to the editor – surplus is an unnecessary tax burden, budgeting should be based on Actuals, continual overbudgeting results in large end of year surpluses. In the last four years, Amity had a 10.4 million dollar surplus. Mr. Shanley pointed out that some Board members recommended a 0% budget increase for next year for Amity. It was also pointed out that Amity uses their surplus for their own purposes instead of returning the full amount to the respective towns. An example of this is the Black Box Theatre.

11. Discussion & Approval of Minutes – January 25, 2021

- The Board members reviewed the January 25, 2021 minutes and made revisions.

Ms. Romano made a motion to approved January 25, 2021 Board of Finance minutes, seconded by Mr. Shanley. All were in favor and the motion PASSED.

12. Review Revenue & Expense Reports for 1/31/21

- Mr. Cifarelli reviewed the revenue with tax collections, noting that Parks and Recreation and the library are not bringing in the revenue due to reduced hours. There are some shortfalls but Mr. Cifarelli thinks that the town will make due.
- Mr. Cifarelli reviewed the expense report, noting that COVID brought some added expenses. However, he feels that they might be slightly over by the end of the year. Chairman Houlihan pointed out that the Federal Stimulus money is \$82k for the Town of Orange. This amount is low compared to other towns. Mr. Cifarelli believes that this money is distributed to the Board of Education, not the town.

OLD BUSINESS

13. Review Cost of Tropical Storm Isaias

- Mr. Cifarelli reported that Mr. Brinton is completing the FEMA application and they will have to see what they agree to cover at 75% reimbursement. The town received \$97k in December for COVID relief.

15. Set up Meeting with Pension Board & Milliman

- Mr. Cifarelli advised that there will be a joint meeting on May 17th with the Pension Board and Milliman. Mr. Shanley would like all of the materials prior to the meeting date.

12. Adjournment

Mr. Shanley made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 p.m. Ms. Romano seconded the motion All were in favor and the motion PASSED.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborah Satonick
Recording Secretary